

PROMISING APPROACH # 5

Invest in Youth Service Programs or Public Sector Internships

The principle of youth service views young people as assets or resources. Youth service can be defined as “an organized period of substantial engagement, where young people are contributing to their local, national, or world community, in exchange for minimal or no monetary contribution to the participant.”¹ It reverses the norm in which public services are typically provided *to* young people, by offering them instead the opportunity to play an active role in community and national development while learning new skills, increasing their employability, and contributing to their overall personal development.

Youth service programs can be either formal or informal. Formal service typically requires a young person to make a voluntary commitment of time and effort to an organization that is contributing to the development of their local, national, or world community.² Informal service involves the same kind of voluntary contribution to a worthy cause and is often the result of an ethic of service to others that has been passed down to the young person through families, schools, civic organizations, or popular culture. The more formal types of service are usually run by governments, employers, nonprofit organizations, and other civil society groups. Research shows that these more organized forms of service produce the greatest benefits to both participants and society.³ Some examples of youth services include providing basic health services in public health clinics, building sustainable housing, literacy tutoring, protecting the environment, and building small-scale infrastructure. The key features of a successful youth service program are structured, organized activities and sustained participation by each young person.

How Do Youth Service Programs Reduce Risky Youth Behavior?

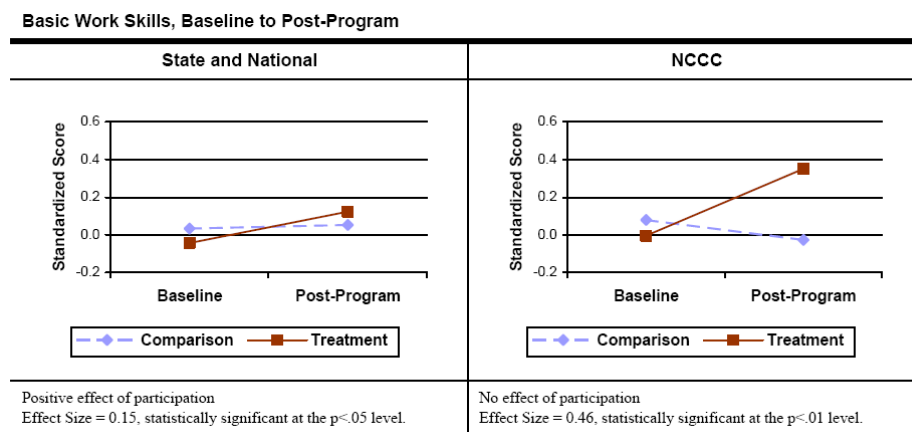
Participating in youth service programs can reduce risky behavior among young people in four key ways. First, it provides them with practical, marketable, and transferable skills and knowledge, which makes them more employable and facilitates their transition into the job market, further training, or higher education. Second, constructive, structured, and supervised activities can reintegrate at-risk youth into their communities and diminish their feelings of social exclusion, which reduces the likelihood of them engaging in risky behavior. Research shows that young people who volunteer are 50 percent less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, to engage in delinquent behavior, or to drop out of school.⁴ Third, making a positive contribution to their communities and countries increases young people’s self-esteem, confidence, and sense of empowerment, which in turn reduces the chances of them engaging in a range of risky behavior. Fourth, being involved in youth service teaches young people to trust other people, find ways to bridge differences, and develop mutual understanding, all of which increase their social capital and their sense of their own citizenship. It also creates more stable and harmonious communities, which are important protective factors for young people.⁵

Research Findings: Providing the Evidence Base

The U.S. *Job Corps* program offers vocational training, academic construction, and social services for young people ages 16 to 24, most of whom are high school dropouts. Participants in the program have demonstrated measurable improvements in everyday literacy and numeracy skills and have more General Educational Development (GED) certificates than nonparticipants. They also have significantly less involvement in crime, with arrest rates 16 percent below those of similar young people who did not participate in the program.⁶ Participants in the U.S. *AmeriCorps* program⁷ provide a year of full-time service (1,700 hours per year) in areas such as education, public safety, human services, and the environment in

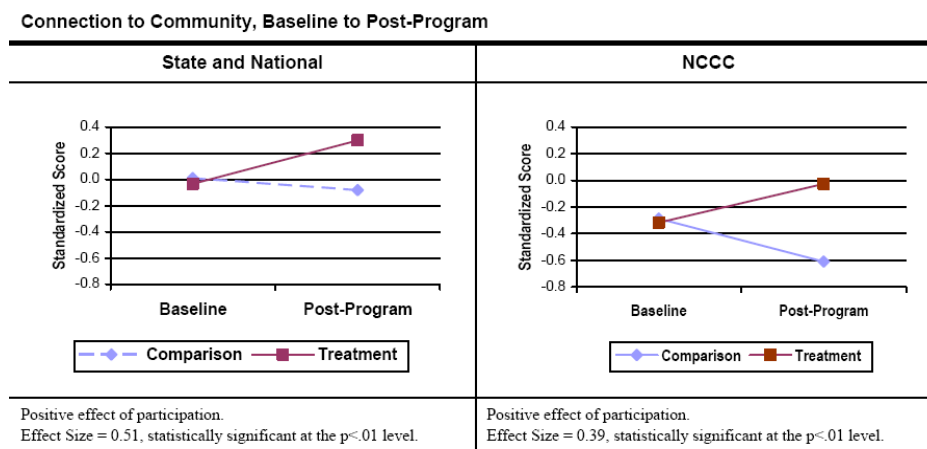
exchange for an *AmeriCorps* Education Award of up to US\$4,700 that can be used for either higher education, vocational training, or to repay students loans. A 15-year longitudinal study of the program showed that at-risk participants were much more likely to have worked for pay (after graduating from the program), had worked more hours, were less likely to have been arrested, had acquired more basic work skills, were more involved in civic life, were more connected to their communities, and were more likely to choose a career in public service than their peers in a control group (see figures).⁸ Jamaica's *National Youth Service* program, which combines residence-based training in job and life skills with an internship for unemployed secondary school graduates, was also successful in helping 60 percent of its participants either to find permanent employment or to continue their studies, compared with only 34 percent of similar young people in a control group.⁹ In Argentina, initial research suggests that including "service-learning" (a teaching and learning strategy that integrates community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience) in primary and secondary school curricula may reduce grade repetition and dropout rates.¹⁰

Impact of AmeriCorps Program on Basic Work Skills of Participants



Source: Jastrzab and others 2007.

