

Through the Eyes of Youth: Experiences at the Crissy Field Center – Inspiring Young Emerging Leaders & Urban Trailblazers



I-YEL interns become role models for the UTB kids and empower them through skill building, sharing knowledge and experiences, and mentoring.

The Objective: *Explore two youth programs and identify both program impacts and leadership development outcomes.*

Inspiring Young Emerging Leaders (I-YEL) and the Urban Trailblazers (UTB) are two separate, ongoing programs that have been in existence since 2001 and 2003, respectively. Among the various staff interests and needs was to determine if, and how, youth experience any attitude and/or behavioral changes about and towards the environment as a result of their participation. Level of connection and transference to their home, school and/or community was also examined. Understanding how the program affects youth academics in school, as well as future career choices, were supplemental components of this study.

The Project: *Use focus groups to gather information about middle school participants in the summer outdoor and environmental youth program as well as high school students involved in an experiential leadership development program at the Center.*

Data were collected during a two Phase process. During the summer of 2006, four focus group interviews were conducted with 43 middle-school age girls and boys in the UTB program, teenagers participating in I-YEL, and a convenience sample of I-YEL Alumni. The youth interviewed came from diverse racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and ranged in age from 11 to 22 years old. Phase II occurred during that fall and consisted of a program-related document review and analysis of a sample of materials and resources (both current and previous years).

The Results: *There were distinct findings across groups due to developmental differences; however, overall, youth involved in these two (separate) programs enhanced their understanding of environmental issues, feel safe at the Center, consider their peers a tight community and “like a family”.*

“Because of my involvement in the program, I don’t just act or behave differently, I live differently. And more appropriately, I live better than I used to.” Ten common themes emerged across all focus groups. Examples:

Connection: The CFC is a safe place to go; powerful and unique. **Effect:** The program is a springboard to increasing self-confidence and clear transference to other aspects of life (e.g., school, family, peer relations). **Personal/Social Growth:** Deep enjoyment of learning new skills and elevated consciousness about abilities and relationships. **Contribution to Environment:** Greater comprehension of environmental impacts, knowledge gained about natural resource issues, experience with resource protection, and desire to educate others about their learning. **Healthy lifestyles:** Increased awareness of proper nutrition habits; love of outdoor trips as ‘incredibly fun’ and physically invigorating; spiritual/emotional connection to nature.



Youth learn that positive social skills affect their involvement in the program and how this carries over into their community, beyond the Center.

This summary is based on a General Technical Report submitted to the Crissy Field Center and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. For more information on the Crissy Field Center Youth Programs, visit: <http://www.crissyfield.org>. Questions about this summary should be addressed to Dr. Nina S. Roberts, San Francisco State University at nroberts@sfsu.edu