



# Cookie Cart: A first-time job experience for teens



## *2015 Evaluation Summary*

*Ever Since working at Cookie Cart, I have become more confident about trying new things and knowing anything is possible as long as I try. It makes me want to work harder in school to be successful in life. - 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 focuses on building real world skills within a positive learning environment where supervisors are teachers and teaching takes priority over cookie production. All lessons are given in the context of how to meet the expectations at traditional jobs. In the first half of 2015, Cookie Cart served 108 youth.

For nine years, Cookie Cart has contracted with Wilder Research to conduct evaluation activities to inform program strategies for helping youth gain employment skills. For this evaluation, Cookie Cart and Wilder Research staff worked to add a new component to the evaluation that involves collecting longer term employment outcomes using Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) data for youth who have exited the program. 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 2015 survey, and initial outcomes from DEED employment data.

## Program activities

Cookie Cart programming focuses on the soft skills needed to find and keep employment and is divided into three main components: experiential learning, classroom learning, and credentialed learning.

### *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*

**360 Degrees 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

The 2015 Cookie Cart evaluation involved two main components: a web-based survey of youth and parents as well as an analysis of employment outcomes using DEED data.

The evaluation focuses on five core outcome areas which the program seeks to strengthen youth's skills

and knowledge: connectedness to new communities, future goal orientation, interpersonal skills, critical thinking skills, and employment readiness skills.

The current evaluation surveys were conducted between January and June 2015. Youth who had participated in the Cookie Cart program for a minimum of 75 hours, 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.

Seventy of the 108 youth employed at Cookie Cart during January and June of 2015 were eligible to participate in the evaluation; forty-one 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. Fifteen parents participated for a response rate of 21 percent.

### Cookie Cart youth employee participants in 2015 evaluation survey (N=41)

|                                 |                           | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                   | Male                      | 29%        |
|                                 | Female                    | 71%        |
| <b>Grade level</b>              | 9th-10th grade            | 59%        |
|                                 | 11th-12th grade           | 41%        |
| <b>Racial/ethnic background</b> | African American          | 68%        |
|                                 | Asian or Pacific Islander | 29%        |
|                                 | Caucasian                 | 2%         |
|                                 | Other                     | 2%         |
|                                 | Latino                    | -          |

## Survey results

Cookie Cart staff worked with Wilder Research to revise the evaluation design to determine if youth with more Cookie Cart experience (measured by hours worked) had differing outcomes. This analysis included three groups of youth: 1) those

with 75-199 hours worked; 2) those with 200-500 hours worked; and 3) those with more than 500 hours worked at Cookie Cart to determine whether or not they accomplished the target goals set for each outcome area. Current year survey results show overall positive gains in each of the program's five core outcome areas but specifically in the areas of employment readiness, interpersonal communication, critical thinking and connectedness to new communities.

### ***Improvement in skills and attitudes***

Youth participants and their parents answered a series of questions about whether they thought specific skills and attitudes of youth improved during their Cookie Cart employment. Overall, youth and parents' reports of changes were very positive.

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

- Ability to present yourself as an experienced employee (97% youth; 100% parents)
- Readiness to find and keep a job after Cookie Cart (95% youth; 100% parents)
- Ability to interview for a job (93% youth; 100% parents)
- Willingness to carry out responsibilities (95% youth; 100% parents)
- Ability to act as a role model (95% youth; 93% parents)
- Ability to do something different when things are not working (90% youth; 92% parents)
- Willingness to help others (85% youth; 93% parents)
- Learning from watching others (88% youth; 93% parents)

Youth and parents also reported gains in youth commitment to succeeding in school (70% youth; 80% parents), and youth hopefulness about their future (74% youth; 79% parents). This year over half (54%) of youth said they have increased the amount of time spent thinking about college, while all parents said they had seen their youth increase time spent considering college.

### ***Youth and parent perceptions of supervisors***

Youth employee's comments about Cookie Cart staff show that they feel they have learned important lessons. Most frequently mentioned were that staff helped them behave responsibly, learn specific job skills, learn how to work with others, and develop positive and respectful work attitudes. In addition, the majority of youth (98%) said that they felt they probably or definitely could seek help from their supervisors if necessary. Parents' comments about the Cookie Cart staff were similar to those offered by the youth.

### ***Thoughts about future education and employment***

In 2015, youth and parents were asked whether or not youth had any change in thoughts about their future education or employment. Most respondents described ways in which their thoughts had changed as a result of the Cookie Cart experience. The following comments are examples of what was said:

*I have gotten more options as to what my future career can be, and people who I have met throughout this time working for Cookie Cart has given me a better insight on what I can be doing.*  
-youth participant

*My thoughts about my future about school or about Cookie Cart has changed now that I know more about its program and Cookie Cart's core.*  
-youth participant

*At first I was having trouble deciding if I wanted to continue my education in college because I thought it was going to be too challenging for me. Now, I realize I can do anything if I put my mind to it.*  
-youth participant

*My child wants to go to college and get an associate's degree in accounting then transfer out of state to get his bachelor's in another field.*  
-parent participant

*He is thinking about more specific career paths. Ever since Cookie Cart, he has realized he is interested in working with people as a psychologist, therapist or teacher.*  
-parent participant

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

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. Over one-third of youth (36%) and one half of parents (50%) said their grades had improved, and that they could attribute that improvement at least in some part to their employment at Cookie Cart. This compares to 50 percent of youth and 50 percent of parents who reported improvements in grades in the previous year.

