YOUTH VOLUNTEER CORPS

Measuring Impact:
YVC Network Evaluation

Inspiring a lifetime ethic of service
2025

UMKC
BLOCH | MIDWEST CENTER
FOR NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

About Youth Volunteer Corps
Youth Volunteer Corps was founded in 1987 to give youth a chance to give back to their community. What began as a summer camp experience in Kansas City has since evolved into an international network of year-round service-learning programs. YVC programs develop youth ages 11-18 through structured team-based service-learning opportunities that appeal to a wide variety of youth interests and schedules.

About the Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership
The Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership is a service and outreach unit of the Department of Public Affairs in the Henry W. Bloch School of Management at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. The mission of MCNL is to enhance the performance and effectiveness in the nonprofit sector through high quality community-oriented education, applied research, problem solving, and service. MCNL applies the resources and talents of the University and the sector to the problems and issues facing the nonprofit sector so its members are better prepared to serve their communities. MCNL creates opportunities for the leaders of this vital community to come together as colleagues to learn, network and support each other, and to encourage personal, professional, and organizational renewal and effectiveness.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation explores life and career skills, building upon the 2018 evaluation, and also investigates two new factors: academics and mental health. The research questioned the extent to which YVC participation affected 18 indicators in life and career skills, five in academics, and four in mental health.

From April to October 2024, 1,138 youth were surveyed: 957 were YVC program participants and 181 were not YVC participants. Throughout September and October 2024, 43 YVC Program Directors and Executive Directors responded to the survey. The research instruments for youth and directors were online or paper surveys. In addition to the primary youth outcome indicators for life and work skills, we also asked youth to self-report on academic and mental health indicators. Youth provided a rating in these areas after their time in YVC. Youth who did not participate in YVC were also asked to self-report on these additional items at the time they were given the survey.

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Life & Career Skills

18 skills in six different categories were measured; all 18 skills showed improvement.

Average improvements for each category – % of youth who improved

- Initiative & self-direction ~ 67%
- Flexibility & adaptability ~ 65%
- Leadership & responsibility ~ 60%
- Productivity & accountability ~ 65%
- Social & cross-cultural skills ~ 57%
- Community stewardship ~ 70%

The greatest amount of improvement was in the community stewardship category. After YVC participation, youth have a better understanding of communities, how they work, and how they can make a difference in their communities.

53% of youth understand the needs of their community.
57% of youth take action to meet the needs of their community.

Comparison of YVC and non-YVC Youth

YVC and non-YVC youth were surveyed to assess their confidence in life and career skills on a four-point scale from no confidence to high confidence. The percentage of youth who reported "very true of me" was significantly greater in 14 of 18 Life and Career Skill indicators for youth who participated in YVC as compared to youth who did not participate ($p < 0.05$). The greatest differences recorded were in all three community stewardship indicators, further supporting the finding that YVC helps youth understand their communities and how to make a difference in them.

> The point of positive improvement in life and career skills is 20 YVC service hours, with skill improvement peaking at 30 hours.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Academic Indicators ~ All five indicators showed improvement. The greatest amount of improvement was in leadership skills, with 91% of youth assessing themselves as better leaders after involvement with YVC. Further, 58% of youth reported improvement in involvement with school activities.

Mental Health ~ All four indicators showed improvement. On average, the aggregate percentage of improvement of all mental health indicators was higher for underserved youth than their peers. Underserved youth saw 63% improvement and well-served youth saw 53% improvement.

A significantly higher percentage of YVC youth reported a belief in their ability to make a difference ($p < 0.05$) and in their ability to connect with peers ($p < 0.05$) compared to non-YVC youth. These two critical indicators of mental well-being suggest that participation in YVC programs fosters a sense of agency and belonging, equipping youth with skills necessary to navigate challenges, build resilience, and contribute positively to their communities.

AFFILIATES

Affiliate Practices

100% feel that YVC benefits the youth, their organization, and their community.

90% feel that YVC headquarters always provides excellent support.

88% of affiliates have year-round programming.

80% always use YVC's database, Ydat.

60% always attend Summit and feel it is important to continue the relationships and collaborations they have made there when they return home.

Programming Practices

90% regularly include service-learning and meaningful reflection.

85% include icebreakers or team builders.

72% regularly include youth in leadership roles.

Future Practices

Communication with youth has begun to change. Leaders mainly use text and email, but they must continually adapt to youth needs, communicating in innovative ways.

Affiliates are exploring their role in youth mental health awareness and support.

INTRODUCTION

Youth Volunteer Corps, a premier service-learning organization engaging youth ages 11-18, has affiliate programs in locations across the United States, Canada and Uganda. Most YVC affiliates operate as programs under host organizations like the YMCA, United Way, Boys & Girls Club, parks and recreation departments and schools. Other YVC affiliates are operated directly by YVC Headquarters, and still others operate independently, without support of a host organization.

YVC affiliates implement programs that vary in duration and design throughout the school year and summer. Volunteer projects range from a couple of hours to one week. Programming is offered during school, after school, in the evenings, on weekends, on school holidays and at all times during the summer, often in camp formats.

YVC consistently monitors program success to continually improve. In addition to annual program evaluations implemented by YVC Headquarters staff (YVCHQ), YVC hires independent evaluators to assess its programs every 5-6 years. Questions explored in this evaluation follow.

Does participation in Youth Volunteer Corps:

- **Increase a young person's life and career skills?**
- **Educate and empower community stewardship?**
- **Positively influence a young person's academic achievement?**
- **Positively affect a young person's mental health?**

Does YVC Headquarters effectively support and enable affiliates to serve their communities better?

Mission: We engage youth in team-based service experiences that build life and work skills while inspiring a lifetime ethic of service.

Vision: Communities defined by compassion, selflessness, and respect for others.

Fundamental Goals
1. Engage youth in service projects that are challenging, rewarding, and educational.
2. Serve the needs of the community and its residents.
3. Cultivate a greater understanding and appreciation for diversity.
4. Promote a lifetime ethic of service among youth.

Program Standards
1. Conduct frequent, supervised, team-based service projects that address a variety of important community needs.
2. Recruit youth ages 11-18 who represent the diversity of the program's community.
3. Assign a program director responsible for managing the program.
4. Establish an integrated education and reflection process for participants.
5. Provide leadership opportunities for youth volunteers.
6. Use the trademark Youth Volunteer Corps name and logo prominently in close coordination with the name and logo of the YVC host.
7. Provide no financial inducement for youth volunteer participation.
8. Participate in the YVC evaluation process.

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Methods

To remain consistent with the previous evaluation conducted in 2018, evaluation instruments focused on career preparedness. The survey instrument was based on the P21 Framework for 21st Century Learning life and career skills and YVC's community stewardship mission outcomes. A total of 18 indicators were used to assess life and career skills and community stewardship. Additional questions of self-reported perception of academic achievement and overall well-being were also addressed. The life and career skills section of the survey is provided with a 4-point scale, excluding a neutral option and encouraging youth to determine a clearer position to measure their experiences. Questions of self-reported perception of academic achievement and overall well-being are provided on a 5-point scale with a neutral option.

For comparisons across YVC and Non-YVC youth, a chi-square test for statistical significance was conducted to compare and determine if any differences in scores between the two groups were meaningful.

For statistical analysis of the pre and post-tests, a non-parametric test allowed for analysis of non-normally distributed data and took into account that youth participate at varying numbers of hours and with differing experiences and offer an estimate of the difference between pre- and post- scores taking those variations into account. The threshold for statistical significance was set at $p<0.05$.

Life & Career Skills
The survey included two to four indicators for each life and career skill category:

1. Initiative and Self-Direction
2. Flexibility and Adaptability
3. Leadership and Responsibility
4. Productivity and Accountability
5. Social and Cross-Cultural Skills

Academic Indicators
The survey included five indicators for academic success:

1. Grades
2. School Attendance
3. Leadership
4. Attention in School
5. Involvement in School Activities

Community Stewardship
Three indicators were included in the survey to assess the following outcomes of community stewardship:

1. Awareness of Community Needs
2. Capacity to Address Needs
3. Preparedness for Work

Mental Health
The survey included four indicators to assess mental health:

1. Well-being
2. Self-worth
3. Belief in the ability to make a difference
4. Connection to their peers

Participation

From April to October 2024, 1,138 youth participated in surveys. Of those, 957 were youth who participated in programming through 22 YVC affiliates in the United States, Canada, and Uganda. Some youth volunteers were new to YVC, and others had completed many service hours with YVC. They were first asked to respond on how they felt at the end of their service (post-test) and then to reflect on how they felt at the beginning of their service experience (reflective pre-test). Also taking the survey were 181 youth who had not participated in YVC.

