



Assessing the Impact of eYES

An Evaluative Research Report

INTRODUCTION

What is eYES?

A new initiative for YES, *Empowering Youth to Empower Seniors (eYES)* is an intergenerational computer training program whereby youth are trained to teach seniors how to use computers and navigate the internet. The program is designed to empower disadvantaged youth with new skills that will increase their confidence and their ability to secure employment. It is further designed to bridge the gap between youth and seniors in the high priority neighbourhood of Weston-Mt. Dennis.

After an initial pilot phase in the late spring of 2008, the first official run of the eYES program started in late October 2008 and concluded with a graduation ceremony on December 12th 2008. The program began with the recruitment, screening and selection of eight youth who displayed a need for work experience and soft skills development. The eight youth participants attended two full-day workshops where they received computer training and reviewed the detailed lesson plans to be used with their senior students. After the workshops, youth participants were partnered with one another forming four pairs of teachers.

The teachers met with their senior students for two hours a week for four weeks. Class sizes ranged from two to four students per class. The lesson plan started with instructing the senior students on how to perform basic computer tasks such as turning the computer on and off, using the mouse and keyboard and learning about the internal components of the computer. Soon thereafter, students were taught how to use Windows, execute programs and navigate the internet. Towards the end of the program, students were taught how to operate email accounts and social networking sites.

Rationale for the Research

eYES distinguishes itself from the rest of YES' programming by combining an employment intervention project with an intergenerational activity meant for empowering both youth and seniors. As such, the desired impact on participants exceeds that of traditional employment programs and services where a strict focus is maintained on skills-building or job placement.

In addition to providing youth with employment experience, soft skills training and a positive work reference, eYES has the added objectives of bridging the gap between youth and seniors and empowering both groups through a mutually-beneficial activity. These added objectives are believed to be beneficial not just for the prosperity of underserved youth and seniors but integral to building stronger, more cohesive communities.

Unlike measuring the success of programs that aim for more concrete outcomes like job placements, creating resumes or an increasing knowledge, the benefits of eYES are personal. The outcomes of programs like eYES are subjective and deal primarily with changes in attitude and perceptions. Examining changes in personal growth and development are difficult to measure through standard program evaluations. As a result, evaluating the impact of eYES called for a more specialized research methodology.

Research Aim

This project seeks to evaluate the impact of eYES on its youth participants by examining the relationship between intergenerational practice, empowerment and the search for employment. By furthering an understanding of the relationship between these three factors, this research seeks to inform the design of future intergenerational projects and employment interventions for youth.

Objectives

- Develop a collective definition of “empowerment” based on definitions supplied by the eYES youth research participants.
- Work with youth participants to develop ideas on how to measure any changes in empowerment they experience from the beginning of eYES through to the program’s conclusion.
- Identify changes in youth participants’ perceptions and attitudes towards seniors through the eYES program.
- Identify changes in senior participants’ perceptions and attitudes towards youth through the eYES program.
- Assess and describe any impact eYES has on the youth participants’ sense of self, sense of community and their search for employment.

Research Questions

- What does empowerment mean to youth and how does this program empower them? How does it empower seniors?
- What are the perceptions and attitudes seniors and youth hold towards each other? How does intergenerational practice impact these perceptions?
- What is the relationship between empowerment and youth unemployment? What about the relationship between intergenerational practice and youth unemployment?
- What kind of age-specific struggles do youth and seniors face in their lives? Is there any similarity between these struggles?
- How has eYES impacted the youth participants’ sense of self, sense of community and their search for employment?

METHODOLOGY

Evaluative Research

The research conducted on the eYES program can be considered “evaluative research” in that it aligns with the two major purposes of this particular methodology. These two key components are identified and described in Rebecca P. Winsett’s article, *Evaluative Research* (2009). The first goal of evaluative research is to evaluate a program’s impact and effectiveness – what Winsett refers to as the program’s “outcomes” and “process”¹. This evaluation component was quite central to the eYES research project as findings and data were used to assess the program’s impact. The evaluation aspired to measure how successfully eYES’ outcomes met the program’s objectives as they were originally defined at the program’s inception.

¹ Winsett, R. P. (2009). “Evaluative Research.” In *NATCO Research Guidelines*. Retrieved October 31st 2008, from http://www.natco1.org/research/files/EvaluativeResearch_000.pdf. (Pg. 1).

The second purpose of evaluative research is to fulfill the traditional goal of research which is “to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge”². Thus, to be considered evaluative research, a project must encompass both the program evaluation component and the knowledge production component. Otherwise, Winsett cautions, “if the results are developed in a manner that is intended only to assess and revise a specific program, then it is not research”³.

Along with its goal of evaluating the program, the eYES research project aimed to further our understanding of the correlation between intergenerational practice, the notion of “empowerment” and youth in need of employment. It seeks to answer the questions: what can eYES teach us about the benefits of intergenerational practice? What can eYES teach us about the relationship between empowerment and employment?

Evaluative Research Meets Community-Based Research

A minor caveat to the above description of the eYES research project is that the methodology employed alongside the evaluation process is not that of traditional research but that of community-based research (CBR). Rather than producing knowledge that is *generalizable* and strictly for knowledge sake, CBR is community-specific and action oriented – seeking to produce knowledge for change. Working within this framework requires a paradigm shift from a place where research is conceived as expert-driven and strongly objective to a place where research is more democratic and participatory. The latter paradigm shares power, control and ownership of the knowledge being produced with the particular community that it seeks to benefit⁴. CBR also differs from traditional research in that it relies heavily on qualitative research data rather than quantitative, measureable research data. This is because CBR seeks to understand complex social realities and multiple perspectives – the pluralism that makes up the human experience.

Self-Assessment Surveys

Several research tools were employed to collect the necessary data. The first tool to be designed was a self-assessment survey distributed to the youth participating in eYES (see Appendix A). The survey was designed to gather information about the participants’ soft skills, their motivations for enrolling in eYES and their expectations of the program. Survey respondents were also asked to provide information regarding their desired career path and to identify any barriers they believe they are facing to obtaining a desirable job. The self-assessment survey was also designed to measure the respondents’ levels of confidence and motivation in their search for employment.

The self-assessment survey was distributed twice throughout the duration of the program. The first round of surveys took place at the beginning of the eYES, after the youth had completed their two-day training but prior to teaching classes. The second round took place once the participants had completed the program at the graduation ceremony. This was done in order to measure changes to the participants’ soft skill levels, confidence levels, motivation and thoughts about the program.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ George, P. (2008). “Principles of Community Based Research.” *Community Based Research Workshop*. Artreach Toronto. Toronto, ONT.: 29 October, 2008.

Key-Informant Interviews with Youth

Four semi-structured interviews were held with youth participants, each interview averaging about 45 minutes long. All eight youth were interviewed two at a time in their assigned teaching pairs after class. The only exception to this scheduling was the first pair of youth participants who were interviewed *before* they had begun teaching as the first week of classes were cancelled and rescheduled. The next two interviews took place at two and three weeks into the program followed by the final interview, conducted on the fourth and final week of the program.

The original research plan was to hold focus groups with all youth participants present. This unfortunately was not possible due to conflicts in scheduling amongst participants. Conducting interviews in pairs, however, proved to be most useful in combining the intimacy of one-on-one interviews with the benefit of dialogue that comes with group discussions.

Because the interviews were dispersed over the course of the program, each interview session offered insight into a unique point along the program's timeline. For example, the first interview gathered information from participants who had not yet begun teaching the computer classes. As a result, their responses focused on expectations. By contrast, the youth interviewed at the end of the program, whom had taught all four classes, could reflect on the whole experience.

The key informant interviews with youth were aimed at gathering information about the following three topics:

The eYES Program:

- Who are the participants enrolling in the eYES program?
- Why did they enroll in eYES?
- What are their impressions of eYES? How has the program impacted them?
- Has the program increased their soft skills and overall ability to find employment?
- What would they change about the program to make it better?

Empowerment:

- What does "empowerment" mean to the youth participating in this program?
- How can we know if eYES is successful at empowering youth and seniors?
- How do eYES activities empower youth? How do they empower seniors?
- What is the relationship between empowerment and employment, or unemployment?

Intergenerational Practice:

- What kinds of experiences do participants have with seniors?
- What are some of the popular attitudes and beliefs they hold towards seniors? Did these perceptions change through the eYES program?
- What kind of personal or social outcomes emerge from intergenerational practice that are unrelated to relationships with seniors?
- What kind of perceptions do people hold towards youth? Do these perceptions impact youth's lives?

The questions listed above were not necessarily included in the interview; rather they were used as a basis to develop more strategic interview questions (see Appendix B).

Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussion with Seniors

Only two interviews were held with seniors averaging about 30 minutes each (See Appendix C). The first interview had two participants and the second, only one. In addition to the two interviews, an informal group discussion about the eYES program took place at the graduation ceremony where all senior students and three youth teachers were present. Compared to the interviews, the seniors were much more engaged in a group setting whereas the youth were less so.

Limitations

- ***Time with youth research participants***

Interviews were arranged based on the eYES class schedule, the participants' availability. Since research participants could not be remunerated for their time, this may have posed a barrier for some who could have otherwise dedicated more time to interviews and focus groups.

