



# Cookie Cart: A First-time Job Experience for Teens

## *2016 Evaluation Summary*

*From here on out I am going to work hard for everything and anything that I want. – Youth participant*

Since 1988, Cookie Cart has helped youth age 15-18 build life, interpersonal, leadership, and transferable job skills through training and employment at a bakery with a retail store. The nonprofit program serves youth living in or near North Minneapolis, which is an area with higher poverty rates and lower graduation rates than other parts of the metro.

Cookie Cart participants earn a paycheck while receiving both hands-on employment experiences and classroom-based training. As a result, they gain and strengthen skills and knowledge in five core areas: employment readiness, interpersonal communication, goal orientation, critical thinking, and connectedness to new communities.

For ten years, Cookie Cart has contracted with Wilder Research to conduct evaluation activities to inform program strategies for helping youth gain employment skills.

Cookie Cart and Wilder Research staff have collected longer term employment outcomes using Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) data for youth who have exited the program. This is the second year that employment data has been collected. Annual evaluation data are gathered through surveys of Cookie Cart participants and their parents. This report provides a brief description of the Cookie Cart program, a summary of results from the 2016 survey, and initial outcomes from DEED employment data.

## Cookie Cart programs

Cookie Cart programming provides learning in the following ways.

### *Experiential learning*

- **The Bakery Program** teaches youth to prepare, package, and sell cookies.
- **Customer Service Training** teaches youth interpersonal communications, professionalism, and sales.

### *Classroom learning*

- **Career Readiness Program** teaches youth how to prepare resumes, practice job interviewing, explore career opportunities, and learn job search skills.
- **Financial Literacy workshops** cover the essential building blocks of personal finance: budgeting and saving, checking accounts, and personal credit.

### *Credentialed learning*

- **National Career Readiness Certificates and ServSafe** are both nationally recognized credentials to verify to prospective employers that teens have the skills to be successful employees.

## Evaluation approach: Youth and parent surveys

Wilder Research has worked with Cookie Cart for 10 years to evaluate the benefits and impact it has in the lives of youth through surveys of youth participants and their parents. The most recent survey was conducted between August 2015 and July 2016. For the second year, Wilder Research also examined longer-term employment outcomes for youth who had exited the program using Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) data.

**Youth survey:** Cookie Cart participants are eligible to complete a self-administered online survey after 75 hours of continuous work experience in the program. (Participants who completed the previous year’s survey were not included.) There were 149 youth employed at the time of the survey. Of the 149 youth employed, 70 were eligible, and 38 completed the survey. Some youth leave the program without notice before graduating. Program staff are developing a formal exit process that includes completing the survey, which may increase the number of youth participating in the surveys.

**Parent survey:** Parents were asked to complete a telephone interview or self-administered online survey if their child had been employed at Cookie Cart for at least 75 hours. Eight parents either completed the survey online or did a telephone interview with a Cookie Cart volunteer. Staff reported that low parent participation may be the result of limited contact or involvement with the program, or lack of understanding of the value of their feedback. Cookie Cart staff are exploring how to develop a meaningful and reasonable role in the program for parents.

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**2016 Cookie Cart youth survey participants (N=38)**

<b>Gender</b>	Female	71%
	Male	29%
<b>Grade level</b>	9th-10th grade	55%
	11th-12th grade	45%
<b>Racial/ethnic background</b>	African American	87%
	Asian or Pacific Islander	8%
	Other	5%
	Native American	3%
	Latino	3%

## Survey results

Wilder Research analyzed the results of the survey to explore the skills and knowledge gained by youth participants. Similar to last year, skills were grouped by core outcome area and the number of hours youth worked to determine if youth with more Cookie Cart experience (measured by hours) had different results. This year’s analysis included two groups of youth: those who worked 100 or fewer hours; and those who worked more than 100 hours to determine whether or not they accomplished the target goals set for each outcome area. This year’s results show overall positive gains in all of the five core outcome areas. Additionally, youth exceeded the target goals for each core outcome area, specifically in the areas of employment readiness, critical thinking skills, and connectedness to new communities (youth who worked more than 100 hours).

