



Cookie Cart youth work experience and empowerment program

2014 Evaluation Summary



Cookie Cart teaches me things that most places won't – like helping me get another job after this. - Youth participant

Cookie Cart is a nonprofit employment program that has served youth from North Minneapolis and surrounding neighborhoods since 1988. The program offers youth ages 15 through 18 an opportunity to build life, leadership, and transferable job skills through training and employment at a commercial bakery with a retail store. The program provides a first paid job experience for participants and helps them develop the skills necessary to transition to traditional employment. In 2013 Cookie Cart served 135 youth.

Since 2006, Cookie Cart has contracted with Wilder Research for assistance in evaluating the Cookie Cart strategy for helping youth gain employment skills. Evaluation data are gathered through annual surveys of Cookie Cart participants and their parents. This report provides a brief description of the Cookie Cart program and a summary of the results of the 2014 evaluation surveys.

Program activities

Cookie Cart participants receive both hands-on employment experiences and classroom-based training focused on the “soft skills” needed to find and keep employment. The Cookie Cart program has three main components: experiential learning, classroom learning, and credentialed learning.

Experiential learning

The Bakery Program teaches basic employment skills including appropriate workplace behavior, problem solving, teamwork, time management, following instructions, and completing tasks.

Cookie Cart Captain is an advanced opportunity for youth employees who have demonstrated leadership strength to learn to lead youth employee teams and manage work assignments.

Classroom learning

360 Degrees is a comprehensive workforce-readiness classroom training that teaches job preparation skills including resume writing, preparing for interviews, and job searching. In 2013, sixty youth earned a certificate of completion for this training.

Customer service training is a six-week, age- and culture-appropriate curriculum available to Cookie Cart employees who have worked for a minimum of 90 days and have completed a performance evaluation. Employees who complete this training are offered opportunities to work in the Cookie Cart store and assist at promotional events.

Financial literacy training helps Cookie Cart youth learn about using checking and savings accounts, budgeting, and managing credit. In 2013, Cookie Cart worked with US Bank, Wells Fargo, and Junior Achievement to provide 660 hours of financial literacy training to 74 youth employees.

Credentialed learning

National Career Readiness Certification: In partnership with the Minnesota Workforce Center, Cookie Cart supports youth as they participate in training that prepares them for the National Career Readiness Certification test. Thirty-three Cookie Cart youth earned a National Career Readiness Certification in 2013.

Evaluation approach

The Cookie Cart evaluation process gives both youth participants and their parents the opportunity to complete a self-administered questionnaire describing their impressions of the program and their view of the impact of the Cookie Cart employment experience.

The 2014 evaluation surveys were conducted in April and May of 2014. Youth who had participated in the Cookie Cart program for at least 90 days, were enrolled in the program during the survey period, and had not completed the survey in a previous year were eligible to participate in the evaluation.

Twenty-six of the 86 youth employed at Cookie Cart during April and May of 2014 were eligible to participate in the evaluation; all completed the survey. Parents of these youth were contacted by a Cookie Cart volunteer and asked to complete the survey either by telephone or on-line. Thirteen parents participated for a response rate of 50 percent.

Cookie Cart youth employee participants in 2014 evaluation survey (N=26)

		Percentage
Gender	Male	35%
	Female	65%
Grade level	9th-10th grade	62%
	11th-12th grade	38%
Racial/ethnic background	African American	73%
	Asian or Pacific Islander	19%
	Caucasian	15%
	American Indian	8%
	Latino	-

Survey results

2014 survey results show continued positive performance in each of the program's five core outcome areas: employment readiness, interpersonal communication, goal orientation, critical thinking and connectedness to new communities.

Improvement in skills and attitudes

Youth employees and their parents answered a series of questions about whether they thought specific skills and attitudes of youth showed positive changes since participating in the Cookie Cart program. Overall, youth and parents' reports of changes were very positive.

Specific skills in which the greatest number of both youth and parents saw improvement were:

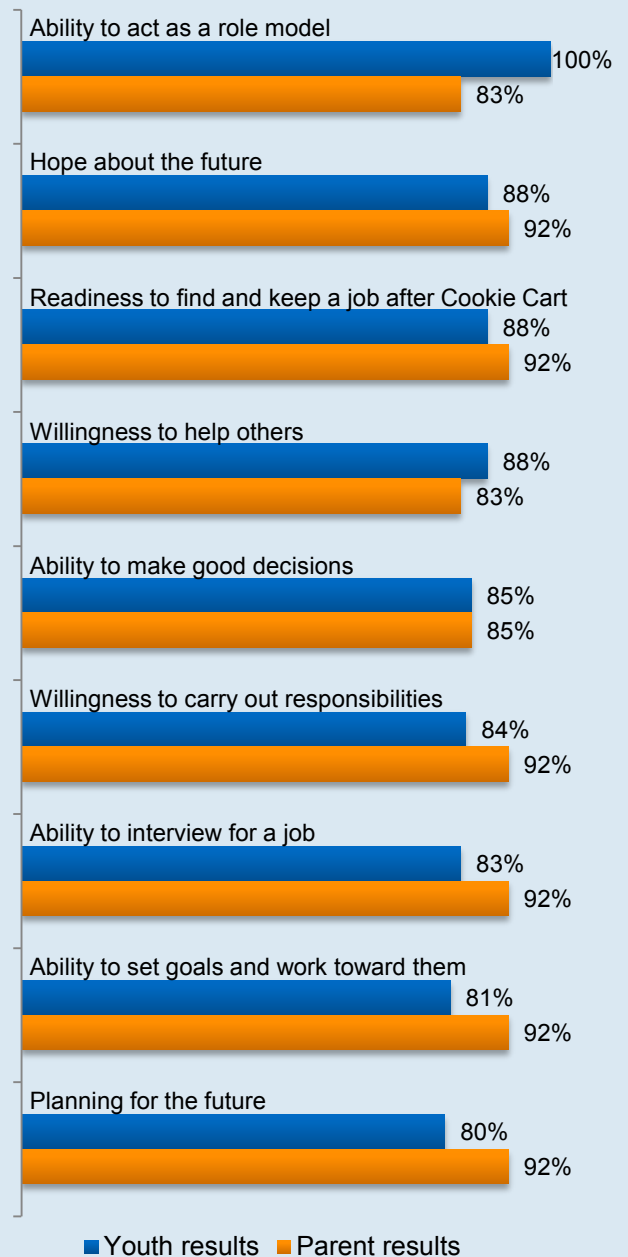
- Ability to present yourself as an experienced employee (96% youth; 100% parents)
- Ability to work as a team member (100% youth; 92% parents)
- Ability to solve problems on own (96% youth; 92% parents)
- Learning from watching others (92% youth; 100% parents)
- Involvement in leadership activities (92% youth; 92% parents)
- Skills in getting along with other kids (92% youth; 92% parents)

It is significant that over three-quarters of parents (77%) and youth (79%) reported an increased "commitment to succeeding in school." In addition, two-thirds of youth said that they have increased the "time spent thinking about or planning for college," and almost all parents (91%) indicated they have observed this change in their children.

Youth and parent perceptions of supervisors

Comments from youth employees show that they feel they have benefited in many ways from working with Cookie Cart staff. Most often mentioned were how staff have helped them improve their communication skills, work more cooperatively with others, understand the importance of

ADDITIONAL YOUTH AND PARENT RATINGS OF POSITIVE CHANGES IN YOUTH'S SKILLS AND ATTITUDES INCLUDE:



Note: Because of the low percentage (50%) and small number of parents (13) who responded to the evaluation survey, these results cannot be considered representative of the opinions of the entire group of parents who were eligible to participate in the evaluation.

behaving responsibly, and learn how to maintain positive and respectful work attitudes. In addition, all youth said they felt they probably or definitely could seek help from their supervisors if needed. Parents' comments about the Cookie Cart staff were similar to those offered by the youth.

Thoughts about future education and employment

In 2014, youth and parents were asked about how the Cookie Cart program had influenced their thoughts about youth's future education and employment. Almost all respondents described ways in which their thinking had changed as a result of the Cookie Cart experience. The following comments are representative:

I have always wanted a job after working with Cookie Cart. I want more than just a job. I want a good, high paying job, something more than just Burger King or Wendy's.
-youth participant

I used to look for lower standard jobs before Cookie Cart. I felt I did not know much about job experiences and background knowledge. ...but my skills have increased since working at Cookie Cart including professional appearance and presentation.
-youth participant

At first I just wanted to go to college but now, I want to go so I can be better and give back the way Cookie Cart gave to me.
-youth participant

She wants to go to college even more than before.
-parent participant

She talked more about getting a part-time job in the future when she is in college. She has not decided if she wants to stay in Minnesota or not.
-parent participant

Improvements in grades

As in previous years, youth and parents were asked if they thought working at Cookie Cart had any effect on youth's grades in school. Fifty percent both of youth and parents said their grades had improved and that they could attribute improvement in their grades at least in some part to their employment at Cookie Cart. This compares to 33 percent of youth and 58 percent of parents who reported improvements in grades in the previous year.

Conclusion

Year eight survey results are very strong and indicate that youth and parents find substantial benefit in the well-rounded employment experience provided to youth by Cookie Cart, as well as the opportunity the program provides for youth to build valuable job, life, and leadership skills that will prepare them to find future employment and continue their education.

**Wilder
Research**
Information. Insight. Impact.

451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700
www.wilderresearch.org



AMHERST H
WILDER
FOUNDATION
ESTABLISHED 1906

Here for good.

For more information

This summary presents highlights of the *Cookie Cart*. For more information about this report, contact Thalia Hall at Wilder Research, 651-280-2692.

Author: Thalia Hall
NOVEMBER 2014