- ***Sample size***

eYES enrolls eight youth participants at a time. This small number of participants may be beneficial for program activities but a relatively small size for a research sample of unemployed youth. Thus, the research participants may not accurately reflect a larger demographic of unemployed youth. Rather, their responses can be used to generalize about youth who enrol in eYES.

Given the nature of the data being collected, however, this small number of youth may have actually worked out as an advantage. Interview questions required introspection and discussion on the part of the participants. For this reason, it was important that interviews were long enough to delve critically into one's ideas and thoughts. Given the limitations of time noted above, it is possible that having more participants would have resulted in dividing the amount of interview time amongst more participants.

- ***Small number of youth completed exit survey.***

Self-assessment surveys were distributed to youth participants at the beginning of the program and again at the program's conclusion. Whereas all youth participants were present during the first round of surveys, only three were present at the time of the exit survey. As a result, comparing the results of both rounds of surveys will not provide as accurate a picture of reported changes as it would had all eight participants completed both surveys. For this reason, the interview data, which collected the thoughts and ideas of all eight youth participants, is a more reliable source for assessing outcomes and answering research questions.

- ***Insufficient data collected from the seniors***

Only three seniors participated in in-depth interviews throughout the duration of the program. This is likely because travel arrangements and schedules were a lot less flexible with the senior participants regardless of their willingness to participate in the research.

As a result, the data collected from the senior participants was found to be insufficient in meeting certain research objectives but remained quite useful for the program evaluation. The interviews and focus groups conducted with the seniors produced data that was valuable

towards program evaluation but slightly elusive in addressing research questions. As a result, the research project addresses research objectives and questions that deal primarily with youth.

RESULTS

Youth Participant Profile

Profile data on eYES youth participants was collected through YES' registration form – a protocol required by all of YES' new clients. Equivalent information could not be obtained for the senior participants because they are not clients of YES but of St. Clair Seniors' Center.

There were eight eYES youth participants in total, ranging in age from 18 to 25, with the majority of the youth participants in their early twenties. One participant is a landed immigrant from Trinidad-Tobago while the others all identify as Canadian-born. Other personal information gathered at registration is represented in the following graphs:

Fig. 1a

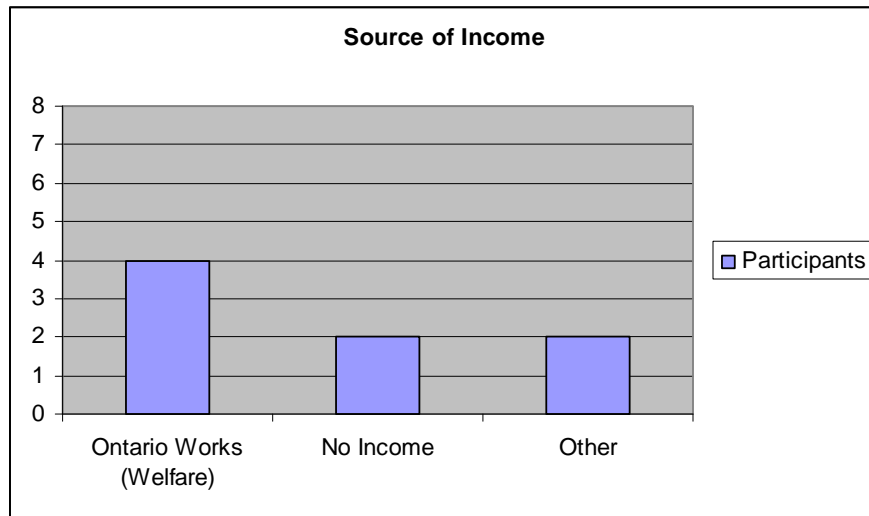
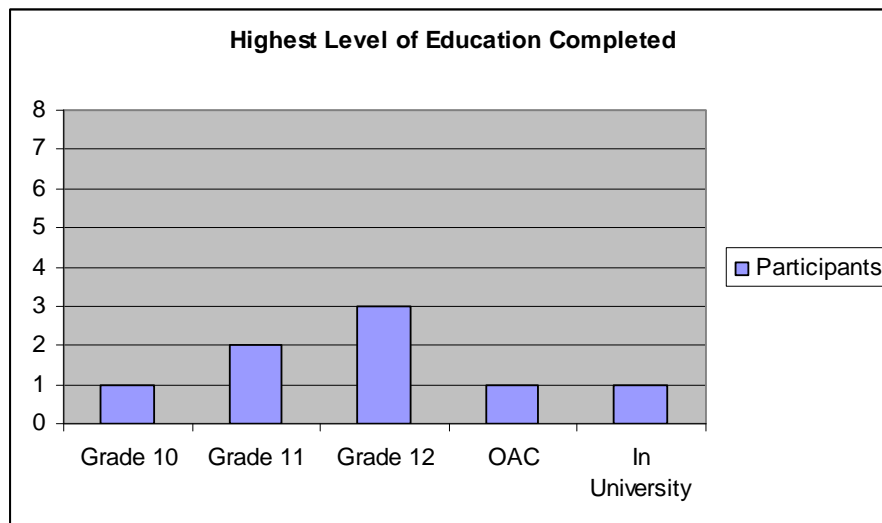


Fig. 1b



In addition to collecting personal information, YES asks its clients upon registration to fill out a “Client Questionnaire” which asks them to identify barriers they believe they face towards employment. Participants are advised to select from a number of responses to a single question and may choose multiple responses where they see fit. The eYES’ participants’ responses to the questionnaire are represented in the graphs below. Please revisit Appendix D for a list of all the questions and potential answers.

Fig. 2a

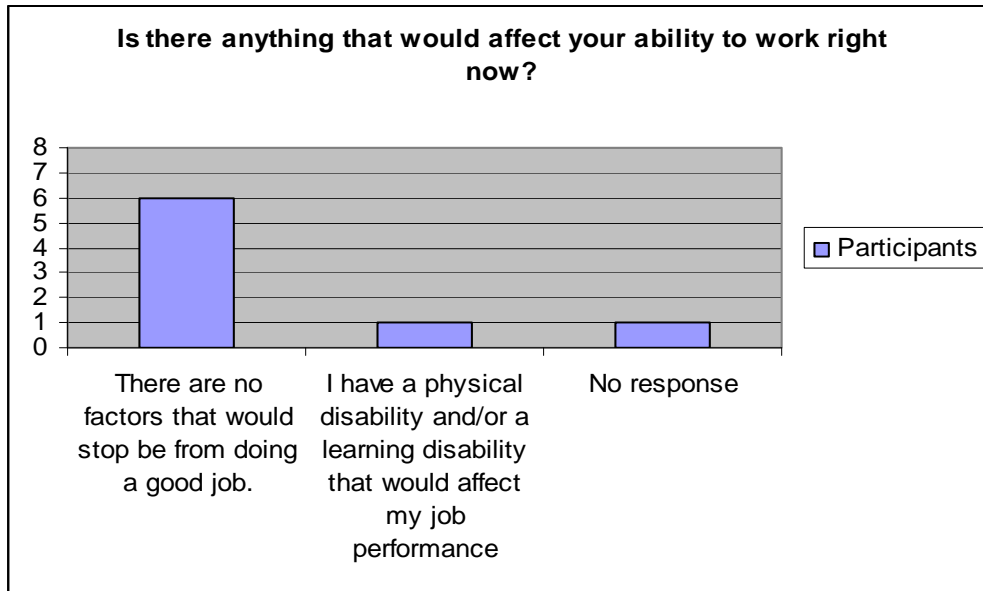
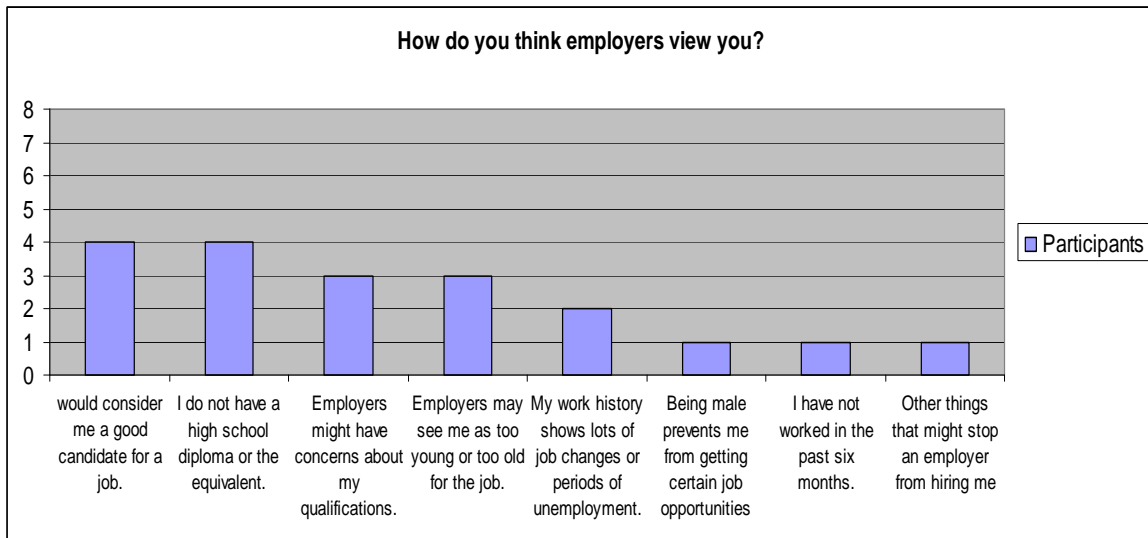


Fig. 2b



‘Fig. 2b’ indicates that one participant believed that other factors might stop an employer from hiring them. Upon selecting this choice in the questionnaire, the client is prompted to state the

“other factor” that might stop an employer from hiring them – to which the respondent wrote “stuttering.”