Impact of AmeriCorps Program on Participants' Connection to their Communities



Source: Jastrzab and others 2007.

Evaluations of the United States' *Job Corps* have found that it has had a positive and statistically significant impact on the earnings of its participants (a 12 percent gain on average) three years after finishing the program. *Youth Service Canada*, which was designed to help young people acquire real work experience, learn

or enhance their transferable job-related skills, develop qualities such as self-esteem and leadership, and contribute to their community, was found to have had no statistically significant effect on participants' annual earnings, weekly wages, number of hours worked per week, or annual social assistance benefits. However, the program was deemed beneficial by its participants in the area of personal development, including increased self-confidence and knowing how to find a job. Furthermore, there was a statistically significant increase in the amount of time that participants spent in school and in training after finishing the program.¹¹

Moving Forward: Factors for Success

- ***Ensure that program lasts long enough and that program activities are designed and structured in a way that they make an impact on both the lives of young people*** (by teaching them useful and marketable skills) ***and on the communities in which they are working*** (by ensuring activities carried out meet community's priority needs).
- ***Teach skills that will be in demand*** once participants have graduated from program.
- Ensure that ***youth service programs are aligned with national and community development goals***.
- ***Identify future education, training, or employment opportunities for the participants*** after they graduate from the program and ensure that these opportunities are realized.
- ***Form interorganizational and public-private partnerships*** to ensure that programs are implemented effectively and are sustainable.
- ***Select sites for youth service programs based on the greatest need***, the potential for expansion, and the community's willingness to participate.
- ***Provide incentives*** such as health insurance and social services to encourage all young people to participate.

Endnotes

1. Sherraden, M. 2001. "Youth Service as Strong Policy." Working Paper 01-12. Center for Social Development. Washington University, St. Louis, MO.
2. Sherraden 2001.
3. Perry, J. 2003. *Civic Service: What Difference Does it Make?* Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe.
4. Alessi, B. 2004. "Service as a Strategy for Children and Youth." *Innovations in Civic Participation*, Washington, D.C.
5. Alessi 2004.
6. Betcherman, G., K. Olivas, and A. Dar. 2004. "Impacts of Active Labor Market Programs: New Evidence from Evaluations with Particular Attention to Developing and Transition Countries." World Bank, Washington, D.C.
7. AmeriCorps is a network of three programs: AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC).
8. Jastrzab, J., L. Giordano, A. Chase, J. Valente, A. Hazlett, R. LaRock, and D. James. 2007. "Serving Country and Community: A Longitudinal Study of Service in AmeriCorps, Early Findings." *Early findings* December 2004, updated April 2007. Abt Associates, Cambridge, MA.
9. <http://www.nysjamaica.org>.
10. Global Service Institute/Center for Social Development. 2004. "Youth Volunteerism and Civic Service in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Potential Strategy for Social and Economic Development." Washington University, St. Louis, MO.
11. Human Resources Development Canada. 1999. "Evaluation Reports, Summary Evaluation of Youth Service Canada." Ottawa (Ontario), Canada.

Key Implementation Considerations	
Anticipated Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater employability • More employment • Greater skills development • Improved self-esteem and increased confidence • More civic engagement • More community involvement • More school completion • Better academic performance
Secondary Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less violent behavior among young people • Greater likelihood of going back to school and/or onto training
Responsible Agency/Actor	National, state, or local governments; NGOs; public-private partnerships
Targeted Risk Group	Types I, II, and III
Target Age Group	14–24
Examples of Cost per Beneficiary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel: <i>National Youth Service</i>—US\$9,000 overall per volunteer per year ^a • United States—Average US\$10,000 per participant/per year ^b (cost per beneficiary would most likely be reduced in middle-income countries)
Necessary Initial Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-identification of programs that are in line with either national or community development goals • Partnerships with institutions necessary for the program to be implemented • Mechanisms to identify and reach out to young people who will benefit most from participating in the program
Specific Examples & Level of Effectiveness (Strong Evidence and Emerging Evidence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United States: <i>JobCorps</i>—Strong evidence (http://www.jobcorps.dol.gov) • United States: <i>AmeriCorps</i>—Strong evidence (http://www.americorps.org) • Canada: <i>Youth Service Canada</i>—Strong evidence (http://youth.hrhc-drhc.gc.ca) • Jamaica's <i>National Youth Service Program</i>—Emerging evidence (http://www.nysjamaica.org)
Issues to Consider for Replication and Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the program is in line with national or community development goals • Make certain that the skills being developed through the program are in demand in the labor market and in society

Sources:

a. Bar-Tura, M., and N. Fleischer. 2004. "Civic Service in Israel." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 33(4) (Supplement).

b. Jastrzab, J., J. Blomquist, J. Masker, and L. Orr. 1997. "Youth Corps: Promising Strategies for Young People and their Communities." *Studies in Workforce Development and Income Security*, No. 1-98, February. Abt Associates, Cambridge, MA.