## *Employment readiness*

Nearly all youth reported gains in employment readiness skills.

### **Youth survey: Percentage of youth reporting increased employment readiness skills while working at Cookie Cart**

<b>Employment readiness skills increased</b>	<b>≤100 hours worked (N=12-13)</b>	<b>&gt;100 hours worked (N=19-22)</b>
Ability to present yourself as an experienced employee	93%	100%
Willingness to carry out responsibilities	86%	96%
Readiness to find and keep a job after Cookie Cart	86%	86%
Ability to interview for a job	100%	96%
Comfort talking to a potential employer	93%	100%
Knowledge of how to dress for an interview	86%	86%
	<b>(N=11*)</b>	<b>(N=20*)</b>
<b>Target goal set by Cookie Cart</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>65%</b>
Improved in 4 or more skill areas, youth report	79%	95%

\* Youth needed to have rated each item to be included in the analysis of each target goal.

## *Interpersonal communication*

Most youth reported gains in interpersonal communication skills.

### **Youth survey: Improvements in interpersonal communication skills by number of hours worked at Cookie Cart**

<b>Interpersonal communication skills increased</b>	<b>≤100 hours worked (N=11-14)</b>	<b>&gt;100 hours worked (N=15-22)</b>
Ability to work as a team member	86%	100%
Ability to act as a role model	100%	86%
Use of peaceful means to resolve conflicts	79%	75%
Willingness to help others	100%	78%
Skill in getting along with other kids	79%	78%
Skill in serving customers	85%	91%
	<b>(N=10*)</b>	<b>(N=15*)</b>
<b>Target goal set by Cookie Cart</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>65%</b>
Improved in 2 or more skill areas, youth report	71%	68%

\* Youth needed to have rated each item to be included in the analysis of each target goal.

## Goal orientation

Almost all youth reported an increase in their goal orientation skills.

### Youth survey: Goal orientation skills increased

Goal orientation skills increased	≤100 hours worked (N=9-12)	>100 hours worked (N=7-22)
Ability to do differently when things are not working	86%	95%
Ability to set goals and work toward them	79%	90%
Hope about your own future	79%	96%
Commitment to succeeding in school	86%	61%
Planning for the future	77%	83%
Knowledge of how to use a bank, budget, and save money	75%	96%
Time spent thinking about or planning for college	71%	32%
	<b>(N=11*)</b>	<b>(N=17*)</b>
<b>Target goal set by Cookie Cart</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>75%</b>
Improved in 4 or more skill areas, youth report	79%	77%

\* Youth needed to have rated each item to be included in the analysis of each target goal.

## Critical thinking skills

The majority of youth reported gains in their critical thinking skills.

### Youth survey: Critical thinking skills increased

Critical thinking skills increased	≤100 hours worked (N=10-14)	>100 hours worked (N=17-22)
Ability to solve problems on own	100%	74%
Ability to make good decisions	100%	86%
Ability to manage own money	77%	83%
Learning from watching others	86%	96%
	<b>(N=13*)</b>	<b>(N=20*)</b>
<b>Target goal set by program</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>65%</b>
Improved in 1 or more skill areas, youth report	93%	87%

\* Youth needed to have rated each item to be included in the analysis of each target goal.

## *Connectedness to new communities*

Nearly all youth reported gains in their connectedness to new communities.

### **Youth survey: Connectedness to new communities increased**

<b>Connectedness to new communities increased</b>	<b>≤100 hours worked (N=9-14)</b>	<b>&gt;100 hours worked (N=17-21)</b>
Skills getting along with other kids	79%	91%
Involvement in leadership activities	86%	91%
Knowledge about people from other cultures	64%	81%
Comfort talking with people from of different backgrounds	100%	77%
	<b>(N=10*)</b>	<b>(N=21*)</b>
<b>Target goal set by program</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>65%</b>
Improved in 2 or more areas	71%	91%

\* Youth needed to have rated each item to be included in the analysis of each target goal.