Fig. 2c

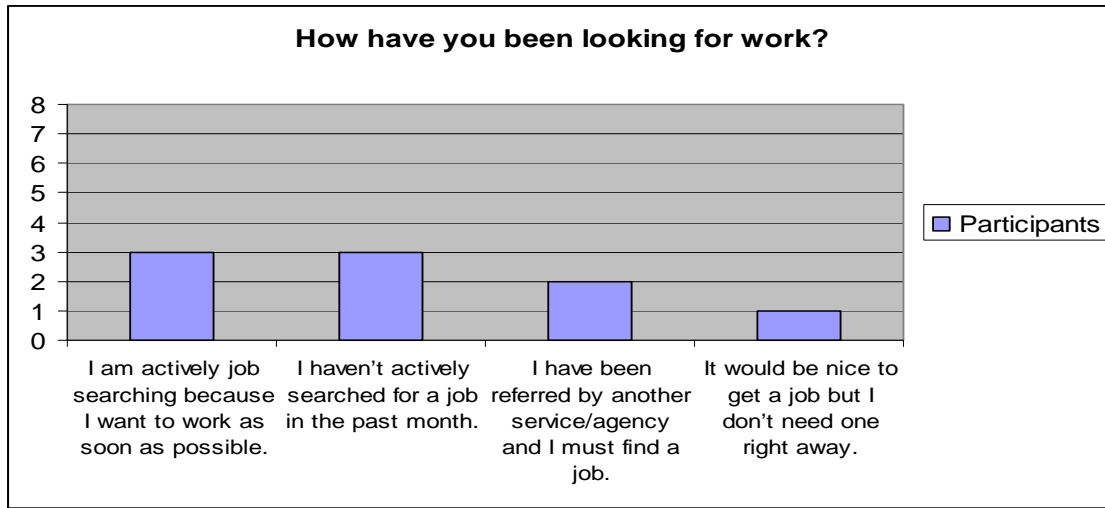
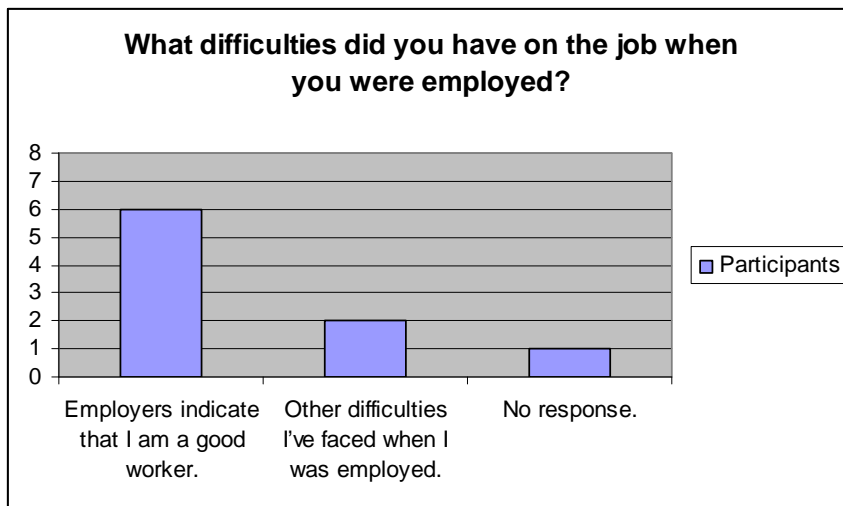


Fig. 2d



Once again, when clients selected the option “Other difficulties I’ve faced when I was employed” they were prompted to identify the difficulty. One respondent wrote “sleeping” while the other indicated that not having a babysitter proved to be a difficulty when employed.

Fig. 2e

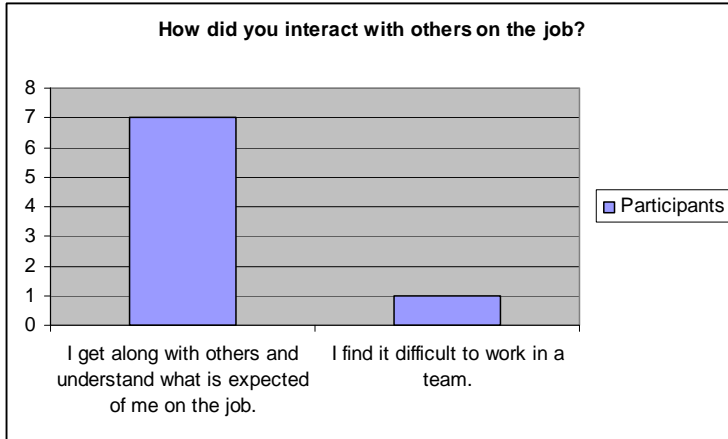


Fig. 2f

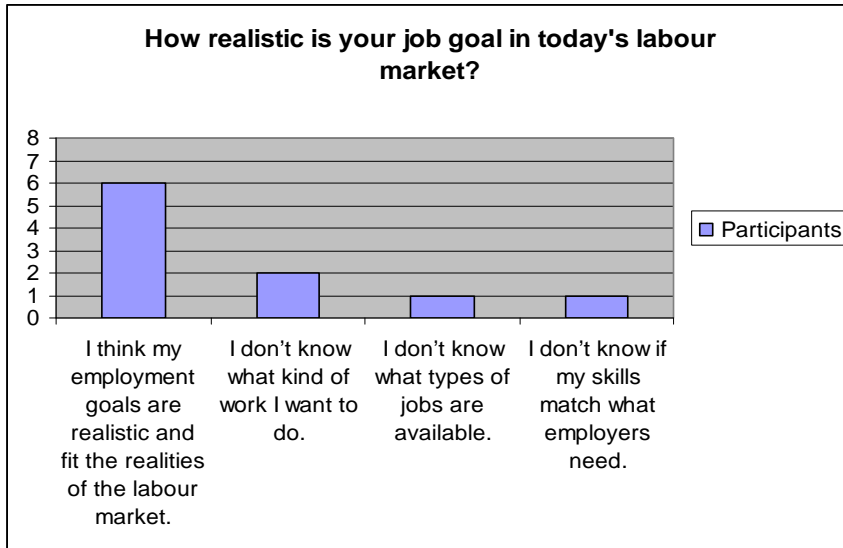


Fig. 2g

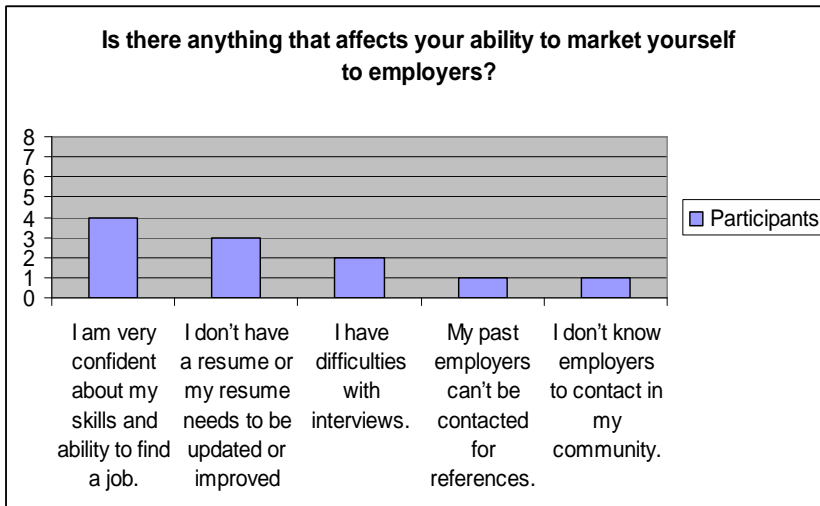
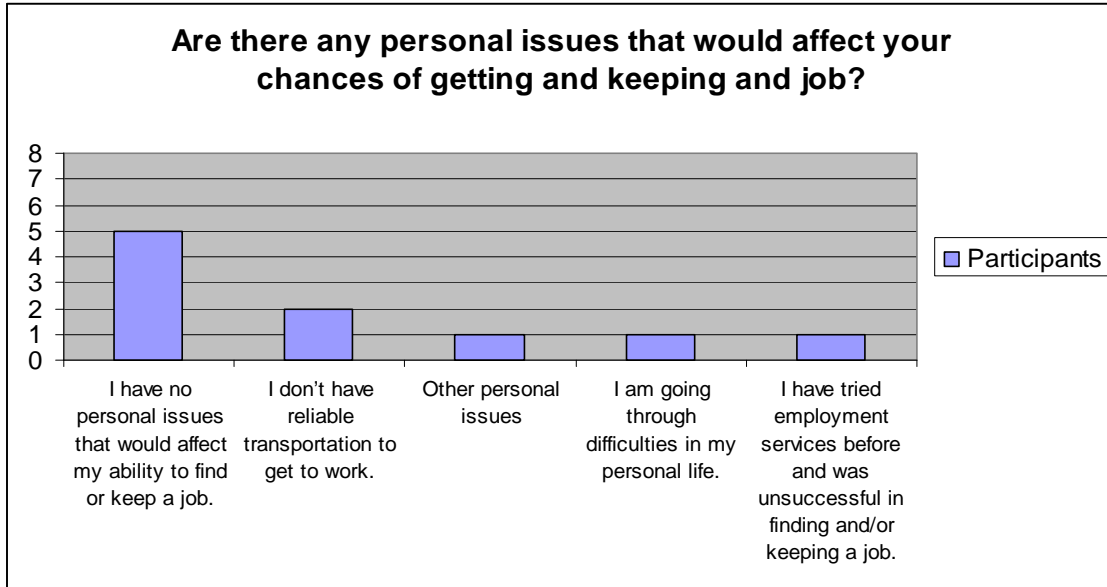
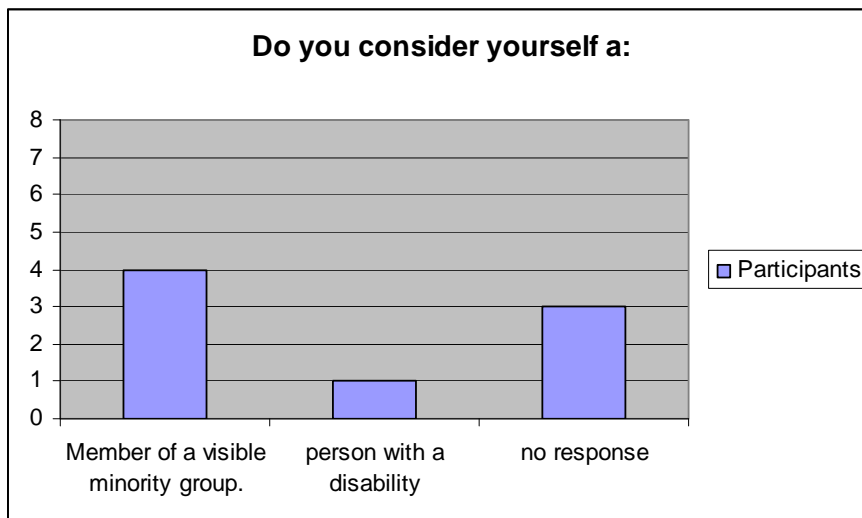


