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**EMERGING DIVERSITY INTEGRATION: LATINO YOUTH
ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THEIR DESIRED TO PURSUIT EDUCATIONAL
GOALS IN THE UNITED STATES**

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EMERGING DIVERSITY INTEGRATION: LATINO YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THEIR DESIRED TO PURSUIT EDUCATIONAL GOALS IN THE UNITED STATES¹

ABSTRACT

The Youth² nonprofit organization launched the My-Venture initiative in conjunction with a Foundation in an effort to transform the lives of Latino youth by improving their interest in education, self confidence, life skills, community engagement, and leadership skills. The Youth surpassed its goal of 50 Venture Teams by successfully launching 82 teams across the United States through the My-Venture initiative. From the total pool, 50 teams were selected and identified as official competition winners. They were awarded start-up grants of up to \$1,000 to launch their Ventures to help young Latinos stay in school and prepare for college and beyond. In order to better understand the My-Venture participants' experiences making change, The Youth analyzed the initial Progress Reports of 30% of teams three months after their initial launch. The evaluation results are arranged to respond directly to four research questions: 1) Impact on Educational Goals 2) Impact on Life Skills and Engagement 3) Impact on Communities Served. 4) Programmatic Knowledge. Results indicate that the work of Venture Teams has an impact to both the Latino communities that were the focus of the Ventures as well as the community at large. Survey participants also strongly conveyed that the activities of the young people involved in the Ventures have positively affected the perception of Latino youth in their communities in addition to positively impacting the education of Latino students. Because of the success of the My-Venture initiative in furthering educational goals and achievement indicated by evaluation results, it is recommended that The Youth replicate the model and approach to reach more Latino youth and youth from other vulnerable populations around the country.

Keywords: Latino, youth, social entrepreneurship, venture

INTRODUCTION

The progression of young people into the labor market remains a problematic area for policy makers. Most of us will agree that education is the answer to most, if not all, the questions raised by the global knowledge based economy. In the United States, an emerging youth group "Latinos"

The United States grew steadily more diverse last year, with Latinos holding on to their rank as the nation's largest and fastest-growing minority group, a trend with far-reaching implications for American politics and immigration policies. Newly released figures from the U.S. Census Bureau show that the nation's Latino population grew by 1.4 million in 2007 to reach 45.5 million people, or 15.1% of the total U.S. population of 301.6 million (*Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 2008). Blacks ranked as the second-largest minority group, at 40.7 million.

By 2020, about one in three Americans will come from a minority background (Ingram, 2002). We need to target this population with strategies that will keep the Hispanic

¹ Initial draft was awarded the best case study in Eight International Business and Economic Conference (IBEC) in Udaipur, India, 2009

² Name changed to The Youth to protect organization identity.

student in school, to be able to graduate, to attend post-secondary universities, and to pursue a career. In 2000, approximately 1.56 million U.S. residents ages 16 to 19 had not graduated nor were enrolled in school. Of the total, nearly 34 percent were Hispanic.

The Youth is based on the simple underlying and core insight that if an individual is powerful as a young person, they are highly likely to be powerful as adults. To be powerful – in fact, to be a full citizen in a world characterized increasingly by change – one must be a changemaker. The Youth invests in young people to become changemakers by inspiring and guiding them as they create their own sustainable, community-benefiting Ventures. In starting a Venture, young people learn important skills of leadership, entrepreneurship, teamwork, and empathy, as well as other practical skills, as they form teams and run Ventures together.

The Youth, supported by a Foundation, launched *My-Venture* (<http://xxx>) as a collaborative effort with other organizations. The goal of this initiative was to empower Latino youth to take action on education, and to inspire and support Latino teams in creating their own sustainable social ventures to prepare for productive and engaged futures. The goal of *My-Venture* was not only to help young Latinos to take initiative and address challenges they face in their schools and communities, but also to transform the lives of these youth by improving their interest in education, self confidence, life skills, community engagement, and leadership skills.

The Youth surpassed its goal of 50 Venture Teams by successfully launching 82 teams across the United States through the *My-Venture* initiative. From the total pool, 50 teams were selected and identified as official competition winners. They were awarded start-up grants of up to \$1,000 to launch their Ventures to help young Latinos stay in school and prepare for college and beyond. Additionally, five finalist teams were selected to receive a \$5,000 scholarship.

In order to better understand the *My-Venture* participants' experiences making change, The Youth analyzed the initial Progress Reports of 30% of teams three months after their initial launch. Even though preliminary results were positive, additional research was needed to substantiate these findings, further measure the impact of the program on the individual, team, and community, and advance institutional knowledge on working with Latino youth.

As The Youth expands in the U.S. and increases outreach to Latino youth, there is a desire to increase our knowledge of the needs of this major minority in order to better improve current services and outreach strategies. This information will also be helpful as we seek to work with other vulnerable populations. Increasingly, The Youth sees value in linking our work to educational goals. Therefore, the evaluation results will provide needed information with regard to how to increase outcomes in the area of youth's educational goals, both formal and informal, and including lifelong learning.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Comisión Económica para Latino América y El Caribe de las Naciones Unidas (CEPAL) and la Organización Iberoamericana de Juventud (OIJ) (2004) reported that economic pressures have youth combine work with higher education, and even though this practice could ease youth into the labor force in the future, it has detrimental consequences in academic performance. The report states that education is still

considered a key factor to improve the employment prospects for youth in Latin America; however, in times of economic crisis, educational attainment does not guarantee successful insertion in the labor force, there is an increase in the last decade of “academic unemployment” leaving youth with high levels of education working in low productivity sectors.