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Key Findings

Pre-test and post-test results showed statistically significant improvements across 14 indicators ($p < 0.05$) among youth volunteers. Indicators related to community stewardship skills showed the greatest increases.

The five indicators highlighted below had the largest increase in the percentage of youth reporting the highest impact from YVC participation. The figures represent the percentage of youth who self-rated an improvement in outcome indicators due to their participation in YVC programming.

57% improved in
"I take action to meet the needs of my community."

53% improved in
"I understand the needs of my community."

50% improved in
"I understand what jobs are available in my community."

44% improved in
"I easily manage my time."

43% improved in
"I reflect on my experiences so I perform better in the future."

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Life and Career Skills

Youth volunteers reported improvements in all five life and career skills categories.

Each life and career skill category is comprised of two to four indicators. The bar chart below delineates youth volunteers who improved across each category.

The Youth Outcomes section provides the total proportion, or percentage, of youth who reported a positive change on these indicators.

A full table of average scores, percent of youth who improved, and percent of improvement is listed on page 37.

Initiative and Self-Direction
Manage goals, time; work independently; be a self-directed learner.

Overall, **67%** of youth volunteers improved in at least one of the following areas.

⬤ % of youth who improved

I EASILY MANAGE MY TIME.	44%
I REFLECT ON MY EXPERIENCES SO I PERFORM BETTER IN THE FUTURE.	43%
I AM ABLE TO COMPLETE TASKS WITHOUT DIRECT OVERSIGHT.	36%
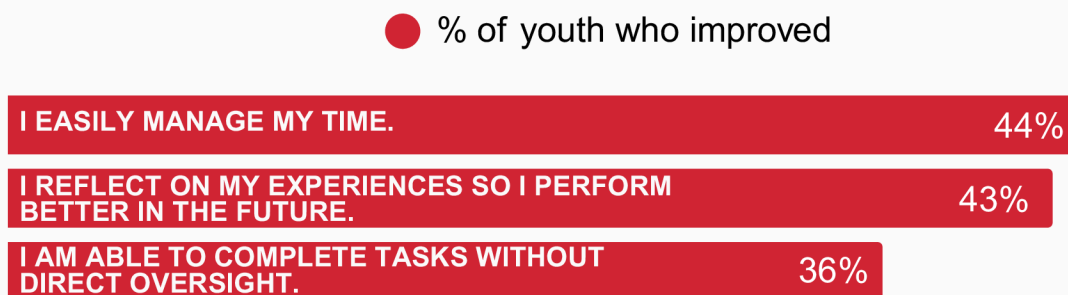
Initiative and self-direction saw the greatest amount of improvement in the largest number of youth volunteers when compared to other life and career skills.

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Life and Career Skills Continued

Flexibility and Adaptability
Adapt to change; be flexible.

Overall, **65%** of youth volunteers improved in at least one of the following areas.

● % of youth who improved

I AM COMFORTABLE WITH UNCERTAINTY.	43%
I CAN EASILY HANDLE CHANGING PRIORITIES.	39%
I HANDLE CRITICISM WELL.	37%

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Life and Career Skills Continued

Leadership and Responsibility
Guide and lead others; be responsible to others.

Overall, **60%** of youth volunteers improved in at least one of the following areas.

● % of youth who improved

I MEET THE GOALS I SET FOR MYSELF, EVEN IN THE FACE OF OBSTACLES.	38%
I AM ABLE TO ACT PROFESSIONALLY IN ALL SETTINGS.	38%
I CAN MANAGE MY WORK TO ACHIEVE HIGH-QUALITY RESULTS.	33%

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Life and Career Skills Continued

Productivity and Accountability
Manage projects; produce results.

Overall, **65%** of youth volunteers improved in at least one of the following areas.

● % of youth who improved

I CAN INSPIRE OTHERS TO BE THEIR BEST.	40%
I CAN LEAD OTHERS TO ACCOMPLISH GOALS.	38%
I UNDERSTAND HOW MY ACTIONS IMPACT BOTH ME AND OTHERS.	32%
I AM DEPENDABLE.	28%

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Life and Career Skills Continued

Social and Cross-Cultural Skills
Interact effectively with others; work effectively in diverse teams.

Overall, **57%** of youth volunteers improved in at least one of the following areas.
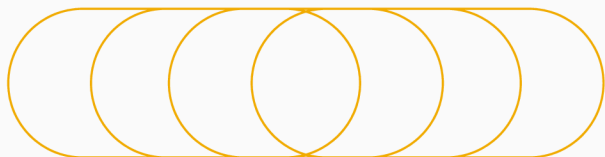
● % of youth who improved

I CAN WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT LIKE ME.	43%
I KNOW WHEN TO LISTEN AND SPEAK WHEN WORKING IN GROUPS.	36%

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Community Stewardship

The ability to understand and take action to meet the needs of the community.

Community stewardship skills saw the greatest amount of improvement among youth volunteers out of all the skills.

The strong connection to YVC's mission could be why community stewardship skills, particularly understanding and taking action to meet needs of the community, saw greater improvement than the life and career skill areas.

Overall, **70%** of youth volunteers improved in at least one of the following areas.

● % of youth who improved

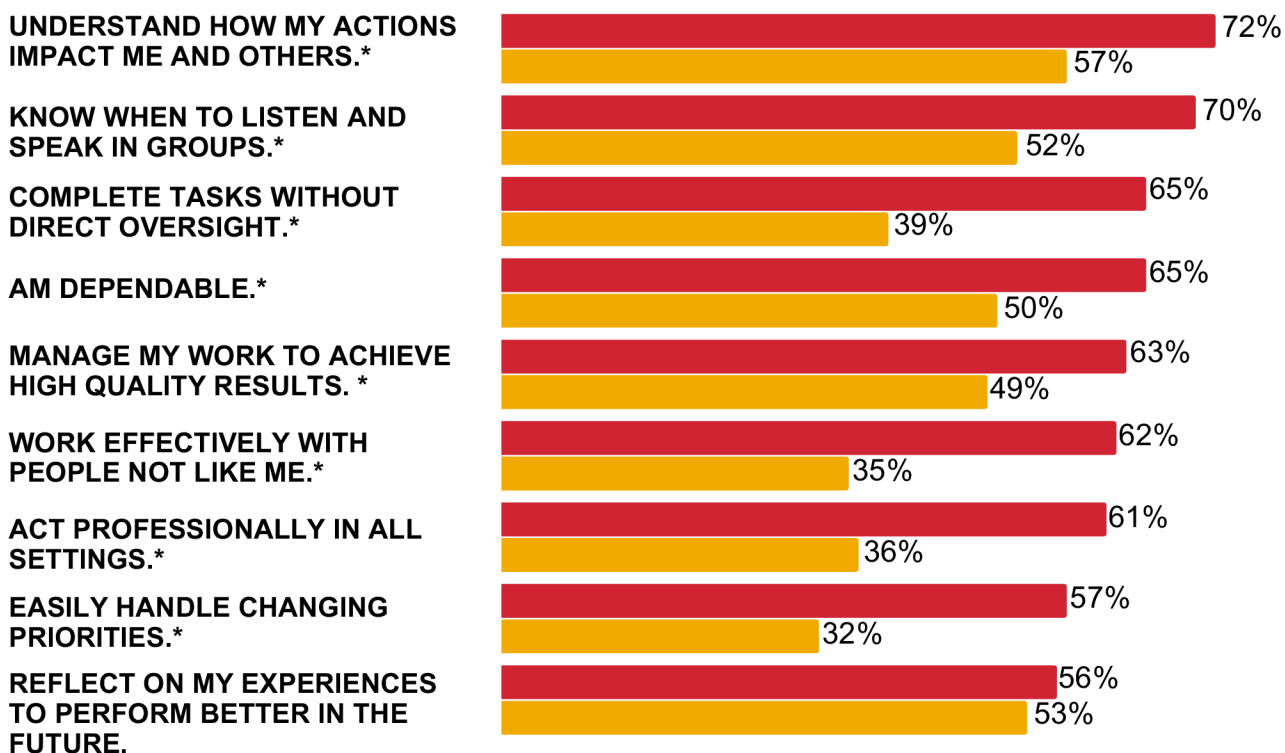|	
I TAKE ACTION TO MEET THE NEEDS OF MY COMMUNITY.	57%
I UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS OF MY COMMUNITY.	53%
I UNDERSTAND WHAT JOBS ARE AVAILABLE IN MY COMMUNITY.	50%

YOUTH OUTCOMES

YVC Impact on Youth

YVC youth reported higher responses of "very true of me" than non-YVC youth in all life and career skills. In 14 of 18 of these skills, the difference was significant* ($p<0.05$) indicating that participation in YVC programs is associated with stronger self-reported life and career skills development.