## *Improvement in skills from 2015 to 2016*

In 2016, youth participant ratings of skill improvement were compared to youth participant ratings in 2015. Overall, youth reports are reasonably consistent.

Specific skills in which there were large differences in the perceptions of improvement between youth from 2015 to 2016 were:

- Comfort talking to a potential employer (82% of youth 2015 vs. 97% of youth 2016)
- Ability to make good decisions (81% of youth 2015 vs. 91% of youth 2016)
- Skills in serving customers (77% of youth 2015 vs. 89% of youth 2016)
- Knowledge of how to dress for an interview (75% of youth 2015 vs. 86% of youth 2016)
- Hope about your own future (74% of youth 2015 vs. 89% of youth 2016)
- Skills getting along with other kids (73% of youth 2015 vs. 87% of youth 2016)
- Knowledge of how to use a bank, budget and save money (61% of youth vs. 89% of youth 2016)
- Time spent thinking about or planning for college (54% of youth 2015 vs. 47% of youth 2016)

## ***Change in thoughts about future education and employment***

Youth and parents were asked whether or not youth had any change in thoughts about their future education or employment since working at Cookie Cart. Thirty-seven percent of youth described a change. Some examples include:

*I want to work as a chef. - Youth participant*

*I am more goal oriented and know what I want out of life. - Youth participant*

*From here on out I am going to work hard for everything and anything that I want. - Youth participant*

*My child has been talking about going to college, living on campus, graduating, and having her own home. For employment, she wants to run her own business. - Parent participant*

*She talks about her future, going to college, and working a job. - Parent participant*

*My child has always been goal-oriented about her education and having money. - Parent participant*

## ***Improvements in grades and homework completion***

When asked, 43 percent of youth reported that their grades improved and they could attribute that change at least in some part to their Cookie Cart experience. This is an increase from 2015 when 36 percent of youth reported improvement in their grades.

Over half of youth (55%) said they are more likely to complete their homework on time compared to 20 percent in 2015.

## ***What youth learned from Cookie Cart staff***

Youth participants were asked to identify three things they learned from Cookie Cart's adult staff. Most youth (97%) mentioned that they learned responsible behavior, how to work with others, and customer service.

*There is a level of professionalism that should be happening while at work, whether you are a youth employee or manager. When you clock in, leave your personal problems at the door. - Youth participant*

*I learned that you have to get along with others even though you might not like them. - Youth participant*

*Smiling is always the key to success. It lets the customer know you're there and ready to go. - Youth participant*

## Evaluation approach: DEED employment analysis

For the second year, Wilder Research examined employment success of youth participants after they graduated from Cookie Cart by looking at employment data from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). This goal is to better understand the relationship between skill building and employability; the information is also used for continuous quality improvement efforts.

As in 2015, Cookie Cart requested data from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) to identify wage, earnings, and hours worked by Cookie Cart graduates. Eligible youth are those who were hired by the Cookie Cart program and participated in programming for at least three months and exited between January 12, 2011 and March 31, 2016.

Graduates are grouped based on their exit date to reflect the greatest amount of data available. For example, students who graduated prior to July 2015 are included in the Quarter 1, Year 1, and Year 2 analysis, but not the Year 3 analysis, as they exited the program fewer than three years prior to the data pull. As such, “increases” or “decreases” in employment over time should be interpreted with caution.