Fig. 2h



One participant indicated “stuttering” after selecting “Other personal issues.”

Fig. 2i



Self-Assessment Surveys – Findings and Analysis

Complementing the personal information gathered through the registration process, the self-assessment surveys help provide a more comprehensive picture of eYES youth participants. The self-assessment surveys were designed to identify:

- Changes in soft skill levels;
- Changes in self-confidence and perceived ability to obtain employment;
- motivations for enrolling in the program; and
- expectations of the program compared to impressions and feedback upon completion.

The survey also asked youth to state their desired career path along with any barriers they believe to be facing in their journey to achieve their desired job.

With only three participants completing the exit survey, it is difficult to truly generalize about any changes the program brought about to the individuals. For this reason, the interview data provides more solid evidence of changes in personal development and skill levels. Nonetheless, the surveys still offer a fair amount of insight into the program and its participants.

- **Soft Skills**

Participants were asked to rate, from one to ten (lowest to highest) their soft skill levels in the following areas: communication, leadership, problem-solving, presentation and team-work. A brief definition of the term “soft skills” was provided on the survey sheet to clarify the term. Additional “guiding questions” were provided under each soft skills heading to solicit accurate responses. These questions were meant to help participants assess their skill levels. For example, when asked to rate their communication skills, the following questions were provided for guidance:

Do you have trouble getting your point across? Are you shy? Do others seem to understand you? Do you feel comfortable talking or would you prefer to avoid it? Also think about how well you listen to others. Do you give people your full attention when they speak?

Average ratings for before and after the program, are represented in the graph below:

Fig 3a



‘Fig 3a’ shows that, on average, youth participants assessed themselves to possess strong soft skills both before and after the program, with the majority of skills having been strengthened through the eYES program. Two interesting hypotheses can be deduced from this generous self-assessment. The first is that eYES manages to attract, screen and select participants who *already possess* the skill sets that are to be developed through the eYES program. Such a conclusion is not entirely unlikely since it is easy to believe that those who are drawn to a teaching program would view themselves as possessing the appropriate teaching skills.

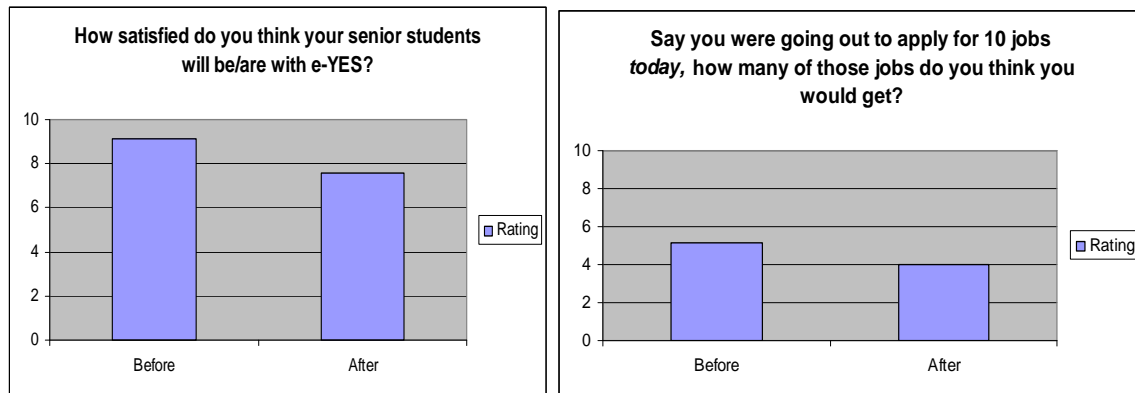
A second hypothesis to be made from the soft skills self-assessment is that prior to engaging in the eYES activities, participants had little teaching or facilitation experience on which to base their self-assessment. If this is in fact the case, it is possible that without having earlier experiences of applying their soft skills, participants did not have any past examples to refer to and thus provided an inflated estimation. This analysis would explain the otherwise surprising decrease in some of the participants' skill levels.

Though the self-assessment results show that the majority of participants' believed their soft skills to be strengthened through the eYES program, there is a curious decrease in the participants' communication and teamwork skills (see Fig 3a). Interestingly enough, these two skill areas were rated the highest in both the entrance and exit surveys. As discussed above, this decreased rating in communication and teamwork skills could be the result of acquiring hands-on experience where one has to rely heavily on these particular skills. This experience, in turn, provided participants with a reference point that enabled them to better conceptualize their skill levels. It is possible that the participants didn't know how much they could improve their communication and team-work skills until they had a formal opportunity to apply these skills. Otherwise, it would be difficult to conceive of how eYES activities could have actually lead to a regression in skill levels.

- **Expectations and Motivation**

Perhaps a similar analysis could explain the decrease in confidence apparent in several survey responses. For example, both of the survey questions in the graph below received higher ratings in the first survey compared to the exit survey.

Fig. 3b



'Fig. 3b' shows that youth yielded high expectations for the seniors' level of satisfaction with eYES. These expectations were then not met at the program's conclusion – as demonstrated by the decreased score. Oddly enough, during the interviews, most youth revealed that they held fairly low expectations of the seniors' ability to learn how to use the computers prior to starting the program. They then reported that the senior students ended up *exceeding* their expectations in how quickly they excelled at learning to use the computer. The inconsistency in the participants' responses could be reflective of the vagueness of the question rather than a sign of contradictory opinions. The term "satisfaction" is subjective and requires clarification to solicit a clear response.

The second question represented in Fig. 3b also highlights a contradiction between the responses shared in the survey and those offered in the interviews. The survey demonstrates an overall decline in the participants' confidence in finding work. In the interviews, however, participants described an increase in confidence and ability to secure a job.

Surveys can be slightly misleading as we do not know any of the external circumstances that surrounded the participants' responses. One possible explanation is that, at the time of the exit survey, youth had been searching for employment a lot longer than they did at the start of the program. It is possible that youth had grown discouraged with the lack of job opportunities they were offered throughout the month.

A review of the participants' motivations for enrolling in eYES also provides some insight into their expectations of the program. Participants were asked to list their reasons for applying to be a part of eYES. A small portion of the reasons provided were very general, reflecting goals that could be met by other employment experiences, such as: "I thought it would look good on a resume"; "I am in desperate need of an income" or "because my counsellor brought it to my attention." However, the vast majority of responses made mention of strongly *intentional* objectives, specific to either working with computers, working with seniors, teaching experience or helping the community. The highly-intentional motivations for enrolling in eYES are better understood when considering the desired career paths the participants listed on the survey. With the exception of only one participant, all youth listed either social work, teaching or working with computers as their desired career. This overwhelming attraction to social work was prevalent in the interviews as well, pointing to a substantial trend in the type of youth applying for eYES.