YVC Youth & Non-YVC Youth Comparison

Skill	YVC Youth	Non-YVC Youth
UNDERSTAND HOW MY ACTIONS IMPACT ME AND OTHERS.*	72%	57%
KNOW WHEN TO LISTEN AND SPEAK IN GROUPS.*	70%	52%
COMPLETE TASKS WITHOUT DIRECT OVERSIGHT.*	65%	39%
AM DEPENDABLE.*	65%	50%
MANAGE MY WORK TO ACHIEVE HIGH QUALITY RESULTS. *	63%	49%
WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH PEOPLE NOT LIKE ME.*	62%	35%
ACT PROFESSIONALLY IN ALL SETTINGS.*	61%	36%
EASILY HANDLE CHANGING PRIORITIES.*	57%	32%
REFLECT ON MY EXPERIENCES TO PERFORM BETTER IN THE FUTURE.	56%	53%

*Indicates positive improvement is statistically significant ($p<0.05$)

YVC youth participated in a pre- and post-survey measuring their experiences, while youth not participating in YVC received a single survey. Additionally, the sample of YVC youth is much larger than the sample who completed the single survey. These differences should be taken into account as any comparisons are made.
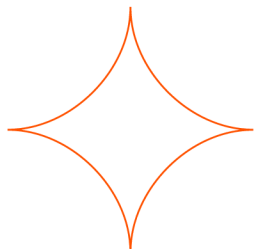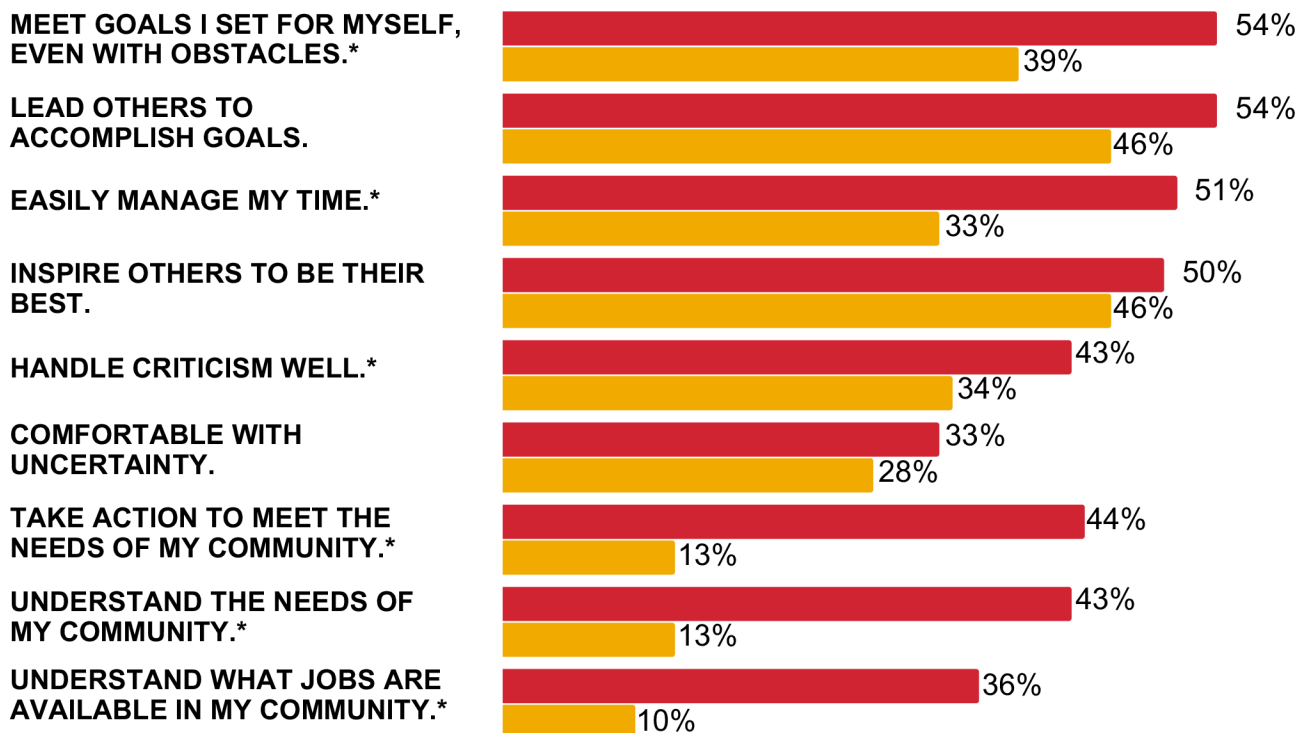
YOUTH OUTCOMES

YVC Impact on Youth Continued

YVC youth reported higher responses of "very true of me" than non-YVC youth in all life and career skills, with a statistically significant difference* (p<0.05) in 14 of the 18 skills, indicating that participation in YVC programs is associated with stronger self-reported life and career skills development.

YVC Youth & Non-YVC Youth Comparison

Skill	YVC Youth	Non-YVC Youth
MEET GOALS I SET FOR MYSELF, EVEN WITH OBSTACLES.*	54%	39%
LEAD OTHERS TO ACCOMPLISH GOALS.	54%	46%
EASILY MANAGE MY TIME.*	51%	33%
INSPIRE OTHERS TO BE THEIR BEST.	50%	46%
HANDLE CRITICISM WELL.*	43%	34%
COMFORTABLE WITH UNCERTAINTY.	33%	28%
TAKE ACTION TO MEET THE NEEDS OF MY COMMUNITY.*	44%	13%
UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS OF MY COMMUNITY.*	43%	13%
UNDERSTAND WHAT JOBS ARE AVAILABLE IN MY COMMUNITY.*	36%	10%

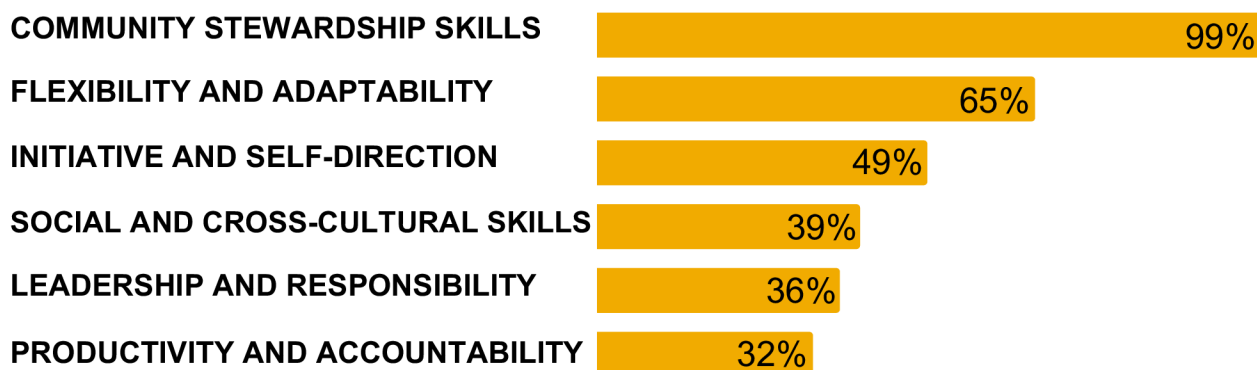*Indicates positive improvement is statistically significant (p<0.05)

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Underserved Youth

YVC uses the term underserved to describe youth who face systemic barriers to opportunities and resources. This includes youth who are economically underserved and/or youth who live in underserved geographical areas (e.g. rural counties, the inner city). Youth identified as underserved experienced increased benefits from YVC programming when compared to their peers.