More groups of youth improved their insertion in the labor force when they incremented their work experience in hard skills (procedural and organizational knowledge) as well as soft skills (attitudes and dispositions). However, not all youth benefit from this process; many young women or youth with very low educational levels do not reap the benefits of this competitive advantage (CEPAL & OIJ, 2004). The O’Connor and Ramos (2006) study explored how education and development in the skills of innovation, foresight and entrepreneurship relate to the empowerment of young people in respect to creating new ventures. Three groups of youngsters aged 13-18 were evaluated with mixed-methodology nine months after their participation in an entrepreneurship program. Results indicated that innovation and enterprise education empowered young people in a dynamic way; it was evidenced more than a skill level but a sense of accomplishment that translates to confidence and also a context that leads to initiative and responsibility taking. The study suggested that a form of social empowerment or agency may be one prerequisite to entrepreneurship. The empowerment stage was where students found sources of inspiration, innovation and renewal that gave them a sense of hope, motivation and direction. Students were socially empowered to find new relationships, networks, practices, behaviors and projects that address their entrepreneurial interests.

Research shows that attitudes can change across time and across situations through interactive processes with the environment. Attitude can be considered a dynamic interactional way that an individual relates to the object, changing from situation to situation (Ajzen, 2001; Chaiken & Stangor, 1987). As entrepreneurial attitudes are open to modification, they may be influenced by educators and practitioners. Youth entrepreneurship programs in the Latin American region can benefit from targeting thoughts, feelings and behavioral intentions to produce change towards a more positive entrepreneurial attitude. Llisterri, Kantis, Angelelli, and Tejerina (2006) found that young entrepreneurs get their first work experience from their entrepreneurial initiatives. For most, it is their only way to get qualified for future jobs. The field of youth entrepreneurship education will benefit with the results from this study as it enhances the impact of entrepreneurship as a tool for youth and workforce development. The results will also expand the knowledge about the differences between social and business entrepreneurial activities for youth and provide further insight for more intentional educational interventions.

EVALUATION GOALS

The evaluation was designed to answer four primary research questions:

1. How does participation in *My Venture* impact the individual lead Venturer and team members in pursuing educational goals, with a specific focus on high school and college?

2. How does participation in *My-Venture* impact the individual lead Venturer and team members in life skills development and youth engagement in the high school/college environment?
3. To what degree do Venture Teams impact the communities they serve?
4. What can The Youth add to its programmatic knowledge in the area of launch and post-launch support for vulnerable youth, specifically Latino youth?

METHODOLOGY

Two types of instruments and methods were used to answer the research questions described above according to the type of data gathered. An online impact survey instrument was developed for quantitative data, and a focus group interview protocol was developed for qualitative data; both instruments were tested for reliability.

Quantitative Analysis

Attempts were made to contact all 164 *My-Venture* participants (lead Venturers and team members). Surveys were completed online and over the phone by 79 past and present lead Venturers and team members for a response rate of 48 percent:

- 67.1% of participants were lead Venturers.
- 32.9% of participants were team members.

All survey participants were entered into a random drawing of ten, \$50 cash incentives for their Venture.

The data gathered was conducted over a two month period. The data has a Confidence Interval of 95, a maximum Margin of Error of +/- 3% for paired sample tests, and all items were statistically significant $p < 0.05$. The internal consistency reliability is 80%, Cronbach's Alpha (.80) for all items *Before* and 91%, Cronbach's Alpha (.91) for all items *After*. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Qualitative Analysis

In total, The Youth conducted nine focus groups, gathering insight from 47 Lead Venturers, Team members, and Allies. Five on-site focus groups of four to eight participants were conducted in Washington, DC and New York, in addition to several supplemental Ally interviews in New York. Four groups were comprised of Lead Venturers and Team members and one group was comprised of Allies.

Additionally, four conference call focus groups were conducted to gather input from *My-Venture* participants living throughout the United States. Two groups were comprised of Lead Venturers and Team members and two groups were comprised of Allies.

All focus group participants, including Allies, were offered \$50 to support their Venture as an incentive for participation. Each group lasted approximately 90 minutes.

The data collected from survey open questions and focus groups was analyzed using thematic and trend analysis.

RESULTS

The evaluation results are arranged to respond directly to the four research questions:

1. How does participation in *My-Venture* impact the individual lead Venturer and team members in pursuing educational goals, with a specific focus on high school and college?

Impact of My-Venture on Pursuit of Educational Goals

The evaluation sought to capture the impact of involvement in the *My-Venture* initiative on participants' pursuit of educational goals by measuring changes in attitude after six months of work in a Venture in four capacities: awareness, motivation, preparedness, and action. Survey results indicate significant increases in participant agreement in all indicators, particularly in motivation to pursue education goals, and most youth expressed that the The Youth experience impacted their interest and motivation in pursuing higher education.

Changes in the awareness of the benefits of graduating and pursuing educational goals

The change in the mean difference in the *awareness* variable of the benefits of graduating before and after participation in the *My-Venture* program is statistically significant, $p=.000 < 0.05$.

Before launching or participating in a Venture, 62% of youth reported to have a clear vision for their career path, while 86% of youth reported having a clear vision for their career path after six months working with a Venture.

| | Disagreement (%) (1 or 2 on 1-5 scale) | | Agreement (%) (4 or 5 on 1-5 scale) | |
|---|---|-------|--|-------|
| | Before | After | Before | After |
| I believe that there are benefits to graduating | 5.1 | 1.3 | 93.7 | 96.2 |
| I am likely to finish High School or College | 3.8 | 2.6 | 91.2 | 97.5 |
| I have a clear vision for my career path | 13.9 | 6.3 | 62.0 | 86.0 |

Changes in motivation to pursue educational goals

The change in the mean difference in the *motivation* variable to pursue educational goals is statistically significant, $p=.000 < 0.05$. Before launching or participating in a Venture, 62% of youth reported that they often talked about their educational goals with teachers, professors or counselors, while 96% of youth agreed with this statement after six months working in a Venture.

| Motivation related items | Disagreement (%) (1 or 2 on 1-5 scale) | | Agreement (%) (4 or 5 on 1-5 scale) | |
|---|---|-------|--|-------|
| | Before | After | Before | After |
| I am motivated to pursue my educational goals | 5.1 | 1.3 | 87.3 | 96.2 |
| I want to attend college, technical programs or graduate school | 1.3 | 1.3 | 89.9 | 97.5 |
| I often talk about my educational goals with friends and family | 12.6 | 3.8 | 67.1 | 88.6 |
| I often talk about my educational goals with teachers, professors or counselors | 12.6 | 1.3 | 62.0 | 96.2 |
| | | | | |

