

Case study: Youth Speak! Collective

by Kine Nordstokka on Tue, 2011-02-22 15:11

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Featured Hero



Darwin Bernardo

Darwin helped to set up the Nutmeg Community Project, which aims to Unite, Educate, Inspire, and Create through inspirational workshops and community forums.

• [Thank you](#)

Name: Youth Speak! Collective

Website: <http://youthspeakcollective.wordpress.com>

Location: California, USA

Date Founded: 2005

Mission: To empower low-income, at-risk youth and their families with the skills necessary to pursue higher education and create strong communities.

Background and aims

The Youth Speak! Collective (YSP) was founded in 2005 by David Kietzman and Whitney Kasserman. It was set up to support at-risk youth in the Northeast San Fernando Valley, home to some of the region's most impoverished and neglected neighbourhoods. Many young people in the area are disengaged from their community and schools, leading to an epidemic of high-school dropout rates and community-wide disempowerment.

Kietzman and Kasserman found that there was a lack of educational resources and activities targeted at young people in the area. This led them to set up an eight weeks long seminar where young people explored what they could do to create a better local community. Participants at the course investigated community needs in their local area and learnt about grassroots organising and grant writing skills. Together the participants came up with the idea of a 'literacy garden', and secured funding to set it up. YSC organised a volunteer day to construct this garden and created a green space for the local community to relax, read and enjoy life. The young participants were inspired by the realisation that they could have a positive impact in their local community. The success of the seminar led Kietzman and Kasserman to develop additional projects and programmes growing the grassroots organisation into an established provider of afterschool programmes for hundreds of young people.

The Innovation

YSC is an organisation implemented by youth, and for youth. Young people are involved in both the design and the delivery of its programmes. It is based on the idea that all young people can succeed if they are provided with the right opportunities. YSC is offering such opportunities to young people through creative, high-quality programmes that channel their intellect and talent, build their academic and leadership skills and strengthen their investment in their own communities. In this way the programmes empower young people to create a better future for themselves and make them realise their own potential. Young people that used to spend their afternoons doing nothing are through the YSC courses instead getting involved in activities such as directing films and organising community fairs. The students have for example transformed a neglected park into a community garden, set up a sports club for at-risk young people and developed a campaign against street violence. In this way the programmes are having a positive effect on both the young people and the community that surrounds them.

95 % of participants on YSC's courses graduate with their class, from schools where on average half of their peers will end up dropping out. 60% of the participants have also become more connected to their family and are better prepared for their future.

Key Ingredients

YSC's programmes fall into the four categories of Youth Development, Academic Support Services, Creative Expression and Family Support.

Youth Development programmes empower young people to design and implement projects which have a positive impact on the local community. While developing their own projects the young people get a range of skills such as planning, team work and leadership skills. In addition to this the youth find a positive sense of self worth, purpose and identity.

In addition to offering practical learning experiences to young people, YSC also offers academic support. Through programmes such as Youth Speak! Online, 9th Grade Academy and Career Internship YSC is helping and encouraging young people to graduate from high school and continue to higher education or a vocational career. These programmes are increasing the participants' employability and raising their prospects for further education. Services include academic tutoring, SAT prep, California High School Exit Exam Prep and college essay writing workshops.

YSP also offers support for young people who want to develop their creative skills through programmes such as Mural Arts, For the Record News and Digital Media. During these courses young people learn to express themselves through art, film and writing.

Lastly, YSP works with the young people's family to ensure that they have the support system in place that they need to support the young people to engage in personal development, pursue higher education, gain employment and enhance the community.

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YOUTH SPEAK! COLLECTIVE

BUILDING A FUTURE FOR YOUTH BY YOUTH