The findings below highlight improvement in all six life and career skills categories.

Improvement for **underserved youth**

Category	Improvement
COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP SKILLS	99%
FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY	65%
INITIATIVE AND SELF-DIRECTION	49%
SOCIAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS	39%
LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY	36%
PRODUCTIVITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	32%

On average, the aggregate percentage of improvement of all indicators for underserved youth was higher than their peers.

Underserved: 63% improvement

Well-served: 53% improvement

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Volunteer Hours

30 hours of service appears to have the greatest impact on positive youth outcomes.

The duration of a service-learning program impacts the amount of change observed in youth volunteers. Youth volunteers who reported positive change between the start and end of service were analyzed to determine the tipping point, or the median number of completed hours necessary, before a change occurred.

20 Hours

Results indicate that 20 hours of service yields a **significant increase** in positive youth outcomes.

30 Hours

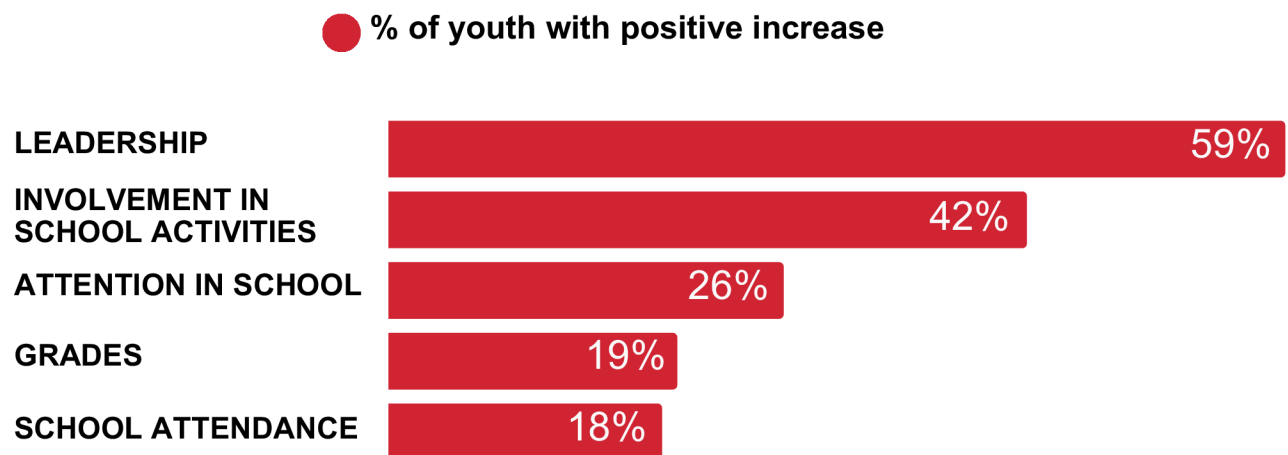Results indicate youth who reach at least 30 hours of service report the **highest amount of positive change**.

Analysis reveals sustained positive scores beyond 30 hours of service, but the rate of change in youth survey responses slows, suggesting that the most substantial positive shifts occur within the first 30 hours for a significant portion of participants.

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Academic Impact

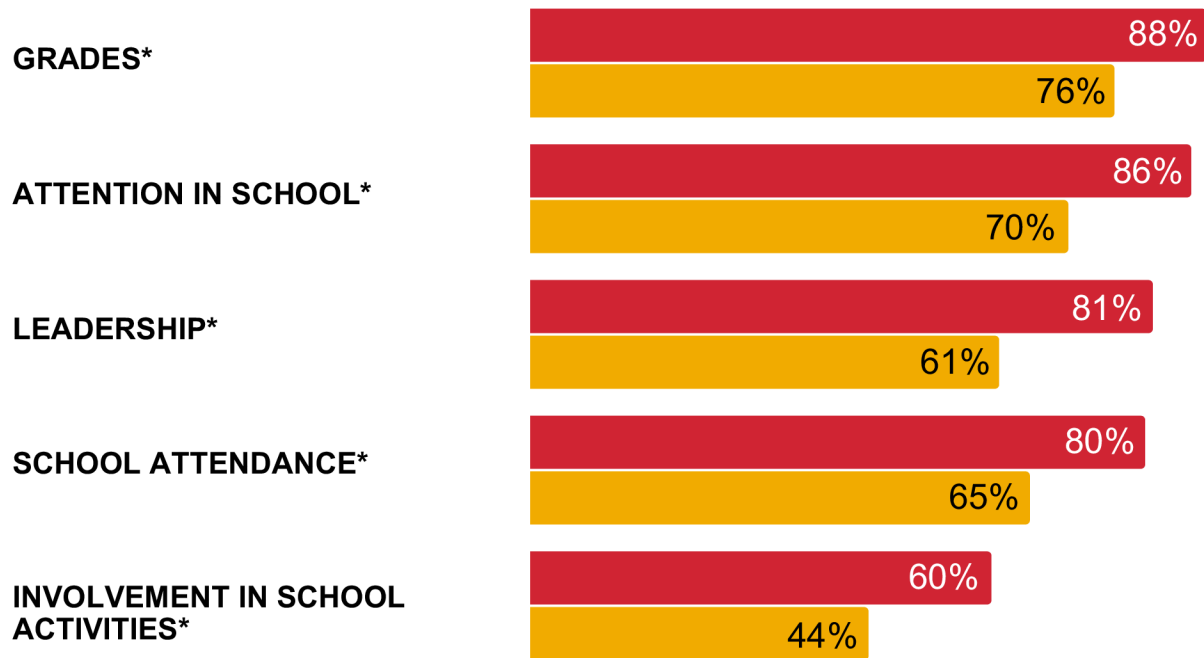Youth volunteers rated leadership and academic confidence higher after volunteer service.

The number of hours served varied, but overall, youth expressed positive results in their leadership skills and academic outlook.
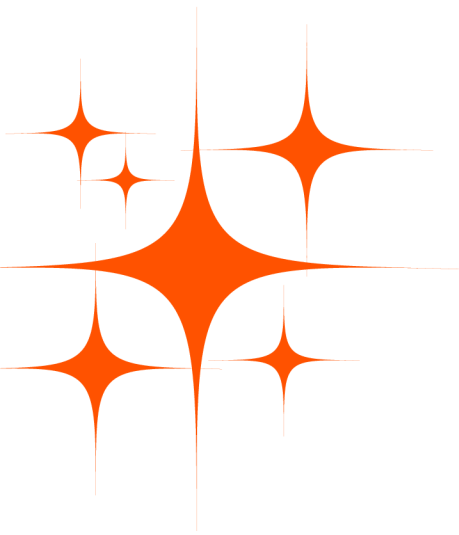
● **% of youth with positive increase**

LEADERSHIP	59%
INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES	42%
ATTENTION IN SCHOOL	26%
GRADES	19%
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE	18%

YOUTH OUTCOMES

YVC youth were more likely than **non-YVC youth** to rate academic impact indicators as "excellent" or "good." For each indicator, the percentage of **YVC youth** providing positive responses was significantly higher* (p<0.05) compared to **youth who did not participate in YVC.**

Positive responses of academic impact for **YVC Youth** and **Non-YVC Youth**

GRADES*
88%
76%

ATTENTION IN SCHOOL*
86%
70%

LEADERSHIP*
81%
61%

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE*
80%
65%

INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES*
60%
44%

*Indicates positive improvement is statistically significant (p<0.05)

Academic Narrative Review

The impact on academics is a new inquiry for YVC evaluation. YVC implements service-learning in school settings through class curriculum and after-school clubs, along with programming in community settings outside of school. The data from this evaluation supports existing research on the academic benefits of service-learning, showing that YVC youth report greater improvements in grades, attendance, leadership, and school involvement than non-YVC youth ($p<0.05$). This aligns with studies linking service-learning to increased engagement, motivation, and academic success (Celio et al., 2011; Furco & Jones, 2016). YVC's model fosters student ownership of projects, enhancing leadership and critical thinking skills (Prentice & Robinson, 2010).

