

Summary of Key Findings

In 2013, the Youth Philanthropy Initiative of Indiana (YPII) and the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis partnered together on a research study conducting focus group interviews with student participants and adult mentors in six Community Foundation youth councils around the state. These particular Community Foundations were selected to participate because they represent diverse regions of Indiana, have strong programmatic elements and successful models of youth philanthropy in action. The purpose of the study was to gain in-depth information about how high school students in Indiana learn and practice philanthropy outside the classroom, as well as the long-term effects of the youth councils.

Participating Youth Councils

Hands helping Hendricks (H3O) – Hendricks County Community Foundation
Kosciusko Endowment Youth Service (KEYS) – Kosciusko County Community Foundation
Youth Philanthropy Committee – Putnam County Community Foundation
Scott County Youth Grantmaking Council – Scott County Community Foundation
Forever Improving Steuben County (FIST) – Steuben County Community Foundation
Washington County Youth Foundation – Washington County Community Foundation

Methodology

- Evaluation aimed to learn about the understanding, attitudes, and behaviors of philanthropy engagement among Indiana high school students outside of the classroom.
- Six community foundation youth councils with participants ages 11 to 18 were selected as case studies with the criteria as follows: (a) the council was to be active in the past year; (b) the council's geographical location was considered with two councils selected from Northern, Central, and Southern Indiana; (c) the council was to be available for an interview between June and July 2013.
- Phone group interviews were conducted with majority of councils and in-person group interviews were conducted with two of the councils in Central Indiana.
- Focus group interviews were facilitated by a trained interviewer and observations were recorded and reported immediately following the group interview. Qualitative content analysis was performed to compare focus group interview question responses. During this process, themes, ideas, and specific words and phrases commonly used by the participants were identified.
- YPII staff also provided data collected through online surveys as background information about the youth councils.

Understanding the Word “Philanthropy”

- Results indicated that high school students have developed clear definitions about philanthropy.
- They viewed philanthropy from the perspective of value, intention, and behavior.
- Some respondents defined philanthropy as “a way of life,” “involvement,” or “selflessness-volunteering without expecting anything in return.”
- Many students stressed the significance of giving without the expectation of receiving rewards.
- Philanthropy was often described as “the giving of your time, treasure, and/or talent to benefit your community.”
- Important finding, the understanding of philanthropy is not necessarily associated with youth engagement. Some youth have been involved in philanthropic activities before they truly understood the meaning of philanthropy. For example, a student said, “I was philanthropic before knowing what it was.”

Initiating Philanthropy

- Several factors played important roles in leading youth to philanthropy, including parents, peers, churches, schools, and nonprofits.
- In most instances, parents, and very often grandparents, taught philanthropic values and acted as role models for youth participation.
- Peer education was also found to be influential on the participants' engagement in philanthropy.
- Many respondents said they participated in youth councils because of their siblings' participation.

Practicing Youth Philanthropy

- Members of the youth councils were engaged in a variety of philanthropic activities, including raising funds and granting money, collecting material donations, and volunteering.
- Fundraising was one key component of the work in which council members were involved.
- Grantmaking was another core element/responsibility of the youth council members.

Personal Benefits of Philanthropy Participation

- Benefits included personal growth and leadership development, building friendships and social networks, and increasing nonprofit management knowledge and skills.
- Youth learned about morals and values through serving their communities.
- Communication skills were improved, therefore increasing their self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Some students specifically learned how to target speeches to special audiences.
- Youth council members also improved their sense of commitment and belonging to a community when they had an opportunity to learn more about philanthropy and their community's needs.
- They learned how to be team members in a group working to accomplish a shared goal.
- They recognized they were only small components of a bigger project.

Continuing Engagement in Philanthropy

- Three elements contributed to continued engagement: strong sense of commitment to philanthropy and community, sense of achievement and youth empowerment.
- Some students conceded they were initially involved in philanthropic activities in order to improve their resumes and to enhance their college applications, although many of these students indicated that they are now more interested in how their participation can assist others.
- Some respondents reported that they might be interested in a future nonprofit career.

Promoting Philanthropy

- Philanthropy promotion included two aspects: acquiring and disseminating information about philanthropic activities.
- Social media has been used as a primary way to promote the councils' philanthropic projects.
- Youth councils have created pages on Facebook and Twitter, and promoted their events and the results/achievements of those events on YouTube.
- Providing quality and meaningful community events was often the best way for the youth to communicate about their work.

Membership Maintenance

- Community foundations have established rules to recruit and retain youth council members, which might contribute to the commitment and performance of participants.
- Some foundations require students to submit an application that includes the following: a description of their philanthropic values, previous experiences with philanthropic activities and an explicit commitment to the foundation. They also require students to participate in an interview process and demonstrate a personal commitment to charitable giving.
- Often youth council members have to adhere to an attendance policy in order to maintain their memberships.

Conclusions

1. **Philanthropy can be effectively taught to and learned by youth.** Through their youth council service and other philanthropic activities, these youth learned to clearly define philanthropy and effectively manage relevant projects in their schools and communities. It is important to point out that many of these initiatives were youth-designed and youth-led with only adult supervision. These achievements demonstrate that philanthropy can be “a way of life” for youth, not merely just for adults.
2. **Philanthropy both facilitates and fosters youth development.** Most youth council members reported that they benefited greatly from being engaged in philanthropy. Benefits gained included the development of knowledge, life skills, and confidence; the feeling of community; improved collaboration skills; increased social network-building; and even career preparation. Their efforts yielded both self-satisfaction and respect from others.
3. **Youth can and should play an important role in the philanthropy landscape.** Youth participating in this research study reported mobilizing a substantial amount of resources to help people in need via fundraising, grantmaking, collecting donations, and volunteering. Their work with other young people proved to be very valuable, and, perhaps more effective, at times, when compared to adults efforts. The participants’ engagement at these young ages might also better prepare them for a future career or volunteer role in the nonprofit sector.
4. **Continued philanthropic engagement requires well-managed programs.** The incentives for individual participants including the sense of achievement, pride, and personal development, although very important, are not substantial to engage youth for the long term. Well-managed programs were key in retaining youth because they developed clear participation guidelines, provided appropriate supervision, delivered timely responses, and left space for youth to learn and make decisions.

Citation:

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