Changes in preparedness and skills for pursuing educational goals

The change in the mean difference in the *preparedness* variable to pursue educational goals is statistically significant. Before launching or participating in a Venture, 73.4% of youth reported feeling prepared to attend college or begin a career, while 92.5% of youth agreed with this statement after six months working in a Venture, illustrating a 19.1% increase in feelings of preparedness.

| | Disagreement (%) (1 or 2 on 1-5 scale) | | Agreement (%) (4 or 5 on 1-5 scale) | |
|--|---|-------|--|-------|
| | Before | After | Before | After |
| I feel prepared and ready to attend college / begin a career | 7.6 | 2.6 | 73.4 | 92.5 |

Changes in action taken regarding pursuit of educational goals

The change in the mean difference in the *action* variable to pursue educational goals is statistically significant.

| Action | Disagreement (%) (1 or 2 on 1-5 scale) | | Agreement (%) (4 or 5 on 1-5 scale) | |
|---------------------------------|---|-------|--|-------|
| | Before | After | Before | After |
| I am working towards graduation | 2.6 | 1.3 | 92.4 | 98.7 |

Affect of The Youth in pursuing higher education

A strong majority of youth surveyed report (4 or 5 on 1-5 scale) that the The Youth experience has affected their attitudes towards higher education:

- 81% report that The Youth experience has affected their *interest* in pursuing higher education;
- 88.6% report that The Youth experience has affected the *motivation* of participants and/or team members to pursue higher education; and
- 88.6% report that The Youth experience has affected the *preparedness* of participants and/or team members to pursue higher education.

| | SD | D | Slightly Agree | A | SA (%) |
|---|-----|-----|----------------|------|--------|
| The Youth experience has affected my interest in pursuing higher education | 7.6 | 3.8 | 7.6 | 35.4 | 45.6 |
| The Youth experience has affected the motivation of participants and/or team members to pursue higher education | 1.3 | 0.0 | 10.1 | 51.9 | 36.7 |
| The Youth experience has affected the preparedness of participants and/or team members to pursue higher education | 1.3 | 0.0 | 10.1 | 51.9 | 36.7 |

While a few youth are unsure what their next steps will be, the majority of youth surveyed expressed clear future ambitions and outline concrete steps they are taking to reach those goals.

Most high school participants plan to graduate from high school, with many reporting plans to apply to and attend college, and some reporting plans to continue working to help other Latinos finish high school. A few participants also report interest in attending technical or vocational schools to prepare for careers such as automotive technician, massage therapist, and television production.

"I plan to be the first one to finish high school in my house. I want to be successful and do not want to work like my parents, three jobs for little money. No matter what I will graduate....I also want to get a scholarship to go to College."

-Male Venturer from New York

Most college participants are more focused on their immediate graduation plans as a road map to a successful career in fields as varied as photojournalism, neurology, criminal justice, education, and nursing. Some of these participants expressed using internships and studying abroad as strategies to solidify their career plans or open their horizons to new possibilities. Choices of current and future higher education vary among participants and include community, private, and public colleges. Several youth report aspirations to pursue graduate and PhD studies in the fields of law, business, physics, and medicine.

"The Venture has done a lot for the students at our college. We have students who look like them and are going on to graduate, going on to 4-year degree, getting all kinds of degrees. Some of them had dropped out and then see an old classmate, find out about financial aid programs, tell them it is going to be okay and try to help them solve the problem."

-Female Ally from Oklahoma

Some participants expressed an interest in pursuing a career in education after working with the field in various capacities through a Venture project. These young people state interest in educational administration, direct education, working with Teach for America, and counseling Hispanic youth to attend college. One focus group participant outlined specifically how the Youth experience through the *My-Venture* initiative impacted her feelings towards pursuing a career in education:

“Education is second nature to me, and now through Youth I felt like the whole Venture was planning a curriculum. I discovered that my Venture’s essence was teaching. I am an English major, I am studying film, and now I want to use videography to teach kids about Latino folktales.”

-Female Venturer from Virginia

Similarly, after participating in a Venture and enjoying working with the community, several youth have decided to integrate community outreach work into their future career plans. Interests in this area include: immigration law, non-profit graphic design, public health, and continuing to work in the Latino community.

“My daughter said she wanted to teach English always, but now she says she also wants to be in public relations to communicate out to the community.”

-Female Ally from Texas

5.2. Impact of My-Venture on Life Skills Development and Engagement in Educational Environments

Survey results and focus group discussions confirm that youth who participated in the *My-Venture* initiative report an increase in knowledge of critical life skills and an increase in engagement in education and educational environments.

Life Skills

Survey results show an increase in life skills developed by youth who participated in the *My-Venture* initiative. When asked to rate the strength of particular life skills after six months of work with a Venture, survey results display increases of knowledge in all fields compared to responses about knowledge before the start of a Venture. Specifically, youth report high levels of knowledge (4 or 5 on 1-5 scale) in life skills after working in a Venture as follows:

- 97.4% in being a successful member of a team;
- 96.2% in successfully leading a team;
- 91.1% in setting and achieving goals;
- 91.1% in the field of planning;
- 87.4% in evaluating work;
- 86.1% in the field of budgeting;
- 82.3% in getting assistance and finding mentors; and

- 75.9% in organizing volunteers.