Interview Data – Findings and Analysis

The interviews proved to be the most reliable research tool. Youth participants were much more elaborate and engaged in their responses as compared to the surveys. This section is dedicated to highlighting and discussing some of the major themes that emerged from the interviews. The themes highlighted address the research questions and objectives established above.

- ***Developing Skills for Working with People***

When asked why they applied to the eYES program, an overwhelming number of participants made mention of a desire to "work with people." Many linked this desire to a larger goal of working as teachers or social workers. As mentioned earlier, these were the career aspirations for nearly all participants. Many participants saw eYES as a good introduction to the dynamics of helping people:

I personally want to see myself working with teens and honestly, the same patience you have working with seniors, sometimes you have to show that patience with teenagers, children, stuff like that. And I think I can carry over the knowledge and the patience of learning.

Participants saw eYES as providing them with transferable skills and knowledge that can be applied to all forms of social work or teaching, not just with seniors. The above quote touches upon a dominant theme of *patience* that weaved its way through all the interviews. Participants

expressed a strong recognition and appreciation for the exercise in patience encountered through eYES activities:

Like [the senior students] were talking a lot about patience. I never knew it was such a big deal. You know? Patience. I was able to hear that computers take patience. I've smashed a lot of computers 'cause I didn't have patience. [Imitating himself angry with a computer] "Well I'm tired of this computer." Because I didn't have patience. But now I'm learning it is a big deal.

I think they [the seniors] were surprised at our patience. They said it more than once: "you guys have so much patience."

Patience was spoken about at length presumably because youth were faced with the challenging task of introducing a whole new technological discourse that, over the years, has become a second language to many of them. However, this discourse has remained alien to older generations. As such, patience proved to be absolutely essential for successful communication. Youth found themselves having to adapt their language and sometimes their entire pedagogical approach to suit the learning styles of their senior students. As one participant wrote in her exit survey:

Things I take for granted would be understood were interpreted differently. I had told a student to drag the mouse to the start button to shut down the computer and she lifted the mouse in the air and bumped it into the screen.

This response speaks to the way the youth participants often had to revisit assumptions and exercise new ways of communicating meaning. Adapting to the needs of others is a valuable skill in and of itself. For example, the same participant quoted above, stated that she had minimal experience interacting with seniors before eYES. She describes the experience of her first day of class:

If you're not exposed to that generation, when you encounter it you kind of act differently. You don't know what you're getting [...] Like, when I first came in, before I introduced myself, they didn't know who I was, they didn't know how to address me because I didn't know how to address myself. Once I found out how I can and I addressed myself and they knew my capacity, it was better. We were able to move a little bit smoother. But if you just walk in a room – you just can't assume.

In the context of eYES' outcomes, confronting the generational gap in their teaching was discussed as a way for the youth to strengthen their inter-personal skills. As with the quote above, the participant described what seemed like a moment of self-reflection. Her instincts had to be revisited to suit the present audience. This exercise in accommodation can help to develop communication skills and build intuition on "reading your audience." Other interpersonal skills were built upon too:

RESPONDENT: ...I also get to teach somebody and I have to listen to them and they have to listen to me. So that's how I think it helps me. It helps me with patience, it helps me to be cooperative so that's how I think it helps me.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, and when you went into this were those things that you were kind of looking to fill?

RESPONDENT: Those were exactly the things I was looking to fill.

This particular respondent had expressed his desire to “work with people” as a social worker earlier on in the interview. The above conversation demonstrates that eYES provided him with the necessary experience and skills-building that he will need to apply later in his career. This sentiment was echoed by another participant who found teaching the seniors challenging at first but understood this challenge to be a valuable lesson:

As soon as we started the lesson, at first my fists were clenched. I’m like “K, one step at a time”, like, I was cruising through. And um, my partner here was trying to help me slow down a little bit, he was a little bit more patient than me. You learn from it. You learn from the experience.

- **Empowerment**

One of the primary aims of this research project was to work collaboratively with youth to come up with a collective definition of “empowerment.” The youth were then asked to work with the researcher to think of ways one can measure empowerment – particularly in the case of eYES. The latter objective proved to be more difficult than previously imagined for several reasons. The first reason was the nature of the topic and the route the discussion took. The act of defining “empowerment” usurped a significant portion of the interview with most respondents. Once a loose-definition was agreed upon, the topic seemed to have exhausted itself, yielding only elusive and vague ideas on how empowerment can be measured. Another factor that proved to act as a barrier was the timing of the interviews. In hindsight, the most effective way to measure how successful eYES was in empowering youth would have been to define parameters for measuring empowerment prior to onset of classes and then revisiting these parameters at the program’s end. Unfortunately, scheduling a focus group with all the youth participants to discuss this at the beginning of the program was not successful.

Despite the problems encountered, evidence of whether youth felt empowered through eYES activities can be found in the interview data. This can be done by comparing the definitions of “empowerment” with the youth’s personal accounts of how they were affected by eYES activities. For example, in the attempt to define “empowerment”, one of the key concepts that emerged was “self-confidence.” As one participant noted:

Yeah well how I feel about what empowerment means is that you try to make someone feel more positive about themselves. But to also have a positive attitude so that they can go and try new things that they haven’t tried to do before.

Here the participant speaks of “empowerment” in terms of feeling secure and proud of one’s own abilities. Apparent in the discourse surrounding empowerment in other interviews as well, the notion of self-confidence was understood as empowering because it increases self-reliance. In turn, self-reliance can motivate people to “try new things that they haven’t tried to do before.” Consider the following participants’ gestures towards self-reliance and self-confidence in the excerpts below as they describe how eYES empowers their senior students:

Like [name of senior student], when she came here, when she realized she was doing something wrong you would see her quitting a lot. And as she started getting more familiar with the tasks on the computer she started to try it on her own and she started to get it. And she felt better about herself and she felt empowered to perform the task on the computer.

Teaching them how to figure out how to use the computer themselves. We're trying to teach them right? But when we're not there, they're going to have to figure out how to do it themselves. So we're trying to teach them how to do it by themselves [...] I hope that they leave here feeling confident that they can move on themselves to do this themselves.

Descriptions of how eYES can empower seniors provided significant insight into how the youth participants understood the notion of empowerment. It appeared as though it was easier to define the term when applying it to the seniors' experience rather than their own. In the quotes above, common themes surrounding confidence, self-reliance and independence are evident. We can draw from these descriptions the impression that the empowered subject is the autonomous subject – the person who can rely on themselves and their abilities. Characterizing this autonomy is a sense of pride in recognizing the hard work one has to undertake to earn this independence – a sense of accomplishment.

In order to find evidence of the youth feeling empowered themselves, interview data was reviewed for statements in which the youth described themselves as experiencing the characteristics of empowerment listed above. For example, several participants spoke to the feeling of self-confidence and the courage to explore new endeavours:

I'm actually showing people how to do things – directing. Kind of like directing the show. I feel more confident to maybe take on a managerial or supervisor role that I wouldn't have before.

My confidence is a lot better after teaching this class.

So I won't ever feel that, like, vibe. Like you're worthless and pathetic and you know you stay on your minimum wage job, you know? I won't be looking at myself like that because I know that, deep down inside, I've done really productive things for my community.

The last of these excerpts points towards another important theme that came up in the attempt to describe “empowerment” – that of self-worth. Though discourse surrounding empowerment held a focus on independence, autonomy and self-reliance, there was an equally strong focus on the desire to feel *needed*. The ability to help others and the feeling of self-worth that comes from being needed or important to the community was described as empowering. This feeling was often tied to the intrinsic rewards of teaching – contributing one's knowledge to those seeking that knowledge:

For the youth, like myself, I think it empowers us because a lot of us have been searching for jobs for a long time and I mean, what can you say about teaching? It's a pretty respectable thing to do. I mean even though it's just teaching seniors how to use a computer, it does feel empowering.

I want them to feel like they learned something and they can still learn and they can still be able to do stuff. And not that they're just seniors and they're old and they can't do anything anymore. They'll be able to feel self-worth [...] As long as they learn something I'm going to feel like I taught them so I did a good job. So it'll make me feel happy.

Yeah, um, because I haven't tried to teach people too many things so for me to teach people and for them to actually learn something, I would feel very happy.

Teaching allowed participants to see the results of their effort embodied in their students which prompted feelings of pride and self-worth. As the first of the three excerpts indicates, experiencing appreciation and self-worth can feel foreign to some youth. Especially those hunting for jobs and constantly trying to prove themselves to be worth employers' time and money.

If definitions of empowerment were difficult to solicit from participants, one question that helped them articulate their views was "how does empowerment differ from power?" Responses led to two characteristics of empowerment that differentiated it from power. The first revisits the notion of the Self and self-reliance. Empowerment, as it was described, was self-generating, it functioned from the inside out rather than power, which was seen as working from the top-down:

Cause I think, like, you can always be given power into something, but if you have empowerment, that means you're, like, stronger. Because it's in you and you have to find it.

In some of the excerpts above, youth articulate feelings of power that emerge from "within." For example, consider the language in the following statement:

So I won't ever feel that, like, vibe. Like you're worthless and pathetic and you know you stay on your minimum wage job, you know? I won't be looking at myself like that because I know that, deep down inside, I've done really productive things for my community.

