

# Cookie Cart youth empowerment program

## *Evaluation summary*



*Gaining more knowledge about the work force, more knowledge about Cookie Cart and what other bosses and supervisors expect from you, is one of the benefits of working at Cookie Cart.*

Cookie Cart, an employment program for youth ages 15 to 18 living in or near North Minneapolis, provides a quality, paid experience for the development of life, interpersonal, leadership, and transferable job skills through a combination of trainings and employment at a retail and commercial bakery.

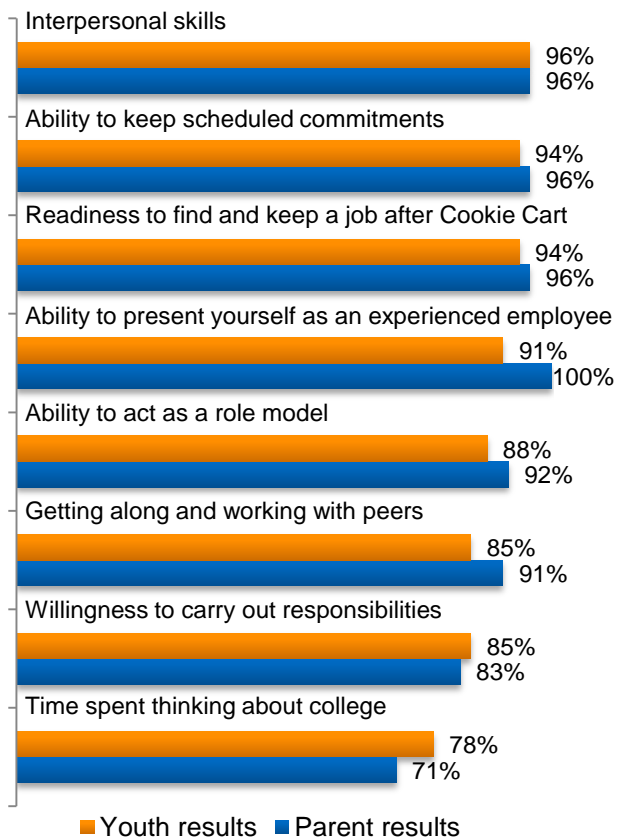
This is the seventh evaluation of Cookie Cart by Wilder Research and is based on surveys of participants and parents, to assess growth in specific skill areas, program impact, and participant satisfaction. This summary contains youth and parent findings for the 2013 study.

### **Survey participants and methods**

For the current evaluation, surveys were conducted between January 8 and April 19, 2013. To be eligible to complete the survey, youth had to be enrolled during the survey period, have at least 90 days of participation

in the Cookie Cart program, and not have participated in the evaluation during a previous year. Of the 90 youth employed between January 8<sup>th</sup> and April 19<sup>th</sup>, 34 met the study criteria and all completed the survey on-site within the stated timeframe for a 100 percent response rate. Fifty-three percent were male and 47 percent were female. Nearly 80 percent were African American. Other youth self-identified as Caucasian (15%); Native American (12%); Asian (8%); and Hispanic (3%). Four of these youth participants identified themselves with more than one race or ethnic group. More than half of the youth were younger high schoolers, typically in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Parents of the 34 youth were also asked to complete the survey by telephone or on-site with a Cookie Cart volunteer. Twenty-four of the 34 parents participated for a response rate of 71 percent.

## Percent of youth and parents reporting growth or positive change in specified area



## Survey results

### *Growth in skills*

Compared to study results in previous years, 2013 results show stronger performances in virtually all areas including, professional development, interpersonal communication, goal-setting, and academic and leadership skills. In the goal-setting category, the majority of youth reported having an increased ability to keep scheduled commitments since working at Cookie Cart. Growth in this skill area showed the strongest year over year change, rising from 66 percent to 94 percent in the most recent study cycles. Similarly, more than three quarters

(76%) of youth in the current study period compared to 56 percent of youth in the last study reported an improved ability to manage their money. Parent results paralleled these findings. In addition, other areas showing improvement included:

- readiness to find a job after Cookie Cart
- comfort talking to a potential employer
- knowing how to present oneself as an experienced employee
- knowing how to dress for an interview

Eighty percent or more of all youth in the current cohort reported improvements in understanding the consequences of their behavior, and getting along and working with adults and peers. Leadership opportunities are also part of the Cookie Cart work experience and 88 percent of youth reported an improved ability to act as role model. While Cookie Cart programming does not focus on grades or school, one-third of youth in this year's cohort reported that they had improved their grades and that this could be partly attributed to their Cookie Cart experience. Significantly, 78 percent of youth reported spending time thinking about or planning for college; a 24 percent increase over last year's results. In addition, 77 percent of youth reported a strong commitment to academic success.