Changes in participants' life skills

| Life Skills (%) | | No knowledge of | Limited knowledge of | Some knowledge of | Knowledgeable | Highly knowledgeable |
|-----------------------------|--------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Being part of a Team | Before | 1.3 | 5.1 | 22.8 | 54.4 | 16.5 |
| | After | 0.0 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 31.6 | 65.8 |
| Leading a Team | Before | 6.3 | 11.4 | 34.2 | 34.2 | 13.9 |
| | After | 0.0 | 1.3 | 2.5 | 26.6 | 69.6 |
| Setting and Achieving Goals | Before | 2.5 | 15.2 | 25.3 | 32.9 | 24.1 |
| | After | 0.0 | 0.0 | 8.9 | 32.9 | 58.2 |
| Planning | Before | 5.1 | 11.4 | 40.5 | 35.4 | 7.6 |
| | After | 0.0 | 0.0 | 8.9 | 43.0 | 48.1 |
| Evaluating work Budgeting | Before | 6.3 | 12.7 | 32.9 | 38.0 | 10.1 |
| | After | 0.0 | 2.5 | 10.1 | 49.4 | 38.0 |
| | Before | 12.7 | 27.8 | 40.5 | 19.0 | 0.0 |
| | After | 0.0 | 1.3 | 12.7 | 63.3 | 22.8 |
| Getting assistance | Before | 10.1 | 25.3 | 43.0 | 15.2 | 6.3 |
| | After | 0.0 | 2.5 | 15.2 | 51.9 | 30.4 |
| Finding mentors | Before | 13.9 | 25.3 | 40.5 | 12.7 | 7.6 |
| | After | 1.3 | 3.8 | 19.0 | 43.0 | 32.9 |

Most youth referred to their gain in life skills as one of the most rewarding parts of the *My-Venture* experience.

"I learned that to be the leader was not to be the boss but to have what it takes to keep us all focused and happy working for the community."

-Male Venturer from California

"We did not know how to act as a team in the beginning, we were all doing the same thing or we would get into arguments very quickly. We had to learn how to work together if we wanted the project to succeed."

-Male Venturer from New York

"To have done the whole project by ourselves gave us skills that we will never forget and that we can apply in school and at work... I never saw myself doing a budget or planning a schedule for all mentor volunteers and at the same time solving problems with the kids!"

-Female Venturer from New York

One focus group participant cited increased knowledge in fundraising, a life skill not captured in the survey:

"The biggest accomplishment for us was the benefit. We raised \$15,000 at the event, about \$5,000 more than we expected. We are starting our college tours for a large

Latino program, and the students only have to pay \$50 for the program when they would normally pay \$300.”

-Female Venturer from New York

Educational Engagement

Youth surveyed also report increases in engagement in school, in both high school and college environments. Educational engagement was gauged by involvement in school work, extra-curricular activities, and leadership in extra-curricular activities.

| | Disagreement (%) (1 or 2 on 1-5 scale) | | Agreement (%) (4 or 5 on 1-5 scale) | |
|--|---|-------|--|-------|
| | Before | After | Before | After |
| I am engaged in my school work | 5.0 | 2.5 | 77.2 | 95.0 |
| I am engaged in activities at my school /college | 6.3 | 1.3 | 70.8 | 91.1 |
| I have taken the lead in school / college activities | 22.8 | 2.5 | 48.1 | 87.3 |

Focus group participants had the opportunity to elaborate on specific ways in which their engagement, including new insights in educational attainment and career paths, has increased:

“I just realized how my grades have gone up greatly... with more responsibility and focus I am able to get better grades in school. Now when I look for jobs or colleges, people really look for leadership, and that is what [Youth] has given me.”

-Female Venturer from Virginia

“Girls are more concerned about community issues and what’s happening around them. They are more responsible and aware. They have a drive and a belief that they can change. They are participating much more in school because they have the power to affect other people’s lives and improve the community.”

-Female Ally from Texas

“My perspective on the actual education has changed. Before, I saw it as a job, something to do when I was older... now I see the actual reason for getting my education.”

-Female Venturer from Georgia

Youth in the focus groups brought up other ways in which their educational engagement has increased as a result of their participation in the *My-Venture* initiative. One Venturer mentioned how seriously he takes his education now, while another mentioned being more recognized by professors and advisors around campus as a result of his Venture work. Several Venturers discussed how their experiences helped refocus or reshape their educational goals and career paths towards citizen-sector work, or being proud to assert that they were the first college graduates in their families.

3. Impact of My-Venture Venture Teams on Communities Served

The survey and focus group results indicate that the work of Venture Teams has impacted both the Latino communities that were the focus of the Ventures as well as the community at large. Survey participants also convey that the activities of the young people involved in the Ventures have positively impacted the perception of Latino youth within their communities.

Estimated number of volunteers and estimated number of people benefited

Most youth report an estimated number of up to 10 volunteers involved in their Venture in some capacity; most youth also report up to 49 people directly benefiting from the activities and services of their Venture.

| Estimated Number of Volunteers | Valid Percent (%) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Less than 10 | 45.6 |
| 10-19 | 30.4 |
| 20-49 | 19.0 |
| 50-99 | 3.8 |
| 100 or more | 1.3 |

| Number of People Benefited | Valid Percent (%) |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Less than 10 | 17.7 |
| 10-49 | 48.1 |
| 50-99 | 13.9 |
| 100-499 | 17.7 |
| 1000+ | 2.5 |

Impact in the Latino community

Youth report impact in the Latino community in the areas of educational feasibility, awareness of resources available, educational advocacy, parental involvement, academic responsibility, expectations of Latino youth, youth motivation and behavior, volunteerism and community engagement, and issue awareness.

Some youth report that their Ventures have helped Latino youth become more familiar with resources available and steps to be taken toward improving their education. They report that the community is realizing that there are opportunities available for Latino students and the Latino community as a whole to succeed. Specifically, many participants report an increase in community knowledge around access to educational opportunities such as scholarships and other resources for low-income Latinos and other minority students without funds for college. These youth report that the communities they serve now have the information necessary to make informed decisions.

A few youth report community impact in educational advocacy. After youth served become aware of the lack of access to higher education in some states as a result of Venture activities, they start to be motivated to actively participate in political

campaigns that advocate for rights to education for Latinos, especially for illegal immigrants.

“My kids were very concerned about how to bring real opportunities for illegal immigrant youth. They felt with no answers when undocumented friends asked them for advice; they looked into resources and saw that there were ways to go through the system and get an education even if you are not legal. They became very active in the Dream Act and are looking for ways to voice their opinions.”

-Female Ally from Virginia

One of the major challenges some participants report in motivating Latino youth to finish high school and further their education is parental support. Through the work of the Ventures, several youth report that Latino parents are now more aware of the benefits of higher education and ways in which their children can directly impact their income if they finish high school and obtain higher degrees. Several participants report earning the trust of parents and succeeding in getting them motivated about their children's educational possibilities. A few participants also report seeing communities and friendships created between parents and other family members, expanding the dialogue and creating a culture where it is no longer acceptable for kids to drop out of high school.