Research shows that after time involved in service-learning activities, students exhibit a more positive attitude toward school and education (Celio, Durlak, Dymnicki 2011). Service-learning has also led to increased persistence, engagement, belonging, and motivation for learning (Furco & Jones 2016). All youth engaged in service-learning through YVC have opportunities to select volunteer projects about which they are passionate. This allows them more agency and ownership of the volunteer programming available, with some taking on additional leadership roles in project development. Service-learning also increases attachment to the school – students develop a sense of connectedness (Billig & Sordel 2003).

This evaluation found that 18% of youth reported a positive increase in attendance and 42% reported a positive increase in involvement in school activities. Feeling the pride of involvement in planning and implementation and the direct result of a service-learning opportunity could be part of increased motivation and a sense of responsibility.

Further academic improvements are also seen through service-learning. Research indicates improved grades and increased knowledge retention are linked to service-learning experiences. As noted previously, service-learning involvement leads to an increase in attendance – this, in turn, helps grades. Beyond the basics of attending class, service-learning puts students in real-life situations that allow them to think critically and logically about an outcome. In a study conducted in 2010, over three years, service-learning participants scored significantly higher than non-service-learners in critical thinking, communication, teamwork, civic responsibility, and academic development education success (Mary Prentice, Gail Robinson, 2010).

Academic Narrative Review Continued

Service-learning through YVC involves youth in real-life learning situations that apply academic knowledge in hands-on and practical settings. Knowledge retention is increased because youth learn by doing, not by lecture (Mary Prentice, Gail Robinson, 2010). Through this evaluation, 19% of youth reported a positive increase in grades after involvement in YVC. By applying what is learned in school in real-life settings, students improve in academic settings.

Implementing service-learning programs for underserved youth is especially important. On average, growing up well is more challenging when you live in poverty. Low socioeconomic status is negatively linked to a wide range of child and adolescent well-being indicators. (Roehlkepartain, Eugene C., 2008). Research shows that young people from disadvantaged circumstances benefit from participation in service-learning in several ways, including a greater significant commitment to learning and better school attendance, grades, and academic success than low-income students who did not participate. Underserved youth participating in service-learning activities are also more likely to believe they are contributing to the community, engaged in learning, and have other positive outcomes. They also tend to demonstrate more positive civic attitudes and characteristics than youth from their peers who do not volunteer (Roehlkepartain, Eugene C., 2008).

Additionally, service-learning requires collaboration with peers, sharing ideas, and working through trial and error – all practices help youth leadership skills and confidence rise to the forefront. Leadership and confidence, paired with motivation, a sense of responsibility, retention of knowledge, and improvement in grades, are trends that build upon one another to impact youth in academic settings positively. Research shows that students involved in service-learning have higher graduation rates (Mungo 2017). Service-learning connects real-life experiences with education, and students gain and develop skills associated with improved academic performance.
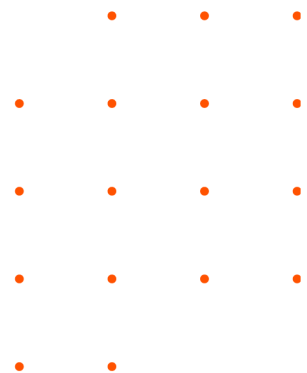
YOUTH OUTCOMES

Mental Health Impact

YVC volunteers showed that their time with YVC positively impacted indicators of emotional well-being and self-worth. Specifically, two-thirds of youth volunteers reported that their emotional well-being and self-worth had increased, with nearly half indicating it had significantly increased.

The graph shows the impact of YVC on mental health. The numbers represent an aggregate score for the four mental health indicators for all youth. 63% reported improved mental health, and 33% reported no change.

|		
HAS IMPROVED	SOMEWHAT 35% | GREATLY 28%	63%
IS THE SAME	33%	
HAS DECREASED	3%	

"Given the significant health consequences of loneliness and isolation, we must prioritize building social connection the same way we have prioritized other critical public health issues such as tobacco, obesity, and substance use disorders. Together, we can build a country that's healthier, more resilient, less lonely, and more connected."

- U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy
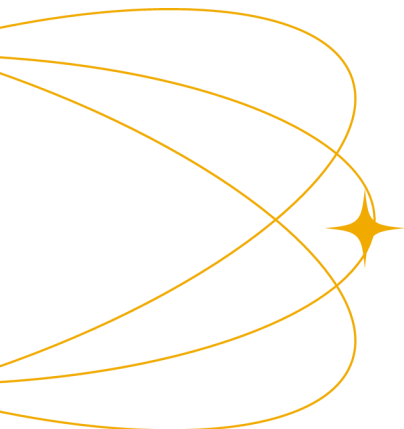
YOUTH OUTCOMES

Youth participating in YVC and those not participating in YVC were asked the same four mental health indicators: emotional well-being, self-worth, belief in their ability to make a difference, and connecting to peers. **YVC youth** scored higher across all four indicators, which are generally difficult to improve, making any positive change meaningful. Two indicators—belief in their ability to make a difference and peer connection—were significantly different between **YVC** and **non-YVC youth** ($p<0.05$). These findings highlight YVC's role in fostering agency and belonging, equipping youth with resilience and the skills to positively impact their communities.

Comparison of Mental Health Indicators for **YVC Youth** and **Non-YVC Youth**

ABILITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE*
- 73%
- 51%

CONNECT TO MY PEERS*
- 71%
- 45%

SELF-WORTH
- 55%
- 52%

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING
- 55%
- 52%
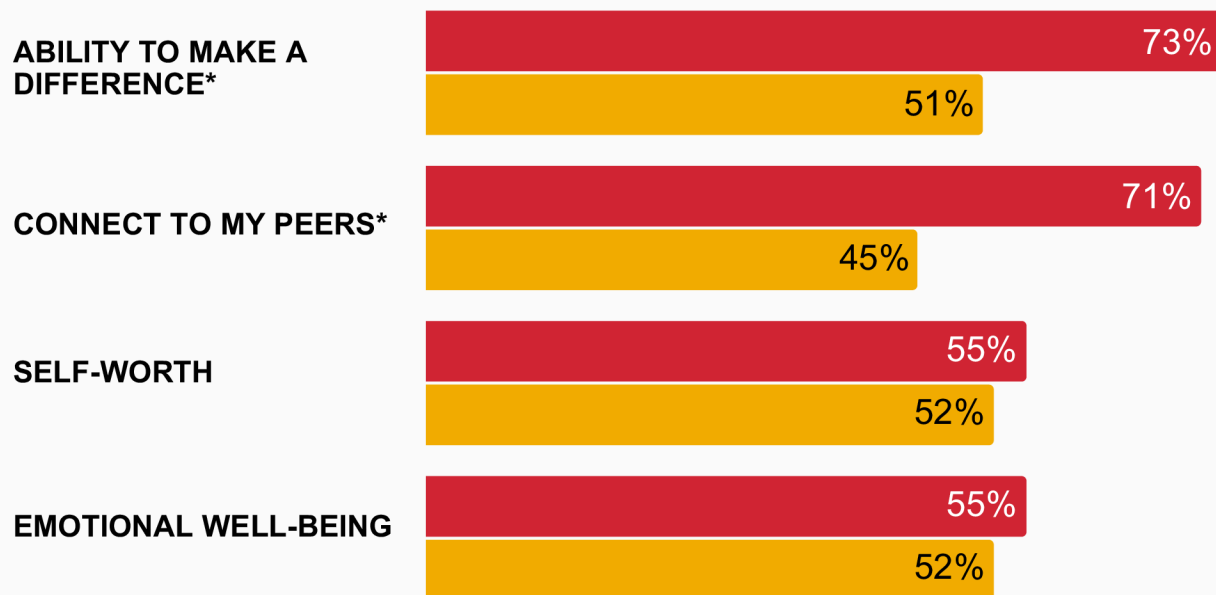
*Indicates positive improvement is statistically significant ($p<0.05$)

Mental Health Narrative Review

Given the increasing prevalence of mental health challenges among youth, YVC incorporated mental health as a new inquiry into its evaluation framework. The findings from the current report further emphasize how service-learning experiences like YVC help mitigate the decline in youth mental health. The significantly higher percentage of YVC youth who reported a belief in their ability to make a difference and stronger peer connections ($p<0.05$) aligns with research showing that social connectedness and purpose contribute to positive mental well-being.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, youth mental health was declining. From 2009 to 2019, one in three high school students reported persistent sadness and hopelessness (US Surgeon General US21). The percentage of youth reporting major depressive disorder rose from 8% in 2009 to 16% in 2019 (Mental Health of America 2020). Between 2007 and 2018, suicide rates among individuals aged 10-24 in the US increased by 57%, with over 6,600 suicide deaths in this age group in 2020 (Curtin et al. 2020).