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### Employment analysis: Demographics of youth participants

<b>Exited before</b>	<b>Quarter 1 3/31/16</b>	<b>Year 1 6/30/15</b>	<b>Year 2 6/30/14</b>	<b>Year 3 6/30/13</b>
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	62%	58%	56%	57%
Male	38%	42%	44%	43%
<b>Age</b>				
16 and younger at hire	78%	78%	78%	77%
17 and older at hire	22%	22%	22%	23%
<b>Racial/ethnic background</b>				
African	2%	2%	0%	0%
Asian	17%	17%	16%	14%
African American	72%	70%	74%	75%
Multiracial	6%	7%	7%	8%
White	3%	4%	4%	3%
<b>All youth</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>95</b>

Notes. Reflects valid percent. Race data are missing for 10 graduates in the 6/30/15 cohort.



## Employment outcomes

Employment rates increased steadily following program exit. During the year prior to program entry, only 16 percent of participants were employed.

At the end of their first quarter after program completion, 47 percent of graduates were employed; of those employed, 30 percent were employed by Cookie Cart (because time at Cookie Cart overlapped into the quarter's data). Overall employment increased to 69 percent by the end of the first year, remained steady at 68 percent by the end of the second year, and increased to 72 percent at the end of the third year. For comparison, this is much higher than the percentage of working-age adults employed in the Near North community of Minneapolis (55%) during 2008-2012.<sup>1</sup>

Though we would expect higher employment rates among students who were older at the time of exit, employment rates among those who were hired at age 17 or older were equal to younger graduates after the first quarter and first year, but lower after the second and third years (54-55% among graduates 17 and older at hire vs. 72-77% among graduates 16 and younger at hire).

### *Continuous employment*

A participant is considered “continuously employed” if they earned at least one dollar during each quarter of the year. Given that Cookie Cart graduates may be continuing in high school or college after completing the program, continuous employment may not be a goal for all graduates. Two years after exit, 32 percent of Cookie Cart participants were continuously employed, increasing to 39 percent three years after exit.

### *Employment industry*

During the first quarter and first year following program exit, many participants worked in retail or wholesale trades, accommodation, or food service. Employment sector data were unavailable for Year 2 and Year 3. Of those employed at the end of the first quarter, 48 percent of employed participants worked in food service, and 23 percent were employed in retail, including those employed by Cookie Cart.

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<sup>1</sup> Employment data based on American Community Survey (ACS) 2008-2012 averages compiled by Minnesota Compass.

## Median earnings and hours

As a whole, median earnings, wages, and hours worked by Cookie Cart graduates increased annually. Minnesota labor laws impact the wages and hours worked by children under the age of 18, and particularly those under age 16, and most program graduates in this analysis were age 16 or younger when they were hired (78%).

### *Median wage and earnings*

Prior to entry, the median wage of graduates age 17 and older was \$7.25 per hour. Earned median wage was \$8.75 per hour after one year, \$8.70 per hour after two years, and \$8.31 per hour after three years. Graduates age 16 and younger showed a steady increase from \$7.25 per hour prior to entry to \$9.22 per hour in Year 3.

### *Median hours*

During the year prior to program entry, the median hours worked by graduates age 17 or older was 195 hours. For the 17 or older group, the median number of hours worked increased from 279 in Year 1 to 345 in Year 2, but decreased to 280 in Year 3. Again, the pattern for graduates age 16 and younger was different, demonstrating a steady increase in hours from a median of 198 hours prior to program participation, to 414 in Year 1, 436 in Year 2, and finally 552.5 hours in Year 3. Here, median hours is calculated as the median number of hours worked by all participants during the specified year, among only those employed for at least one quarter of that year.

## Conclusions

The 2016 parent and youth survey results, coupled with the long-term employment of program graduates, show that Cookie Cart's hands-on programming, caring staff, and supportive work environment provide youth with valuable skill development, socialization, and leadership opportunities that inspire youth to think about their next steps and prepare them for future employment.

*You can achieve any goal you have set. Don't doubt yourself and always do your best. – Youth participant*

*My child has been talking about going to college, living on campus, graduating, and having her own home. – Parent*

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