### *Parents' perceptions of child's growth in skills*

A growing number of parents believe Cookie Cart prepares their children to find and keep a future job (96% of current year parents compared to 76% of parents in the previous year). More parents also believe their children are able to present themselves as experienced employees (100% of current year parents compared to 89% of parents in the previous year).

### ***Differences by grade level, gender, and time in program***

Survey results show that “older youth” (11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> graders), compared to “younger youth” (9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> graders), more frequently reported positive changes in the following skill areas:

- Getting along and working with adults (93% of older youth vs. 75% of younger youth)
- Understanding the consequences of your behavior (93% vs. 75%)
- Ability to set goals and work toward them (93% vs. 67%)
- Knowledge of financial literacy (92% vs. 69%)
- Self-control when frustrated or angry (92% vs. 47%)

Females reported more positive changes than males in interpersonal skills, readiness to find and keep a job after Cookie Cart, willingness to carry out responsibilities, and ability to act as a role model.

### ***Youth and adult perceptions of supervisors***

The adult staff at Cookie Cart are highly valued by youth employees and their parents. In the current study, nearly all youth (98%) and all parents (100%) said they probably or definitely could seek help from their supervisors. All parents and youth could identify one or more specific ways in which supervisors encourage youth.

*They really want me to achieve my dreams. They are stricter as bosses than expected, and they are good friends. – youth participant*

*They taught me to always have a positive attitude and be accountable for others. - youth participant*

*They taught my child to be respectful of others. – parent participant*

*Their willingness and ability to find and use every day experiences as teachable moments – parent participant*

### ***Youth and parent accounts of benefits of work experience***

Youth and parents were asked to describe in their own words, the most important benefits they had derived from working at Cookie Cart. All youth and parents were able to identify at least one important benefit including:

- gaining workforce knowledge (61% of all youth respondents)
- working closely with their peers (46% of all youth respondents)
- earning their own money (27% of all youth respondents)
- their child becoming more responsible (50% of all parent respondents)
- their child being able to better manage money (42% of all parent respondents)
- their child developing a positive and respectful attitude (33% of all parent respondents)

### ***Youth and parent accounts of changes in youth***

Youth were asked to describe what changes, if any, they had seen in themselves during their work experience. Parents were also asked to describe any changes they may have observed in their children. All youth and parents were able to identify at least one positive change including:

- becoming more responsible (29% of all youth respondents)

- personal growth (25% of all youth respondents)
- their child becoming more responsible (33% of all parent respondents)
- their children becoming more assertive (21% of all parent respondents)

*I am very aware of my responsibilities, not just at work but at school and in my home.*  
– youth participant

*I've made a big goal and completed it within my year's work at the Cookie cart and I couldn't be more proud of myself for that.*  
– youth participant

*My child is more motivated and more responsible at getting things done on his own.* – parent participant

*My child is tremendously more assertive, and keeps their schedule from school to Cookie Cart.*  
– parent participant

## Conclusions

In year seven, very strong and positive study results suggest that Cookie Cart has remained successful in helping North Minneapolis youth gain solid workforce skills, develop positive relationships with adults and peers in a commercial work environment, experience the value of skill development and team work, and exercise critical leadership skills. Expanding the availability of these benefits to larger numbers of youth would be beneficial.

## Recommendations for future evaluation efforts

Following the successes of 2013, Wilder recommended the following strategies for improving next year's evaluation work:

- Add specific questions to the youth evaluation survey related to the expanded training experiences now offered by the program.
- Conduct longer term follow-up of participants in the National Career Readiness Certificate Program (NCRC) using wage detail records accessible through the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED).
- Conduct a one-time demonstration study of work and secondary school enrollment for participants who left the program in 2009, 2010, and 2011 in order to more fully assess post-Cookie Cart outcomes for youth and determine the potential value of conducting more routine follow-up in the future.

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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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