The pandemic amplified the causes of mental health issues – students were not attending school in person with their peers, and mental health treatment in the school setting was no longer available (Mental Health of America 2020). Through school closures, the pandemic changed how youth attended classes and how they interacted with friends. Feelings of loneliness increased, youth experienced changes in how they visited family, and access to healthcare in school settings was no longer available (Surgeon General Report 2021). Many youth struggling with mental health issues also began to see a diminished view of self-worth.

In 2021, a group of top pediatric health experts in the country declared a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health. The negative effects of the pandemic were especially severe for those already at risk, including youth with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ youth, and those from low-income backgrounds (Surgeon General Report 2021). Although mental health services for youth are available across the country, they are struggling to meet the growing demand caused by the pandemic, especially for underserved youth. Therefore, strategies aimed at strengthening youth mental health—such as enhancing protective factors, fostering school connectedness, and boosting community engagement—are essential in addressing the ongoing youth mental health crisis and the shortage of resources.

"…the challenges today's generation of young people face are unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate. And the effect these challenges have had on their mental health is devastating."
Vivek Murthy, U.S. Surgeon General. Protecting Youth Mental Health, 2021.

As young people grow and develop, they reach important mental and emotional milestones. This process, known as achieving developmental competence, involves handling various social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral tasks at different stages of development. Part of this competence includes conforming to cultural and social norms and cultivating a positive sense of identity, confidence, and well-being. Various contextual factors can either support or obstruct this process, often referred to as protective and risk factors. (Eccles, J., and J.A Gootman, 2002). Protective factors are characteristics, conditions, or behaviors—either individual or environmental—that help reduce the impact of stressful life events, enhance a person's ability to avoid risks or dangers, and foster social and emotional skills necessary for thriving in all areas of life, both now and in the future. The CDC Division of Adolescent and School Health suggests service-learning as an effective strategy for promoting these protective factors in youth.

Mental Health Narrative Review Continued

Service-learning experiences such as YVC provide ways to mitigate the decline in youth mental health. Through team-based service experiences, youth increase their opportunity for social connection and connections to the greater community. Studies show that the positive social outcomes of volunteering encourage other positive health and well-being outcomes. So, increasing connectedness can positively improve mental health (Nichol B, Wilson R, et al., 2023). This evaluation corroborates these findings. For example, 71% of surveyed youth engaged with YVC reported feeling a greater connection to their peers. Building positive connections can decrease the effects of loneliness and foster a greater sense of belonging.

YVC allows youth to build new skills, work with others, connect volunteer experiences to educational coursework, and see the direct impact of their work. Over time, this increases confidence and positive self-worth. In YVC's survey, 55% of youth engaged with YVC reported increased self-worth. Along with self-worth, other research has indicated that volunteering "may help to provide a sense of purpose" and helps to support pro-social behaviors among volunteering, including increased reports of happiness (Lawnton, R.N., Gramatki, I., Watt, W. et al., 2020). In YVC's survey, 73% of youth reported they now understand that they can make a difference through YVC's hands-on service-learning experiences. Youth instantly see the impact of their volunteer work, which increases their sense of purpose.

Overall, service-learning can enhance social-emotional development. Activities associated with service-learning can foster resilience in ways that reduce emotional problems and enhance problem-solving by increasing motivation for learning, doing, and being (Adelman & Taylor, 2018). Service-learning through YVC allows youth to work through problem-solving as a team. This teaches patience and empathy and allows youth to learn how to work through difficulties, which are all tools in resiliency - a key component of strong mental health skills (Yeh 2010).

"Volunteering or service-learning for youth that regularly engages [in volunteering] is positively correlated with happiness, indicating volunteer service may be an equitable strategy for promoting positive mental health" (Bogonov 2008). This evaluation shows that indicators of emotional well-being and self-worth were positively impacted by their time in YVC. For example, 55% of surveyed youth reported increased emotional well-being.

When one outcome is strengthened, others are strengthened as well. Emotional well-being positively affects academic achievement, which is another inquiry of this evaluation. When mental health is stronger, it is easier to focus on academics, and students perform better (Hurbet & Hauf 2015). Service-learning enhances learning, fosters student engagement, and produces gains in social-emotional and academic learning (Wilczenski and Cook 2009). While these measures are independently measured, one cannot ignore the positive impacts that build upon one another.

In an era where youth mental health challenges, including loneliness and lack of agency, are on the rise, YVC provides structured opportunities for youth to engage meaningfully with their communities, fostering resilience and emotional growth. By allowing youth to see the direct impact of their contributions, YVC instills a sense of purpose that combats feelings of isolation and helplessness. These findings reinforce that service-learning is not just a means of civic engagement but a powerful tool for improving mental health by strengthening agency, belonging, and overall well-being.
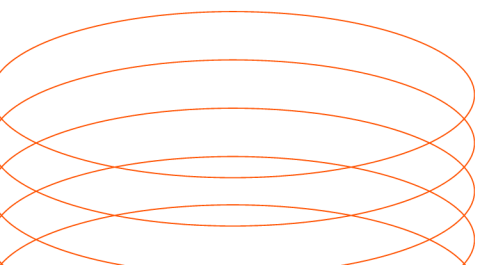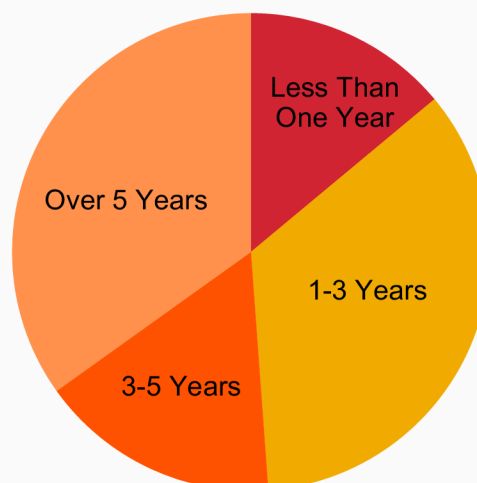
YVC AFFILIATES

Methods

The leadership evaluation surveyed Program Directors and Executive Directors using quantitative and qualitative methods. 93% of affiliates responded, and 27% of the responding affiliates had between 2 and 6 respondents.

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected in an online survey over one month, from September 15 to October 15.

Responses were examined to identify areas of excellence and areas of opportunity.

Program Director and Executive Director tenure with their organization

Pie chart labeled: Less Than One Year, 1-3 Years, 3-5 Years, Over 5 Years

Programs by the Numbers

88% of affiliates have year-round programming

12% have school-year programming only

Program Directors and Executive Directors spend an average of 23 hours per week on summer programming.

Program Directors and Executive Directors spend an average of 21 hours per week on school programming.

Affiliates report utilizing the online resource library, the service-learning library, monthly Program Director Roundtables, fundraising support such as grant assistance, Summit workshops, and personalized support from YVC Headquarters.

YVC AFFILIATES

Value of YVC

100% of YVC leadership feels that:

☀ YVC positively benefits the youth participants.
☀ YVC positively benefits their organization.
☀ YVC positively benefits their community.
☀ YVC project participation develops job skills for youth.

90% of affiliates feel YVC Headquarters provides excellent support.