The participant describes a scenario where his value and accomplishments are questioned. In order to combat accusations of being "worthless and pathetic" he clings to experiences like that of eYES that sit "deep down inside" to know that he has, in fact, been valuable and productive. Rather than relying on other people's opinions or praise (external sources of power), the participant is capable of empowering himself.

Another way the participants distinguished empowerment from power is that empowerment involved the *transmission* of power. Empowerment is fostered through the sharing of power, as opposed to power which is strongest when kept all to one source:

RESPONDENT: Empowerment is giving power and power itself is to have power [...] say you've read a book, well then that would be your power. You've read the book, you know the book. But if you're empowering someone, you'd be reading the book to them. In the end, they would know the book too.

INTERVIEWER: So working with this definition, how would you find this program empowering you?

RESPONDENT: You could take that two ways, empowering youth empowering seniors could mean that they, YES, are giving us knowledge to give them [the seniors] knowledge [...] Another way to look at it would be that we're learning from them as much as they're learning from us.

This participant describes eYES as not only a transfer of knowledge and power from the youth to the seniors, but an *exchange* of power and knowledge: “we’re learning from them as much as they’re learning from us.” This sentiment that the senior students could provide youth with as much power and knowledge as they were providing the seniors, was shared by the majority of participants. This is elaborated upon in the next few sections on intergenerational perceptions and the impact of intergenerational practice in eYES.

- ***Assessing the Impact of Intergenerational Practice***

The impact of intergenerational practice on its participants was examined through two distinct inquiries. The first asks what change, if any, did eYES activities have on participants’ attitudes and perceptions of the other generation. Because our research focuses on youth, results are specific to changes in youth perceptions of seniors. The second inquiry asks what kind of personal impact does intergenerational practice have on participants that are unrelated to relationships with seniors. The latter inquiry looks at any self-professed changes in participants’ self-esteem, confidence, personal outlook and skills.

- ***Changes in Youth Perceptions of Seniors***

Perceptions of seniors were often informed by past experiences with members of that generation. For the most part, participants’ experiences were based on relationships with their grandparents – relationships that varied quite a bit amongst participants. Three participants reported living with their grandparents for a significant portion of their life while another three participants reported having limited to no contact with their grandparents. The remaining two participants did not live with their grandparents but described their relationships as close and positive.

Attitudes and perceptions of seniors were generally quite positive. Participants evoked two popular images of “the senior” in their discourse, images that are often reinforced in Western literature, and media. The first is the image of the lonely and isolated senior – rejected from dominant society and thus starved of social contact. Participants would refer to seniors in this way not in patronizing way, but with sincere care:

Yeah, I think if I like doing this and it's like manageable I think maybe I'll go into a career of teaching seniors. Because what if like they don't know and they're lonely and they need people to like be around them and stuff?

Other participants were not so direct in their description of the “lonely isolated senior.” For example, in the following quote, a participant describes how the internet could be an empowering tool for seniors. The description reveals some of her assumptions about that generation:

Things like, [seniors are] sitting at home bored, you don't have to knit, you could, you know, talk to someone else. Talk to someone else, you could research stuff. You can decide well maybe I should tell someone else my stories. You can post it there! You can start your own blog, where people will actually talk to you and say "I'm actually interested in what you have to say."

A combination of the participants' language and the setting within which she places the senior, portrays seniors as socially disconnected and perhaps undervalued. It is as if the participant is drawing an analogy between seniors being out of touch with technology and seniors being out of touch with a social network that values their particular place in life.

At times, the perception of seniors as lonely and alienated was based on participants' experiences with seniors who were ill and dependent on others for survival. Most participants made mention of losing a grandparent, indicating a common connection between older people and loss or death. This association of old age with death and illness was not over-powering in discussions about seniors. It was often mentioned in passing and rarely used as a platform to generalize older people. However, it shouldn't be ignored that death, loss and illness do make up part of participants' experiences with seniors and could inform their attitudes towards that generation. At times, this attitude surfaced when youth would describe seniors as fragile and innocent. But for one participant in particular, illness and death fed into her perception of seniors quite strongly. As a result, she was apprehensive about eYES :

The working with seniors, to be honest... both my mom and my sister are PSWs [personal support workers] so they work in a community with seniors all the time and I'm not very fond of the idea. Only because nursing homes kinda scare me because of all the illnesses and it makes me think: am I going to be that sick in the future? And stuff like that. But honestly when I came here and I started meeting [the seniors] and I realized that maybe one is in my mom's age group and one is not that far, and the other one, he was okay to be around, it made me a lot more comfortable to be around them. I didn't have to deal with blackened feet and bed sores and all the things I hear about so it was nice too.

As with many others, this participant reported a change in her perception of seniors after interacting with seniors through eYES activities. Initially, seniors evoked thoughts of her own mortality and led to associations with illness. But upon encountering healthy seniors in an environment outside hospitals and nursing homes, the participant was able to reconceptualise life as an older person. Quite a few youth were also surprised by how energetic and alert their senior students were:

Usually when people think like 75 or over they think like group home, hospital, death bed. You know? It's good to see like 75 – 80 like learning something new.

And then I was impressed, like even this guy that came in and you looked at him in a wheel chair and not able to function as readily as everybody else, after a while he was doing the tasks that you wouldn't expect him to be able to do. Like he was moving to the bottom of the screen by himself and clicking the buttons by himself and you tell him to turn off the computer, he knows to go directly to the button and stuff like that. And I was under the impression that he couldn't do anything. Like my immediate reaction when he came in, I was like "oh no." So it

was very kind of, it was a good learning experience because you underestimate people sometimes. They surprise you.

Because I thought- I just expected something. But when I came in and I see [the names of two senior students] they were just so much more alive. I didn't expect them to have so much energy and stuff. Like you know? They're smart people and they got it quick. And even [name of another senior student] was like going ahead. I stereotyped them... and this changed my mind.

In the latter quote, the participant literally contradicts stereotypes of seniors as dying and ill with the descriptors “alive”, “energy” and “quick.” The former excerpts echo the same sense of surprise in seniors’ capabilities.

Challenging stereotypes of seniors as lonely, isolated, dependent and incapacitated is a significant benefit of intergenerational practice not to be overlooked. Oftentimes, seniors are discussed in the public domain as a burden and non-contributing members of society. The seniors enrolled in eYES challenged this perception of their generation. A few of them were active members of their church, offering their time and energy towards volunteer initiatives and pursuing social activities like eYES. One youth participant mentioned that his experience at eYES brightened his entire outlook on old age.

Countering the negative depiction of seniors as lonely, dying and alienated was the image of the wise and learned senior. Though positive, the image of the senior as “wise man” and “all-knowing” bordered on stereotype at times. However, for the most part this image encouraged youth to recognize and appreciate the accumulated knowledge and life experience that hold comes with old age:

Old people are cool. They know all the cool stuff [...] You know, it's kind of interesting because old people have been around a lot longer and they have more interesting things to say than some of the younger people.

We're all able to gain knowledge of their knowledge.

And I think they can teach us stuff too right? Because they're been around for so long, they know stuff that we don't know.

Holding the knowledge of seniors in high-esteem, the youth participants were eager for the opportunity to learn from the seniors. It was common for youth to speak of eYES activities as an *exchange* of knowledge rather than a unidirectional teaching exercise. Unfortunately, this was an expectation the youth held that was not met through eYES activities:

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything that you think that would make this program more enticing for you?

RESPONDENT: I think, well, we don't really get a chance to talk to the seniors very much. Maybe if there was some kind of communication that could go on, it might be a little bit better, because we'll actually be able to connect with the seniors.

Time constraints and the teaching curriculum were likely what prevented youth from connecting with seniors on a more personal level. The stated desire amongst participants for interactions with the seniors perhaps indicates that eYES would benefit from a stronger focus on the intergenerational aspect of the program – allowing more time for relationships to form.

- **Impact of Intergenerational Practice on Youth**

Because eYES combines skills-building activities with intergenerational practice, it would be misleading to link all positive outcomes of eYES to intergenerational practice. Likewise, it would be a mistake to believe that exposure and interaction with an older generation had no impact on youth. However, the data points to some key outcomes to the eYES program are likely the result of intergenerational practice rather than the skills building activities. The first of these outcomes is an increased capacity to work with “difference.”

Though many participants made reference to “working with others” as valuable experience for their desired career paths, some discussed this ability to work with others as something necessary for personal growth. Gaining exposure to multiple perspectives and learning how to interact with others different from the Self was valued as an enriching experience. One participant expressed that he is often only exposed to ideas and conversation with people similar to himself. eYES, he explains, provided a chance to access new knowledge:

I can get into what they're into. Or what they would want to get into. And me personally, I'd just be looking into my culture and my generation. But when they know what to do on a computer, they're looking into their culture and their generation, their wants, their needs. It's kinda cool screen watching, you know?[...] you'll get some knowledge of other things.

Here the participant describes his encounter with “difference” as enriching, providing him with alternative ideas and perspectives. This break from day to day homogeneity and the appreciation of different perspectives is perhaps an overlooked benefit to the intergenerational aspect of eYES. The ability to *appreciate* different people, from different backgrounds, with different perspectives and perhaps even different values is necessary to maintain a level of equity in society – no doubt a vital issue in a multicultural city like Toronto. Nowhere in their responses did the youth speak of “tolerating” or “accepting” different perspectives. Rather, there was an undoubtedly sincere *appreciation* for difference and plurality. Though the difference encountered in eYES was only that of age, one can hope that this appreciation might be carried across other forms of difference like race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation and ability.