“After working with my group of girls I have realized that many of them do not apply for schools because they know their parents would not let them go to any college where they have to leave their homes. Other parents are not educated and want their children to follow their steps at work and do not see any future in getting a degree...that is when I knew I had to start with the parents...”

-Female Venturer from Virginia

“The impact has been that people who the girls have talked to are starting to change their minds about Latinos. People were amazed to see that 10 Latino girls were able to raise the money and go beyond the Rio Grande Valley. Parents need to let go and let the kids see what is out there and trust that they will come back. The parents were really excited, and said ‘I am so proud of you that you went out there. Maybe one day my daughter will go and get out there too. I am not afraid anymore.’ It is important for people to see that our kids are not any different; they can do things, too. Things are really changing.”

-Female Ally from Texas

Some youth report that most of the team members of the Ventures gained visibility in the school, and with the attention came the responsibility to do better academically. As awareness surrounding higher education increased, so did the willingness of these team members and youth served to be proactive with their education in the present. Another trend several participants report in the Latino community is for youth to choose advanced courses or to take mainstream classes instead of ESL classes as the youth felt more mentored and inspired by their peers. These youth report that their peers take grades more seriously, are more committed to school, and have an increased sense of responsibility.

“Our major achievement has been to have some of our students move to mainstream classes. They felt too comfortable with their friends that did not speak English, that they did not want to challenge themselves; it was cool to have low expectations... We encouraged them to move on as we did, we told them that they would really not lose their friends and that they would gain other ones in mainstream. We shared how afraid we also were to let go, but if they wanted to succeed, they had to learn to risk...”

-Female Venturer from Texas

Several youth also report that the work of the Ventures allowed their peers to raise their personal expectations as they saw the Venturers and team members around them succeed. Youth participants indicate being stimulated and influenced by other youth in their pursuit of higher education. One participant conveys that through life journeys and personal stories, Latino students could directly relate to the lessons learned and generated a support system that allowed them to stay motivated together. A few participants indicate that their impactiveness in this area comes directly from the peer-to-peer connection the Ventures allowed them to establish instead of the typical bottom-down approach used by parents and administrators.

Some participants say that their Ventures have become avenues for positive activities and prevent negative behaviors among Latino youth. Several youth claim their Ventures encourage alternative behaviors to violence, promote healthy lifestyles, and keep other young people off the streets. These youth say that other young people now participate more consciously in school and take the initiative to be a part of the school or college environment in a more active way, particularly in leadership roles.

“One of the team members has a background with drugs; he was the one who was really motivated with this project and really enthusiastic about it. From then on, he took all the steps necessary to graduate from High School; he wanted to be a mentor, to take the steps that he saw others taking. One other girl, she took the steps to graduate, took the GED, plus got enrolled in community college. She is still attending and taking summer school classes. The youth have changed from having nothing to motivate them or being in the streets to taking the steps. This project has motivated them to complete those steps. Changes were really positive and very constructive.

-Male Ally from California

Several participants report that involvement in a Venture generated a behavior that inspired other young people to volunteer in other initiatives in an attempt to also make a difference in the community. Some youth indicate that other young people in their communities even wanted to apply for the creation of their own Venture. Many participants also state that the Latino youth in the communities they served are now more likely to ask for help when it is needed because of the active support Venturers and team members provide to students to seek assistance and resources.

“We saw that most of our Latino kids are afraid to ask anything, they do not know the system, and with the anti-immigrant climate they are not used to saying anything. We

teach them that it is OK to ask for help, to ask a question, and that there are people that care for them everywhere.”

-Male Venturer from New York

Many survey participants cite increased awareness around the issue of their Venture as a major impact in the Latino community. Sample Venture issues include: the environment, teen pregnancy, health, and scholarship opportunities.

Finally, many youth indicate that they see the need to continue the success of the Venture to obtain lasting impact in the Latino community. In most cases, the participants identify younger kids to continue to maintain the functions of the Venture, ensuring that the Venture will stay by-youth and for-youth.

Impact in the community at large

Most survey participants report that there was a general shift to a more positive perception of Latino youth in the community at large. A few participants indicate that leaders within the school and general American community see Latino Venturers and team members becoming more engaged and more responsible for the situation of Latinos in their communities. Several participants report that the importance they placed on higher education and their futures forced the community to look at young people as both partners and resources.

“The community of Long Island is recognizing them as active members now, and not only as the son or daughters of landscapers or a probable trouble youth. They have gained respect in the community center and the recreation center, they even got jobs there. Without showcasing their work and positive impact, they would have never been visible and valued.”

-Male Ally from New York

Some participants say that some community members were not aware of the experiences that Latino immigrants go through, and these people became more sensitive and conscious of these issues. In particular, one youth reports that the Venture made many of the community businesses more aware of the struggle inner city students go through to attain internships and careers that will prepare them for college.

Several youth indicate that the community at large became energized by the participation of Latino students in addressing issues that affect everybody. One participant claims that the efforts of the Venture brought the community together by encouraging dialogue between groups who did not typically interact. Another participant attributes community involvement and support to the Venture's efforts to spread community news.

Impact in the education of Latinos

Most of the Ventures launched as a result of the *My-Venture* initiative are specifically targeted to the Latino community in the form of bilingual educational services, including counseling around higher education, tutoring, after-school activities, college preparation training, and formal and informal mentoring. Venture participants teach peers how to write resumes, help younger kids learn to read, provide homework assistance, create school support groups, provide a safe and fun place in the community, and create a space for creative expression for young people.

Many participants report that Latino students in their communities have become more conscious and knowledgeable about the option of completing and furthering their education. In terms of direct impact, one participant reports that the Venture helps students who are not thinking about going to college find trade schools, while other participants say they encourage students to consider the numerous alternatives to dropping out. Another youth reports raising awareness through the Venture that young people can go to college, even if they are not financially stable. A focus group participant explains the impact her Venture had in the education of Latino students:

“High school students came up to me and said they assumed they couldn’t go to college and we helped them figure out how. It was amazing that we could see that we really did affect people and their personal choices.”