YVC PROGRAM POSITIVELY BENEFITS YOUTH PARTICIPANTS. — 100%
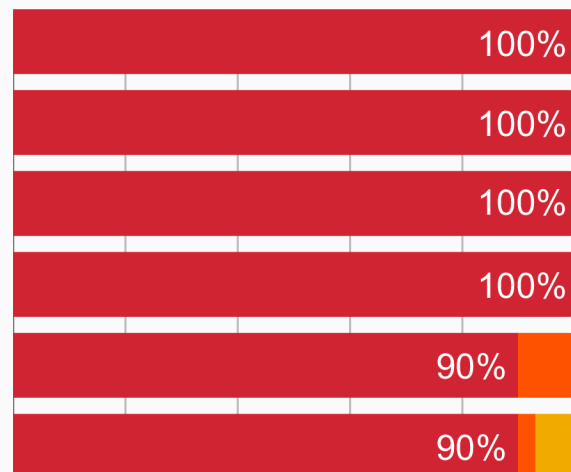
YVC PROGRAM POSITIVELY BENEFITS OUR COMMUNITY. — 100%

YVC PROGRAM HAS BENEFITED OUR ORGANIZATION. — 100%

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS DEVELOP JOB SKILLS ON YVC PROJECTS. — 100%

YVC HEADQUARTERS PROVIDES EXCELLENT SUPPORT FOR OUR AFFILIATE. — 90%

USE PROGRAM EVALUATION & SUPPORT PLAN TO SET GOALS. — 90%

Positive Responses
Neutral Responses
Negative Responses

YVC AFFILIATES

Affiliate Support

80% of affiliates use all support services in some capacity, with the exception of volunteer insurance and online fundraising materials.
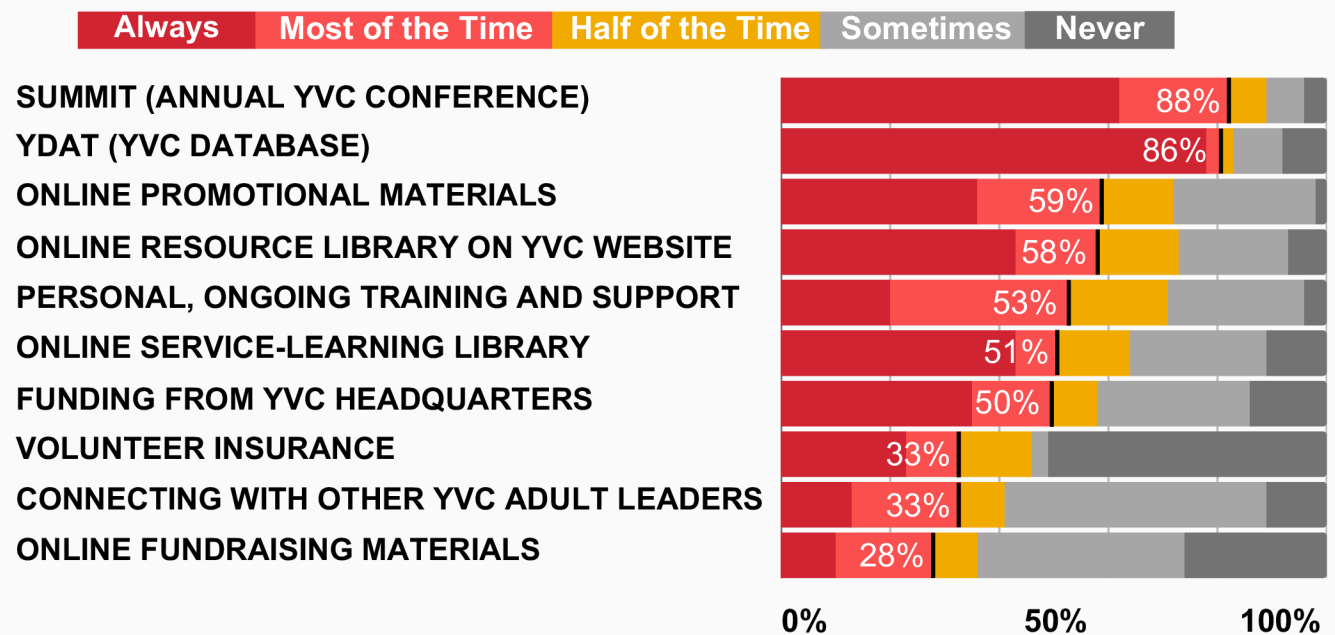
60% of Program Directors and Executive Directors are responsible for fundraising for their programs.

69% of affiliates currently use fundraising support from YVC Headquarters.

88% report that they plan to utilize online fundraising materials from YVC Headquarters.

75% of affiliates report an increase in utilizing the YVC website since 2018.

40% of Program Directors and Executive Directors connect with other YVC adult leaders only about half of the time or more.

Always	Most of the Time	Half of the Time	Sometimes	Never

SUMMIT (ANNUAL YVC CONFERENCE)	88%	
YDAT (YVC DATABASE)	86%	
ONLINE PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS	59%	
ONLINE RESOURCE LIBRARY ON YVC WEBSITE	58%	
PERSONAL, ONGOING TRAINING AND SUPPORT	53%	
ONLINE SERVICE-LEARNING LIBRARY	51%	
FUNDING FROM YVC HEADQUARTERS	50%	
VOLUNTEER INSURANCE	33%	
CONNECTING WITH OTHER YVC ADULT LEADERS	33%	
ONLINE FUNDRAISING MATERIALS	28%	

0%   50%   100%
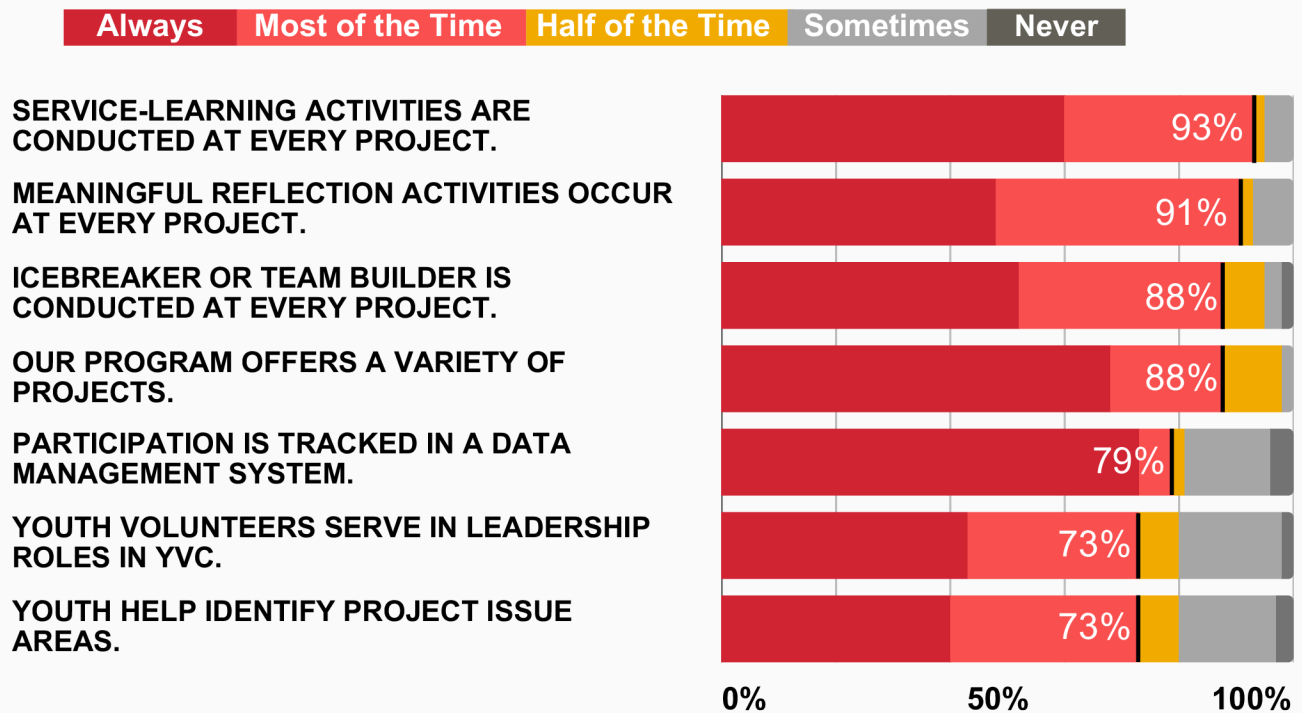
YVC AFFILIATES

YVC Model Fidelity

90% of affiliates consistently (always or most of the time) include both service-learning and meaningful reflection during service projects.