While an appreciation of difference is necessary for social cohesion and cooperation, some youth challenged the discourse of “difference”, highlighting how “difference” is a matter of perception. In turn, they highlighted eYES activities as allowing them to recognize “sameness”:

I don't really see them as “seniors.” I just see them as older people. Just like an older version of me, I guess [...] they've just been around longer.

This insightful comment highlights the socially constructed nature of “difference.” The comment suggests that seniors are only perceived as different because we are taught that their age is reason to consider them as members of a separate group. By referring to seniors as “just an

older version of me”, the participant objects to categorizing seniors in a separate group. Rather, he includes people both old and young in a common category of “people” – “I just see them as older *people*. Just like an *older version of me*.” Another participant emphasized similarity and inclusion in a more direct manner:

Like the conversations they were even bringing, like, it was impressive. Like I was thinking they're dealing with the same issues I'm dealing with. They're just people, you know?

Though expressed quite casually, referring to seniors as “just people” is a profound challenge to strict identity categories. Based on the beginning of the participant’s comment where she states that she was “impressed” with the seniors’ ability to converse, it is possible that she did not always conceive of seniors as “just people” like herself. After spending some time with them in a mutually-beneficial activity, it appears that the participant was able to focus on the similarities between herself and older people.

The ability to embrace difference, while being able to identify “sameness” or commonality, is perhaps one of the most beneficial outcomes that can emerge out of intergenerational practice. Whereas accepting difference is a form of respecting others, identifying sameness promotes cohesion and unification – breaking down the barrier between “Self” and “Other.” Future research could examine the implications of intergenerational practice on raising acceptance and tolerance for all groups perceived as different.

- ***Perceptions of Youth – Social Construction of Youth as Delinquent***

Participants were asked to describe any stereotypes they feared seniors might hold against them. The discussion raised a number of issues about the portrayal of youth in news media and popular culture. Participants felt that the stereotype of youth as “delinquents” and “troublemakers” carried a strong currency in society. They also believed that this construction of the “delinquent youth” was a perception held especially by older people:

...I think that seniors are a lot more gullable than other people and when they watch the news its usually youth doing this or youth doing that. So maybe they're scared of them or maybe they think that we're bad or something.

I think [stereotypes] are on both sides. Usually on the news, you don't see positive. When they see us on the news, it's trouble, when we see them on the news, they're dying. So it's good to get a different view on things.

We're looked at as criminal, basically.

These participants voice concern for the fear mongering sensationalism of news coverage as working towards a wide-scale criminalization of youth. The term criminalization, in this context, is meant to describe how youth are criminalized by virtue of simply being young. As the first of the two excerpts indicates, some participants believed that seniors were susceptible to this fear mongering more than members of other age groups. Yet, observation of classroom dynamics and interviews with the seniors demonstrated little reason to believe that seniors bought in to the image of the delinquent youth. Seniors were asked in both the interviews and focus groups, what kind of experiences and perceptions they have of youth. Their responses focused mainly on family members and expressed no negative attitudes or perceptions about youth in general.

However, as mentioned earlier, data gathered from the senior contingent of eYES was not pursued as thoroughly as with the youth.

While stereotypes about youth appeared to have a rather benign affect on the relationship between eYES youth and seniors, the association of youth with deviancy, was believed to be an alienating and frustrating occurrence in daily life:

RESPONDENT #1: There was one time when I had gone into a store and there was an old guy who worked in the store. So when I went in he would try to follow me to try to see if I would take something. I had felt that he didn't trust me because I was young and going to take stuff.

RESPONDENT #2: I notice that a lot too! Or you'll walk by and you'll see a store and it will say 'only 3 students allowed.' There was even once a Tim Hortons that didn't allow any students in there. Just no. You're not allowed in there.

This conversation highlights the feelings of alienation and hurt that arise out of negative stereotypes about youth. The discussion raises questions about any correlation between treating all youth as criminals and youth crime and deviancy. If youth grow up surrounded by accusations of misdemeanour, are they inclined to live up to these accusations? Paradoxically, one can ask whether the opposite is true – if youth are given opportunities where they are trusted and treated as competent individuals, are they more inclined to fulfill these expectations? Based on the participants' descriptions of empowerment and the desire to feel confident and needed, it is possible that activities like eYES are able to reduce harmful behaviour in youth. By entrusting youth with the responsibilities of teaching and believing in their capacity to do so, eYES helps to counter the barrage of negative messages youth face in society. Rather than greeting youth with expectations of trouble, eYES and similar programs hold positive expectations of youth, offering a better reflection of their capacity.

- **Perceptions of Youth and Employment**

The impact of stereotyping was reported to be a barrier for youth entering the workforce. Participants suggested that their employers or prospective employers were very susceptible to believing and perpetrating negative stereotypes about youth. Participants believed employers stereotyped youth as lazy, uncommitted, poor workers:

On paper they see one thing, and when they see me they're like 'oh she's not going to know how to do this job' or 'she's going to want to talk on the phone to her friends all day or be on Facebook all day and won't do any work.' In reality, I'm very hard working.

...I think I see it first hand. Because my friends, they try, like, hard. They don't want to be like what they are now. They try hard. They send out resumes, they go to interviews. But for some reason, they can't get a job, right? They're always like "because I'm young, I'm black, blah blah blah." Right? But like I tell them "just keep trying, just keep trying." But they still don't get success. So they end up going to do things they don't want to. And then they don't want to stay.

This last quote highlights a number of important issues facing youth in their search for employment, the first being the issue of race and how that might impact perceptions of youth. Thus far, youth have been referred to in this report as though they were a ubiquitous monolithic group. However, other visual markers and identities such as race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, gender and class can all have a profound impact on how an individual experiences discrimination. For example, the quote above directs us towards a deeply problematic history of discrimination against black youth who are portrayed as icons of crime and misdemeanour in pop culture and the media. Other participants pointed out how the intersection of class and age form a barrier to obtaining employment:

I think employers don't like hiring young people too much because they don't have enough experience or they can't afford the proper clothes for a job interview or something...

I would say that if you don't dress a certain way – for instance, today. I'm going for an interview, right? I'm dressed like this. I have to dress up to go to an interview. If you don't do that you usually don't get the job. So I guess that would probably stand in my way.

These comments demonstrate that it is difficult to decipher what forms of oppression and stereotyping work against youth, as they are likely to embody a number of intersecting identities. However, there is a common identifiable thread in all the above comments that link young workers with inexperience, laziness, mistrust. Discussions about these negative perceptions of youth were not wholly challenged. Rather, participants were quite articulate in explaining why these stereotypes may persist:

It's not that youth are lazy going to work. It's just that the only place that will hire youth is like McDonalds and nobody wants to work there. I mean if you end up working at a place like Canadian Tire or McDonalds and they're like, "get out there," We're going to look and go: "Oh Lord. Wow"

The notion that it is the *nature* of the work that discourages youth from fully engaging in the workplace rather than something inherent about their age was a common topic. Linking comments from participants in all interviews, there is a catch-22 situation that can be pieced together. Youth are eager to apply themselves at jobs where they will encounter challenging work that they value as important. The more they value and enjoy the work, the better they will perform. However, the skills and experience that youth hold, such as community work, volunteering, extracurricular activities and/or entry-level work, are generally undervalued by employers:

I've done so many things in my past like networking with my community, trying to run an organization on campus. Those things are not easy and I think there's a lot of people in the workforce that are a lot older than me that have never had to do a challenging task.

When youth do not obtain the jobs they want, they tend to settle into jobs where they do not feel challenged, happy or valued. Consequently, they remain unengaged and eager to find different opportunities:

...But like I tell them “just keep trying, just keep trying.” But they still don’t get success. So they end up going to do things they don’t want to. And then they don’t want to stay.

Similar to the scenario described earlier where a Tim Horton’s shop did not allow any students, it seems that low expectations of youth, again, prevent youth from going where they want. The search for a job where one will be motivated to work hard, only to be met with rejection because youth aren’t trusted with this responsibility, and the subsequent resignation to perform poorly at a menial job was described as a vicious cycle. The solution to breaking this cycle might rest in the participants’ description of empowerment and its relationship to employment.

- **Empowerment, Employment and eYES**

Discussions of this catch-22 situation often bled into discussions about “empowerment.” Defining “empowerment” drew on concepts of self-confidence, self-worth, feeling needed and rewarded. The jobs participants described as menial, did not provide them with any of these empowering feelings. One could imagine that facing rejection and working in jobs where one is easily replaceable can be damaging to one’s sense of self. eYES was appreciated for providing a break in the otherwise ego-bruising search for good employment. As the following participant reports, this was one of the first activities he had done with YES where he felt satisfied with himself:

RESPONDENT: One of my first too. Where I’ve actually got to do something productive. Instead of just making my resume and email my resume to these dead end jobs where I don’t want to continue. I’m actually doing something where I will want to continue later on in my life.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of jobs are you talking about when you say “dead end”?

RESPONDENT: Like seasonal, temporary. Like wrapping gifts or shovelling snow.

INTERVIEWER: Like literally just for money?