-Female Venturer from Idaho

Participants express diverse ways of exposing young people to the world of higher education. A few ways Ventures make the experience tangible include planning visits to college campuses, finding college mentors, and providing research on specific schools. One participant explains that the Venture provides a space for interaction between Latino high school students and Latino college students who can serve as role models and mentors.

Another impact several participants report pertains to increased mentorship, both peer-to-peer and adult-to-youth. Youth with Ventures related to mentorship say that the young people served feel comfortable with youth who are similar to them, receive their advice, and feel supported. One participant reports being an academic role model for the other students in school as the first member of his or her family to attend college.

Many participants report witnessing an increase in sense of self worth and confidence that success in society is possible for Latino youth in their schools and communities. Some participants indicate that most of the youth they work with lack successful role models at home, as they are the first generation in their families to have a high school diploma or go to college. A few Venturers convey that their work and example has helped other Latino students realize that they are also capable of succeeding in college and elsewhere. One participant states success in increasing confidence among Latino students to apply to college.

“Everything starts with the mind; these kids see that people that look like them and come from the same neighborhoods are doing wonderful things through education. They want the same for themselves, but they do not see it as a reality, as their environment does not show them those examples. The Venturers became those lost and most expected role models.”

-Male Ally from New York

Several participants explain that their Ventures assist in the higher education process by acting as mediators between services offered and Latino students. A few Ventures provide mentorship to help other Latino youth navigate the school and college system, by helping enroll students in college-bound programs for example. One survey participant states that students are able to take the SAT and ACT exams after receiving support from the Venture, while another states that the Venture actually helps students pay for SAT testing fees. One participant asserts the Venture activities help advance Latino students from ESL classes to general classes, and another Venture helps move Latino students from general classes to Advanced Placement classes.

Many youth surveyed indicate their Ventures provide assistance with bilingual services as needed. Some Venturers report being bi-cultural, aiding them in understanding both the immigrant and American worlds and helping them interact successfully in both environments. One participant offers Spanish-language services to Latino students, because many services are typically available exclusively in English. Another young person says the Venture helps the limited-English-speaking students better understand the classes they have with non-bilingual English-speaking teachers.

“There is a great advantage in the fact that the youth [are] bilingual; they can reach students that we can not reach for the language, the position, and our roles in schools. Because we do not look like them, they are already intimidated; my group of girls broke those barriers.”

-Female Ally from Virginia

Participants in several instances report impacting not only the education of Latinos, but all vulnerable groups and ethnicities that need assistance in building a road map to college. One Venturer says that the team positively impacts all cultures, not only Latinos, by increasing awareness of the importance of staying in school.

4. What Youth can add to its programmatic knowledge in the area of launch and post-launch support for vulnerable youth, specifically Latino youth

In order to improve the support Youth offers to young people, focus group participants were asked to detail both successes and challenges they faced during the planning phase, the launch phase, and the post-launch phase of their Venture projects.

Experiences during planning

Focus group participants indicated that most of their Ventures experienced some tension in the beginning as it was their first time planning, organizing, and presenting an idea to the real world. Youth report having to conduct further research, become more familiar with community systems and characteristics, and rely on support from their Allies to successfully complete the planning phase.

In terms of challenges during planning, focus group participants reported having trouble finding available space, navigating the school system, working with existing youth-serving organizations, and gaining access to their target youth population. A Venturer and an Ally describe having to adjust plans in the face of unexpected obstacles:

“Planning was a challenge. What we wanted to do was to aim at high school girls, [but] we didn’t exactly know who to talk to. So we talked to a Principal in a high school, then we talked to a Vice Principal. Eventually we worked with a teacher [who] helped us and planning worked out, but it was different [from] what we thought it would look like.”

-Female Venturer from Michigan

“To tell you the truth, I just watched over them. They have planned the whole thing, have gathered all info they needed for planning. They could not get the space they wanted – in the beginning they were given an OK, but it was not formal. When they went back to check, there were problems and found another space. They were in need of encouragement to continue. I gave them the idea to contact the Latino-American association in the neighborhood and that’s where they got space... They thought it would be much easier than it really was.”

-Female Ally from Georgia

In spite of all the challenges, many focus group participants labeled the planning process as a learning experience. A few participants stated that the planning process was impactive in making them think, and another participant said that the learning process was very stressful as it became more apparent that the group hadn’t initially thought things through all the way. Several participants claimed that the process was very helpful and even enjoyable and fun, stating that planning was difficult in the beginning, but got better at the end. One focus group participant outlines the learning experience and transformation her team went through during the planning phase:

“We had a good idea but to start as a group was difficult. To write a grant and ask for money was a new experience. Most of us were shy, and now we are much more open to new ideas. The experience was nerve wracking but afterwards good. For us it has been a good experience.”

-Female Venturer from Oregon

Experiences during launch

After a panel approves a Venture’s Action Plan, the team receives seed funding and Youth launch-support materials. Most focus group participants recounted some initial challenges they had to overcome during this phase, including constant modification of the Venture plans in response to the realities they were facing.

Several participants reported feeling very excited at the prospect of launching. One participant said that the team could not wait to get started, and another stated that the process went smoothly because the team started with something really easy. A few participants attributed the excitement during this phase to feelings of friendship and

teamwork that were present among team members. However, one focus group participant describes how her team's initial excitement quickly became more tempered:

"We got carried away at first but were over-ambitious. We counted on people doing a lot of things and then they didn't get done, so we had to modify things so we would know we would get a good outcome. I wanted to bring the reality closer to the dream, but I ended up having to bring the dream closer to reality."

-Female Venturer from Florida

Despite these feelings of excitement and anticipation, most focus group participants described challenges during the launch phase. Many participants cited getting people involved as an initial challenge, including lack of motivation from target participants, lack of initial trust from participants, trouble finding mentors for their programs, problems recruiting and gaining access to participants, and problems staying in contact with participants. Two focus group participants describe their Ventures' initial struggles getting people involved:

"One thing that our group didn't really think about at first was that we didn't take into account people's willingness to participate or join or say this sounds like a good program and I want to do it. We realized a lot of kids are not focused or not aware... we needed to reel them in with fun stuff. Getting the amount of people we wanted was kind of difficult in the beginning."