### **DEED employment analysis**

This evaluation year Cookie Cart staff worked with Wilder Research to examine employment success of youth participants after they graduate from Cookie Cart's programming. This included an analysis of employment data collected by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). This aspect of the evaluation is in early stages of development and will be used by Cookie Cart staff to better understand the relationship between skill building and employability as well as for continuous quality improvement efforts.

### **Evaluation approach: DEED employment analysis**

Cookie Cart requested data from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) to identify wage, earnings, and hours worked outcomes for Cookie Cart participants. Eligible youth are those who were

hired by the Cookie Cart program from January 2011 through December 2013 and in the program at least three months.

DEED was asked to examine wage information for 162 youth served by the program one year (4 quarters) prior to their hire date through the most recent quarter of wages in 2014. This report was sent to Wilder Research for analysis.

This summary includes preliminary employment outcomes of youth who had successfully "completed" Cookie Cart training, which—for the purpose of this study—was defined as regular participation lasting at least three months. Comparisons across years should be made with caution, as each year contains a different set of students whose varying characteristics, employment decisions, and other factors may have impacted averages in each year.

### **Employment analysis: Demographics of youth participants**

|                  | 9/30/14 | 12/31/13 | 12/31/12 | 12/31/11 |
|------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|
| All youth        | 162     | 132      | 121      | 77       |
| Male             | 43%     | 42%      | 42%      | 43%      |
| Female           | 57%     | 58%      | 58%      | 57%      |
| 16 and younger   | 41%     | 43%      | 46%      | 52%      |
| 17 and older     | 57%     | 54%      | 50%      | 43%      |
| African American | 72%     | 71%      | 72%      | 78%      |
| Asian            | 15%     | 14%      | 13%      | 14%      |
| White            | 7%      | *        | *        | *        |
| American Indian  | *       | *        | *        | *        |
| Multiracial      | *       | *        | *        | *        |

**Notes:** Asterisks indicate suppression for groups of less than 10 participants. Due to missing data, participant age breakdown does not sum to 100 percent.

## Employment

Employment rates increased steadily following program exit. During the year prior to program entry, only 16 percent of participants were employed. Approximately 41 percent of students surveyed were age 16 or younger when they began the program, so high rates of employment are not necessarily expected.

At the end of their first quarter after program completion, 46 percent of students were employed. This increased to 63 percent by the end of the first year, 64 percent by the end of the second year, and 77 percent at the end of the third year.

For those who were age 17 or older at program completion, employment rates were even higher for the third year following program enrollment: 82 percent were employed at some point during the 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. However, it should be noted that only 52 percent of these Cookie Cart graduates age 17 and older were employed continuously during the year.

### *Continuous employment*

A participant is said to be “continuously employed” if they earned at least one dollar during each quarter of the year. Two years after exit, 26 percent of Cookie Cart participants were continuously employed, increasing to 35 percent three years after exit.

Nearly half of all participants (52%) of those who completed the program by December 31, 2011 were age 16 or under at the time of exit, which means they would have been age 19 or younger at the time of the Year 3 pull.

Those who were 17 or older at program exit were more likely to be continuously employed. For participants age 17 and older at the time of program exit, 30 percent were continuously employed during Year 2, and 52 percent were continuously employed during Year 3.

### *Employment industry*

During the first quarter and first year following program exit, most participants worked in retail or wholesale trades or accommodation or food service. Sector data were unavailable for Year 2 and Year 3. Of those employed at the end of the first quarter, 51 percent of employed participants worked in food service, and 14 percent were employed in retail. By the end of the first year, a greater percentage of employees worked in food service (90%) or retail (57%), and some held jobs in both sectors.

## Median earnings and hours

Median earnings, median wages, and median hours worked by Cookie Cart participants increased annually. Wage increases were not necessarily steady or substantial.

In Minnesota, wage laws impact the wages and hours worked by children under the age of 18, and particularly those under age 16. To control for some of these effects, only employed individuals who were 17 or older when they completed the program, were included which should yield more comparable year-over-year wages. In Year 1 and 2, 63 and 64 percent of Cookie Cart graduates age 17 or older were employed, respectively. In Year 3, the proportion increased to 82 percent, with 52 percent being continuously employed.

## ***Median wage and earnings***

Prior to entry, the median wage of participants age 17 and older was \$7.24 per hour. This wage increased by just under five percent after one year (60 cents per hour), then an additional thirteen percent (95 cents per hour) after two years. By year three, average wages leveled out, with an increase of just over one percent, or an additional 12 cents per hour. By September 2014, youth who completed the program prior to 2012 were making an average of \$8.66 per hour. This median wage is still below the 2015 state-mandated minimum wage for large employers (\$9.00 per hour), but above that for small employers and youth (\$7.25 per hour). These new minimum wage rates are effective August 1, 2015.

## ***Median hours***

Prior to program entry the median number of hours youth worked was 220. Median hours refers to the median number of hours worked during the period. The median number of hours youth worked increased from Year 1 to Year 3; 301, 320, and 710 hours respectively.

## **Conclusion**

Consistent with previous evaluation years, parent and youth survey results, coupled with the long-term employment of program graduates, suggest confidence that Cookie Cart's hands-on programming, caring staff and work environment provides skill development, socialization, and leadership opportunities that get youth participants to think about their future and prepare them to find future jobs.

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### **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.

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