RESPONDENT: Like literally, it needs to get done but you can’t make a living off of it.

Notice how the participant juxtaposes “productive” work with resume building and applying to jobs. Presumably, the participant would consider these activities productive or he would likely not continue to engage in them. However, the term “productive” seems to be used as a substitute for “valuable”, “respected”, “important” or even “enjoyable” It appears this was based on the participant’s description of dead end jobs which simply “need to get done” but require low levels of skill and don’t offer much rewards, personally, socially or monetarily.

Despite its minimal financial rewards, eYES was reported as a rewarding experience to many of the participants. Participants were adamant in reporting that enrolling in eYES reflected a larger desire on their behalf, of privileging the intrinsic rewards of work, personally or communally, over financial compensation:

I'm not looking to make mountains of money. I would like to feel confident that I can do my job properly and I don't want anything too easy. I want something that will challenge me...

...before this it was just "well okay fine, I guess I'll pack boxes if it pays over 12 bucks an hour." But not I can see that you can evolve past that.

Like do I want to say I won a lot of cases and I made a multi-million dollars [as a lawyer]? Or do I want to say I helped my community and changed things?

It is important to remember that the altruism that appears amongst participants reflects a particular group of youth – those who enjoy working with people, teaching and doing productive things for their community. However, based on the participants in eYES, it appeared that sacrificing the perks of money to feel “empowered” in one’s work, was well worth the trade.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of evaluating the impact of eYES was two-fold. Firstly, the information gathered through the evaluative research will be used towards improving future eYES programs. Secondly, data was collected and analyzed to advance our understanding of the relationship between intergenerational practice, empowerment and youth unemployment.

Limitations to the research process directed the focus of the project on youth and the impact the program had on them. Data was collected from seniors through semi-structured interviews and one focus group session. Though useful towards program evaluation, this information was considered insufficient to answer research questions.

The program’s impact on youth was measured through surveys and key informant interviews, with the latter of these two methods proving more successful in obtaining the necessary data. Youth were interviewed two at a time in their assigned teaching pairs.

The section below summarizes the research data into key-points that reflect the benefits, shortcomings and recommendations for eYES. This section is then followed by areas of concern that could be addressed through future research initiatives or programming.

Benefits of eYES for Youth Participants

- ***Career experience and soft skills***

With the majority of participants aiming for a career either in social work, computer engineering or teaching, eYES provided them with relevant experience and an impressive reference for their resumes. Teaching seniors allowed participants to explore the dynamics of helping others and provided them with an opportunity to exercise their soft skills. It is possible that the experience also provided youth with a framework off which they can assess their own skill levels more accurately. Having a better idea of their strengths and weaknesses will assist them in their path towards employment.

Participants emphasized that eYES was a useful exercise in patience and communication. Teaching seniors a whole new technological discourse was challenging in that it required youth to revisit their assumptions and adapt their language and teaching styles to suit the needs of their students.

- ***Feelings of empowerment***

Empowerment was characterized as a feeling of self-sufficiency, autonomy and independence. The feeling of empowerment was inextricably linked to feelings of self-confidence and self-worth. eYES was described as being successful in empowering both youth and seniors on a number of levels. For seniors, gaining the ability to cross the digital divide was viewed as empowering because it decreases isolation and connects them to an ever-growing online world. For youth, the act of teaching was described as empowering. As opposed to work at “dead-end” jobs where youth felt they were both easily replaceable and unimportant, teaching provided youth with a sense of being needed. Teaching places one in an authoritative position – the teacher is powerful by virtue of having the necessary knowledge. Students, on the other hand, are in a position of need – they rely on the teacher to gain the knowledge they seek. Rather than feeling expendable, eYES placed youth in a position where their knowledge and skills were greatly valued and needed. They were entrusted with the responsibility to help others, a challenge that increased their confidence and sense of accomplishment.

Empowerment was also described as an internalized form of power. Rather than gaining power through external factors (e.g.: money, verbal praise), empowerment was understood as the ability to give power to one’s self – a form of self-reliance. Some youth expressed that the renewal of self-worth and self-confidence achieved through eYES will empower them in the future. eYES was an experience that the youth could revisit as a way to reassure themselves that they are in fact capable of accomplishing challenging tasks and they have a lot to offer.

- ***Challenging stereotypes of seniors***

The intergenerational aspect of eYES revealed some of the stereotypes youth held around old age. While stereotypes were never derogatory or inflammatory, some negative imagery and assumptions surrounded the youth’s perceptions of seniors. The most frequent image drawn upon was that of the “dying” senior. This stereotype embodied notions of illness, dependency, lack of self-sufficiency and fragility. The seniors at eYES successfully challenged these stereotypes. The students were energetic, social and independent. Those with physical or mental disabilities also challenged the youth’s perceptions of disability and old age.

It should be noted that for the most part, youth participants regarded seniors respectfully and spoke of old age in a positive light. The life experience that comes with old age was understood to be valuable. However, it appeared that grandparents were often the only source of interaction with seniors. This was discouraging to many youth participants as many of them have lost their grandparents and have limited opportunity to build relationships with older people.

- ***Appreciation of “difference”***

Though many participants made reference to “working with others” as valuable experience for their desired career paths, some discussed this ability to work with others as something necessary for personal growth. Gaining exposure to multiple perspectives and learning how to interact with others different from the Self was valued as an enriching experience. This break

from day to day homogeneity and the appreciation of different perspectives is perhaps an overlooked benefit to the intergenerational aspect of eYES. The ability to *appreciate* different people, from different backgrounds, with different perspectives and perhaps even different values is necessary to maintain a level of equity in society – no doubt a vital issue in a multicultural city like Toronto. Nowhere in their responses did the youth speak of “tolerating” or “accepting” different perspectives. Rather, there was an undoubtedly sincere *appreciation* for difference and plurality. Though the difference encountered in eYES was only that of age, one can hope that this appreciation might be carried across other forms of difference like race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation and ability.

- ***Stipends for “volunteer work”***

Participants mentioned that volunteer experience tends to provide them with more challenging tasks and an opportunity to build their capacity. However, their economic positions do not always allow them the luxury of working for free. The stipends and paid travel expenses provided by YES were seen as a great way to gain the valuable experience that comes with volunteering but without the financial loss. Participants recommended that more volunteer programs should follow this model.

Shortcomings and Recommendations

- ***Program length***

Both senior and youth participants suggested that the program run for a longer period of time. Four weeks of classes was not seen as sufficient for the amount of material to get through. Discussions at the graduating ceremony revealed that the seniors were likely unable to perform email and networking-related tasks online without the help of a teacher.

- ***Lack of opportunity to foster intergenerational relationship***

The desire to connect with the seniors on a more personal level was apparent amongst most youth participants. They held the experience and knowledge seniors could offer them in high regard and anticipated accessing this knowledge. They seemed slightly disappointed that there was no formal opportunity in the program to form personal connections with the seniors.

The seniors, however, were primarily concerned with learning how to use the computer. Though they provided very positive feedback about the youth participants, they did not seem to place as much importance on the intergenerational aspect of eYES. Thus, if eYES is to incorporate a stronger focus on forming intergenerational relationships, it is imperative that this is made transparent to senior students as it will require more commitment on their part.

- ***“Disability-friendly” computers***

Several youth participants suggested that the seniors would be able to use the computers with much more ease if certain accommodations were put in place. Some examples given are larger or magnified monitors (available for the visually impaired), sound on the computers (Windows has a narration option for the visually impaired), larger keyboards and mouse.

- ***Stronger focus on soft-skills training***

Though not directly cited as a recommendation by participants, results from the self-assessment survey indicated a need to better prepare youth for the soft skills they require for teaching

seniors. Exercising their soft-skills before the teaching activities start will help minimize the adjustment period youth described when they first started teaching. Suggestions for soft-skills training could include role-playing and/or mock-teaching activities.

AREAS OF CONCERN

- ***Cycle of unemployment for youth.***

Analysis of the interview data attempted to decipher a relationship between empowerment and unemployment. Findings pointed to an unfortunate cycle of unemployment specific to youth or those new to the work force. Youth are motivated to work in an environment where they would feel challenged and empowered – the latter of these terms denoting the sense that one is valued and integral to the work being done. However, given their age, youth tend to have minimal formal work experience and any volunteer or extra-curricular experience they possess seems to be undervalued by potential employers. As a result, youth do not obtain the jobs they deem as empowering and challenging and resort to “dead-end” jobs where they feel expendable and unmotivated. When a job is found to be unimportant or unchallenging, youth employees may disengage from the work and appear to be “lazy” or unable to do a serious job.

This catch-22 situation is difficult to circumvent for youth, as entry-level positions are oftentimes required to reach more rewarding positions. However, this report recommends that further research be done on attitudes and behaviour in “dead-end” jobs. Such research could investigate what types of workplace practices and policies could be implemented into entry-level jobs to make them more engaging and empowering.

- ***Lack of structured opportunities for youth and seniors to interact***

Community forums and services are generally age-segregated and therefore give limited opportunity for members of different generations to interact. Interview data indicated that if youth did not hold close ties with seniors in their own families, there was very little chance of interacting with this age group. Programming and funding more intergenerational activities or safe spaces where two generations can interact would prove to be most useful to building communities and advancing social cohesion.

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