-Male Venturer from Wisconsin

"Launching at the beginning was easy, but... it was tough because our Venture is completely online, and it is hard to get people to hear about it."

-Male Venturer from California

Other participants cited inexperience, trouble communicating with schools, and competition with other after-school activities as initial challenges during the launch phase.

Experiences during post-launch

After four to six months in operation, close to half of the focus group participants reported experiencing success, while the other half of the participants reported still having several challenges to overcome. However, the participants who continued to face challenges also reported feeling the most successful at the end. One focus group participant explains the adjustments her team had to make in order to make the Venture more successful in the long-term:

"After several months, we started noticing our weak points and started looking for motives for youth to attend. We looked for scholarship opportunities and other stuff, thinking this would be a motivator. But we realized that most of the youth were illegal, so they didn't know if they would even be eligible for the scholarships. We found people who were knowledgeable who could go into the schools and help explain. We also started

recruiting younger youth instead of just seniors, so it wasn't the kind of thing where they had one shot and then we lost them."

-Female Venturer from Oklahoma

Many participants reported having to continuously make adjustments to the initial Venture plans during the post-launch phase. Adjustments included shifting meeting times to increase enrollment, using technology as an incentive, finding ways to increase momentum, and dealing with a lot of volunteer turnover. One focus group participant describes how her Venture had to adjust their program in order to accommodate unintended participants:

"At first a lot of people were enthusiastic, but [our message] unfortunately didn't reach out to all of the people that we wanted. The people that were interested already had so much on their plate. It was really hard to schedule things. At first the turnout was great. The people that were not academically strong but had an interest in the Venture were who we were looking for, but that didn't work out. [The program] ended up being more for AP students, which was not what we were intending."

-Female Venturer from Florida

Some other focus group participants described the post-launch phase as a constant learning experience. Youth cited learning how to more efficiently communicate with schools and host organizations, ways to keep kids interested, and how to make things work with what was available. A focus group participant outlines how his team learned to run more impactful meetings:

"Once the ball got rolling, it was easier to get in contact with team members and the people involved. People were starting to get more comfortable with their roles. Five months in is a long time. We had meetings where we would sit down and try to map out what we wanted to get done. We would get sidetracked by every little thing; we would talk about the most minute things. That diminished over time. We learned that we couldn't just keep having meetings; everyone had to bring something to the group and then get something out of the meeting. Over time, it all became more efficient."

-Male Venturer from Wisconsin

CONCLUSIONS

The *My-Venture* experience has significantly impacted the pursuit of educational goals of the Latino youth involved as well as the communities they served. The Youth model has proven to be an impactful tool for the educational transition of minority youth furthering educational goals. It demonstrates that offering youth an opportunity to choose their own Venture project, making them accountable for seed funds, and providing the necessary support to develop their skills and interests can serve as a catalyst towards improving knowledge about educational access and opportunity and encourages youth to become leaders and partners in the development of their communities.

Impact of My-Venture on Pursuit of Educational Goals

The study findings show an overall increase in awareness, motivation, preparedness and action taken towards higher education in individual lead Venturers and team member participants. The highest increases are shown in the motivation and preparedness for higher education.

Regarding the change in awareness, while the participant youth already had a high belief that there are benefits to graduating, they reaffirmed this notion as well as their intention to finish high school or college. The major change that occurred among participants after practicing life skills in the real world was to acquire a sharper vision for their career path. Several participants reported that the reason and purpose of attaining higher education became remarkably clearer as they discovered why and how to use the skills gained from a higher educational institution.

Regarding the change in motivation, the participants reported increased motivation to pursue educational goals and increased willingness to attend college, technical programs, or graduate schools. The most dramatic increase was found in sharing of educational goals with friends and family, and even more so with teachers, professors and counselors. This behavior shows confidence and an inclusiveness of others in the community to assist in achieving educational goals.

Regarding the change in preparedness, the participants felt more prepared and ready to attend college or begin a career. In many instances, the Venture itself did not provide college specific training tools. However, through interactions with college environments or experiences in the real world, the young people prepared themselves to be more self-reliant, independent, and ready to perform in a college or work environment.

Regarding the change in action taken, the participants slightly increased their actions aimed towards graduation. The concrete steps of taking SATs, filling out applications, or applying for financial aid were not the main focus of the Venture experience.

The majority of youth surveyed expressed clear ambitions and outlined a general road map for their educational goals. Most high school participants plan to graduate from high school and attend college afterwards. A few also reported interest in technical or vocational schools. College students have sharpened college plans, changed majors or taken internships.

Several youth reported a willingness to link their career path with the citizen sector or public service, and many of them are exploring the field of education as a career.

A strong majority of youth surveyed reported that the *My-Venture* experience has directly affected their interest, motivation and preparedness towards higher education.

Impact of My-Venture on Life Skills Development and Engagement in Educational Environments

Study results show a high increase in life skill development among youth participants. The highest increases are in the fields of being a successful team member,

leading a team, setting and achieving goals, and planning. These are key skills for educational and workplace success.

Youth report to be more engaged in school work and activities organized in an educational environment. There is a particularly high increase in taking the lead in school and college activities.

There is a high positive correlation between the life skills learned through *My-Venture* and educational interest among participating youth. A factor analysis defined educational interest as the awareness, motivation, preparedness, educational engagement, and actions taken towards educational goals. This means that through participation in the Youth model and the life skills acquired, the participant youth will very likely increase their interest in furthering their education.

Impact of My-Venture Teams on the Communities Served

Most youth report an estimated number of up to 10 volunteers and up to 49 people directly benefiting from activities and services of their Venture.

In the Latino community there was a strong impact on the youth served. Study results report a major change in the feasibility to pursue educational goals by the youth served and an increase in their belief that they could do something about their education. They also increased their own academic expectations, showed academic responsibility, motivation, and felt highly encouraged and mentored by other Latino youth.

