

"Say Word" Journalism Program Review

"Say Word," part of the VIP multi-media program, was funded in 2008 by the Youth Challenge Fund. It is a 3-year program created in collaboration with Ryerson University's School of Journalism. Youth from Scarborough's priority neighbourhoods who are interested in pursuing a career in journalism receive multimedia training in a number of areas – e.g. radio broadcasting, photo journalism, TV broadcasting, writing skills, poetry, fashion editorials, print journalism, magazine creation, interviewing skills, etc.

A variety of programming happens on 4 different days at different points in the day and evening. The program also serves a core group of 12 youth in an intensive Saturday stream, as well as more young people during weekday evening programming. The Journalism program also runs programming for pre-existing groups including Breaking the Cycle, the Scarborough site of the Expelled Students Program, as well as 2 EMYS Day Treatment groups.

Program Successes

The Journalism program has successfully engaged over 70 young people since its beginning in August 2008. Young people were outreached to through the Youth Opportunities Youth Outreach Workers, other service providers, youth justice organizations including Operation Springboard and African Canadian Legal Clinic.

Program staff have successfully outreached to all high schools in priority neighbourhoods in Scarborough, Hoodlinc, Jewil Project and Flemo City Media which are also Youth Challenge Fund funded initiatives in an attempt to create more interest in the program and increase youth participants. It should be noted that there has been a great deal of interest in the program by the youth as well as many service providers in the priority neighbourhoods. This speaks to some successes of the outreach strategy and program components.

All of the programs have been running extremely well, successfully engaging youth that have not been engaged through more traditional means. For example, youth were recruited youth that have been in conflict with the law as well as those considered "at-risk" of being in conflict with the law. Our Youth Outreach Workers have also made several referrals to the program, identifying many youth that also have not historically accessed programs and services.

Another important success to note is the formation of new partnerships. One partnership we have forged for this program is with Breaking the Cycle, the only gang exit program in Scarborough. We have been working directly with this organization, offering the program to a full group of youth who are engaged. They began working on a documentary and will begin work on a yearbook-style publication that will document their experiences breaking cycles in their own life when they return to programming later this month.

Another partnership of note is with the Toronto District School Board. We have recruited many youth from TDSB's Day Treatment and Expelled Students Programs. Bringing these students into the program has been an important success given that many of these students are considered "high risk." Staff have also worked successfully with the TDSB to offer this program as a credit course for these students, which will

ultimately help them in re-integrating back into the school system and for future employment opportunities. This has been an important success of the program and an excellent vehicle for supporting youth in breaking down barriers.

Further, Agincourt Community Services Association requested program staff and youth to conduct various training modules to youth groups within the Chester Le and Dorset Park communities. The focus of these trainings was to learn video documentary skills to create a film that told the experiences of young women in these communities, particularly in terms of being racialized.

The assembly of the Project Advisory Committee has been a great success. The Committee is comprised of staff from Ryerson's Journalism Department, Hoodlinc, Breaking the Cycle, volunteers, Youth Outreach Worker staff as well as youth which makes up a 51% majority.

In terms of programming, a very well received workshop at Ryerson took place earlier in the Fall, allowing many young people to experience university life for the first time. The workshop focused on creating photo/audio slideshows of the culture of downtown Toronto, and for many youth, this was their first venture to the city core. Other programming highlights include taking participants on tour of the Toronto Star and CBC newsrooms and hosting an interactive workshop at EMYS in partnership with staff from Urbanology Magazine.

Youth from the project also took leadership roles in terms of reporting on the Younited Scarborough events, located in the priority neighbourhoods in Scarborough. The youth took photographs, interviewed event organizers, city councilors, and various funders and stakeholders involved in the events. This has been an excellent opportunity for youth to begin harnessing their journalism skills they have been gaining through the project.

Program Challenges

One of the challenges that arose related to the field trip to Ryerson University as most of the participants had not previously been exposed to University life. While one of the secondary goals of this trip was to provide them with a glimpse of what University life is like while learning about the culture of downtown Toronto, this visit highlighted the barriers a few of the youth face in their daily lives. Some noted the financial restraints that will make it difficult for them to attend a University; however, this also provided an opportunity for Staff to support these young people and provide them with information about opportunities to support their education and other future possibilities for success in the field.

Another challenge to note was our unsuccessful attempt to partner with a multi-media organization. Originally, our application noted we would work with Regent Park Focus but they have been unresponsive in our many attempts to contact them. At the advice of YCF staff, we also approached the Jewil Project. Staff met with the Jewil Project and discussed possibilities to partner and collaborate. However, we were informed that they are not looking to partner with other organizations. In order to rectify this challenge, staff have been working to forge partnerships and have had productive meetings with Flemo City Media as a possible partner.

Client Statistics

The Say Word Journalism program has a very specific mandate in terms of young people that can be participants of the program. Youth eligible for the program must live in a priority neighbourhood within the East Quadrant of the City, criminalized and racialized youth whom are not usually representative of creators of journalistic media are sought to help young people consider journalism as a career.

The age range for youth participants is 16-21 years of age, with the majority of registered participants being 16-19 years old. There is a fairly equal gender balance with 16 registered male participants and 12 registered female participants. The community groups who receive programming from Say Word Staff are not reflected in the statistics but also comprise of an equal gender balance.

The core Say Word groups (Saturday and evening) are engaged in programming over a 36 week period. Throughout these nine months various aspects of journalism are explored. Most of the community groups who receive programming from Say Word Staff work within 12 to 16 week modules.

Referral sources include the Youth Opportunities Strategy Youth Outreach Workers, Youth Justice, community service providers, grassroots community partners and youth who are already engaged in the program.

Exit plans for the youth engaged in the program are being worked on by a sub-committee within the Advisory Committee, led by one of the Say Word Staff. These exit plans include assisting youth with applying to college or university, helping re-integrate them with the high school system, assisting with finding employment, internship or volunteer opportunities, setting up mentorship opportunities, and after completing the one-week Ryerson camp, two graduates of the program will be hired as Year Two youth hire to join the staff team.

Aggregate Data

Program participants have been involved in the CIMM evaluation project which is part of the United Way program evaluation across the Province in an attempt to measure common outcomes in other UW funded programs. All youth have completed pre-surveys and post data is being collected for which the analysis is currently being done by our external evaluator.

Future Directions

Seven workshops have been scheduled at Ryerson University for the remainder of Year One of Say Word. These include workshops centered on Magazine Critique, Writing a Profile, TV Broadcasting, Live Radio, Creating Photo/ Audio Slideshows and a panel discussion on Diversity in the Media. Youth engaged in the program will travel to Ryerson on various Saturdays during March Break over the months of February to May to engage in these workshops.

From June 26 - 30, 2009 program youth will attend a one-week summer camp at Ryerson University, which will provide intensive journalism training as well as exposure to living the university life. Throughout this week the youth will work on journalism projects with faculty and senior students from Ryerson as well as have opportunities to showcase their work and network with industry professionals.

Looking ahead to Year Two, program staff will be intensifying the program's relationship with Youth Justice, outreaching into youth custody facilities and engaging them in the program.