The Latino community as a social group became more aware of the resources available for Latino youth, and Venture Teams raised awareness of the situation regarding access to education by minority groups – specifically regarding the situation facing illegal immigrants. The community also received direct educational services such as tutoring, after-school activities, mentoring, assistance with language and cultural barriers, and educational advocacy. By encouraging positive social and educational engagement, the Ventures prevented anti-social behaviors.

One of the major challenges most participants report in motivating Latino youth to finish high school is the lack of parental support. Through the work of the Ventures, several youth reported an increase in awareness of the benefits and opportunities regarding higher education for their children among Latino parents. A few participants reported seeing communities of parents expanding the dialogue and creating a culture where it is no longer acceptable for their children to drop out of school.

In the community at large there was a general shift to a more positive perception of Latino youth. The community started to perceive Latino youth as both partners and resources for development.

The Ventures highly impacted the education of Latinos they served. By providing access to positive mentorship, exposure to higher education, and college preparation training, they served as a bridge between the community and educational access and opportunity. In many instances the Ventures acted as recruiters for other college-bound or educational programs that did not have a strong community-based approach.

Future Venture plans

Most Venturers plan to continue their work based on community needs due to the synergy and expectation that has already been established. These youth report that they have used the following strategies for sustainability: identified new leaders, trained new leaders, created membership bases, expanded fundraising, and sought legal status as a non-profit organization.

Several Ventures intend to expand, replicate or extend their times of services or their target groups to increase the amount of people and communities benefiting from their work.

Programmatic Knowledge

Even though the planning phase was challenging for most groups, overall it was labeled a rewarding learning experience. Most of the challenges described were: trouble finding available space, navigating the school system, working with existing youth-serving organizations, and gaining access to their target youth population. Allies played a key role by encouraging and assisting youth in the challenges faced during this planning period.

During the launch phase most of the youth reported initial excitement and momentum. The challenges for this phase were lack of motivation or trust from target participants, problems recruiting, gaining access and staying in contact with participants, trouble communicating with schools, and competition with other after-school activities. Most teams solved their problems by rethinking strategies, asking for help, and developing the necessary relationships to move the Ventures forward.

After four to six months, most groups were making several adjustments in order to make the Venture more successful. Youth again described this phase as a constant learning experience, where past unsuccessful strategies were the stepping stones to improving the next one.

The Youth Model as a Motivator for Pursuing Educational Goals

Prior studies show that one of the reasons for high dropout rates in minority groups is the lack of motivation to further education. This mainly occurs due to a lack of perceived purpose and meaning in getting a college degree or obtaining a job.

The study shows that Youth increases the motivation necessary to pursue higher educational goals as it provides a sense of purpose and direction to career goals. After young people participate in a Venture, they realize how the world really works and what role they want to play in it. The Ventures serve as “social laboratories” where strategies are tested, skills are used, and learning by doing takes place. This increased awareness and skill development provides the basis for a change in behavior in the pursuit of educational goals.

Related findings show that during the Youth experience the motivational triggers for minority youth are: 1) the freedom by which youth choose their own Venture theme, action steps, and desired outcomes; 2) the accountability placed on the young people by providing them with seed funds to start a Venture; and 3) the support given by Allies, Youth as an organization, and the community at large.

These foundational motivational elements convey the message to minority youth that an organization believes in their capabilities as *changemakers* and is willing to provide a support system in the form of knowledge, social networks, and resources for them to launch Ventures. Minority youth do not receive these messages often, and when they do, they raise the expectations of themselves, act as catalysts for access and opportunity, and become leaders and partners in the development of their own communities.

LESSON LEARNED

1. The Youth model is an important tool for the educational transition of Latino youth in furthering their educational goals. The recommendation is to replicate the model and approach to reach more Latino youth throughout the country.
2. The Youth model can be used with other vulnerable youth groups with high dropout rates, such as African Americans and Native Americans. A cultural adaptation should be made for these target populations.
3. The Youth model plays a motivating role in pursuing educational goals as well as providing the opportunity for youth to feel more prepared to take further steps. Youth could partner with other higher education readiness programs that provide college-bound specific skills to ensure that youth act on these feelings of motivation. The Ventures would provide the motivation and
4. skills necessary for students to succeed, and the partners could provide the hard skills required.
5. Even though all life skills were increased after participation, there is room for improving support in the following areas: budgeting, getting assistance and finding mentors, and organizing volunteers. Youth could develop more tools to strengthen these skills.
6. Latino youth employing a grassroots approach are very impactful at reaching the Latino community, as they know thoroughly the needs and challenges their communities face. This grassroots approach should be maintained strongly in the beginning of a Venture and then expanded to other communities; Latino Venturers need to see how other communities work, and Youth can expose them to that through the work of other teams.
7. Latino youth seem to be very impactful at working with hard-to-access groups such as low-income working parents and illegal immigrant youth, especially because of their bicultural and bilingual background. Their work with Latino parents and immigrant youth should be encouraged and supported.

8. In general, youth feel supported by Youth throughout the overall process, but do need specific guidance at certain stages. In the beginning stages, Youth could provide additional tools or workshops on overcoming common setbacks such as: access to finding available space, navigating the school system, working with existing youth-serving organizations, and gaining access to their youth target population. Post-launch, there could be workshops on how to maintain participation, continuing to sharpen strategies, and creative problem solving. Overall, it is suggested to have more Youth staff in the field and provide a forum for Venturer-to-Venturer sharing.

9. The Youth model places youth as a mediator between the educational opportunities available and the community at large. This approach could be used inside educational institutions such as schools or universities in the form of Youth clubs that promote an agenda of higher education.

10. Youth could develop a monitoring tool to track educational attainment of the Venture participants. Regardless of the focus of the Venture, the youth could record team member and participant action steps taken towards higher education for further development of indicators and outcome results.

11. The Youth model proves to be sustainable in Latino communities as parents, educators, and community members get involved. To increase sustainability, more youth should be supported to launch new Ventures in geographic areas with high density of Latino populations.

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