88% of affiliates include icebreakers or team builders that help the youth connect.

79% of affiliates consistently track participation (always or most of the time) in a data management system.

78% feel that most of the time youth can explain YVC.

73% regularly include youth in leadership roles to help identify project issue areas.

Always	Most of the Time	Half of the Time	Sometimes	Never

SERVICE-LEARNING ACTIVITIES ARE CONDUCTED AT EVERY PROJECT.	93%
MEANINGFUL REFLECTION ACTIVITIES OCCUR AT EVERY PROJECT.	91%
ICEBREAKER OR TEAM BUILDER IS CONDUCTED AT EVERY PROJECT.	88%
OUR PROGRAM OFFERS A VARIETY OF PROJECTS.	88%
PARTICIPATION IS TRACKED IN A DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM.	79%
YOUTH VOLUNTEERS SERVE IN LEADERSHIP ROLES IN YVC.	73%
YOUTH HELP IDENTIFY PROJECT ISSUE AREAS.	73%

0%   50%   100%

YVC AFFILIATES

Summit Impacts

83% of affiliates have attended Summit in the last 3 years.

Favorites

❄ Learning from and networking with other affiliates.

❄ Seeing their place in an international movement that is making an impact.

❄ Being motivated, inspired, and reinvigorated.

❄ Bonding with their affiliate team and with other affiliates.

❄ Meeting HQ staff.

Hopes

❄ Classes and workshops can vary in value depending on the design of the YVC affiliate.

❄ Discussions at Summit are great, but distance makes it hard to turn them into collaborations.

❄ It is also hard to stay connected afterward, even though many would like to.

"Summit is great for our youth because they get to meet youth from all over the country who are committed to service. I believe it has a lasting impact."

YVC AFFILIATES

YVC Trends

Communication in the last 5 years

52% of affiliates report changing how they communicate with youth in the last 5 years. Affiliates have adapted to evolving communication needs, leveraging technology to stay connected with youth. Text and email remain the primary channels, with text being the most common. Directors use various apps such as Signup Genius, Mailchimp, Remind, What's App, Group Me, BAND App, Google Voice, customized YVC app, virtual meetings, group texts, and monthly newsletters. Social media is used but is limited in scope because most youth do not utilize Facebook, and some do not use Instagram.

Emerging Needs of Youth

In recent years, there has been a surge in youth who need support in mental health, social skills, academics, and career preparation. The pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, leading to increased anxiety, isolation, and disrupted education. Youth have shorter attention spans, requiring more encouragement to stay focused and engaged on project tasks. Youth lack stamina in some physically intense projects. Youth participation can be inconsistent, and many youth register for projects but struggle with commitment and follow-through. There is a need for a focus on advanced academic skills and STEM. Additional skills needed include resume writing, interviewing, CPR, CERT, financial literacy, and career guidance.

To combat social anxiety, affiliates are creating welcoming, inclusive environments, facilitating relationships, and youth peer mentors. They are providing more details to the youth to reduce uncertainty. Affiliates are also working with their counties to provide information to help guide teachers and leaders in assisting youth.

YVC AFFILIATES

YVC Trends

Network Engagement

Engagement & Connecting Leaders

Affiliates heavily favor networking with other affiliates and peers across the YVC network. Summit proves to be one of the greatest values offered through YVC. The event allows like-minded leaders to learn, share ideas, and bond. Leaders expressed the need to continue maintaining connections once returning home. Online collaborative experiences like Program Director Roundtables, YVC Wednesdays, and other Zoom sessions should continue to be hosted through YVC Headquarters.

Emerging practices among the network include regional volunteer events and days in which affiliates simultaneously engage in the same event in their respective communities and share experiences over social media. Affiliates also suggested that YVC Headquarters provide tools for collaborative projects and regional events and host an annual program director meeting, quarterly Zooms, and more.

Engagement & Connecting Youth

Affiliates reported that youth value increased connections across the YVC network, similar to adult leaders. Suggestions for connecting youth include regional volunteer events, simultaneous volunteer events, and virtual meetings. In addition to these ideas, affiliates suggest implementing non-volunteer events to connect and bond.

Engaging Alumni

58% of affiliates reported that alumni stay connected with programs by speaking at community events, fundraising events, training meetings, or filling the roles of Team Leaders during summer programming. One affiliate reported having an alumni group that hosts annual events. The remaining 42% of affiliates report that they have done no work to engage their program's alumni and expressed that it is a challenge due to college plans.

YVC AFFILIATES

Future Priorities

To address these evolving needs, affiliates should continue to prioritize the following:

Strengthen Organizational Capacity: Directors cited more staff capacity and funding as barriers to consistent, effective programming. Affiliates will require the commitment of their board and staff as they work to increase staff retention, raise necessary funding, and design a clear plan and road map for moving forward.

YVC Affiliates Meet Youth Where They Are: Due to the effects of the pandemic and social media on youth, affiliates must ensure they are assisting youth with mental health challenges, career-connected learning, and leadership development.

Adapt to Changing Youth Needs: Directors stated that youth sometimes volunteer to meet requirements for high school graduation, school clubs, court orders, or church. They also volunteer to gain job skill experience and enhance college applications and scholarships. Directors report that transportation and busy schedules are the most significant barriers to youth participation. Affiliates must continually develop creative strategies to attract and retain youth, especially those with busy schedules. Affiliates will also need to focus on providing meaningful projects that meet community needs while being engaging and fun for the youth. Affiliates will need to continuously assess the evolving needs of youth and adjust programs accordingly.

Leverage Technology: Affiliates should utilize technology to facilitate communication, engagement, and remote volunteer opportunities.

These current practices are essential to continue to empower young people and make a lasting impact on their lives.

Recommendations

Youth Volunteer Corps has impacted youth's lives for more than 37 years. This success is partly due to constant evaluation, review, learning, being open, and keeping up with changing times.

For Organizations

Connecting with and navigating various school systems to create meaningful collaboration can be challenging. However, YVC Headquarters can bridge the gap by providing validation, recommendations, and teacher training hours.

Changes in social media happen rapidly. Stay current on the best social media channels to reach youth, parents, and guardians. Ensure youth safety in all social media decisions or recommendations.

These recommendations are offered with the intent to ensure YVC remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of youth.

YVC AFFILIATES

Recommendations Continued

For Mental Health

Systemic change is essential for youth mental health, but individuals can do what they can. YVC can determine what role they can best fill in these efforts and continue prioritizing mental health training for YVC Headquarters and YVC network staff.

YVC can continue to make positive impacts toward youth mental health through team building, icebreakers, building relationships with youth, and educating youth on how to navigate challenges. When youth have adults who listen, peers to turn to, and a program to engage with, it makes them feel more hopeful, builds resiliency, and helps them feel capable of facing challenges.

YVC's role in mental health can also become part of the solution. Although some mental health concerns are treatable, all entities that impact a youth's environment can play a part in making positive impacts toward mental health: families, school, government, media, entertainment, healthcare, and more. YVC can be an integral part of the youth's environment to make a positive impact on their mental health.

YVC should design plans to help youth advocate for mental health reform. Provide resources to educate youth on how to spread awareness, lead trainings, and support the implementation of mental health reform in schools.

For Youth

As the needs and culture of youth change and develop over time, YVC should remain committed to engaging youth voices to maintain relevance with their participants. One way to do this is to utilize the International Youth Advisory Board in broader contexts, considering these youth as experts. YVC should commit to learning from these youth and remain open and receptive to their information and guidance. To further increase the extent to which the organization engages youth voice, YVC should incorporate youth input into the design of their next strategic plan.

The organization should also work to increase youth leadership opportunities. YVC should consider increasing the size of the International Youth Advisory Board or create other specialized youth boards. YVC should also provide youth with more training and support in college preparation, career exploration, and life skills.

For Alumni

Task the YVC Alumni Network to host events each year.
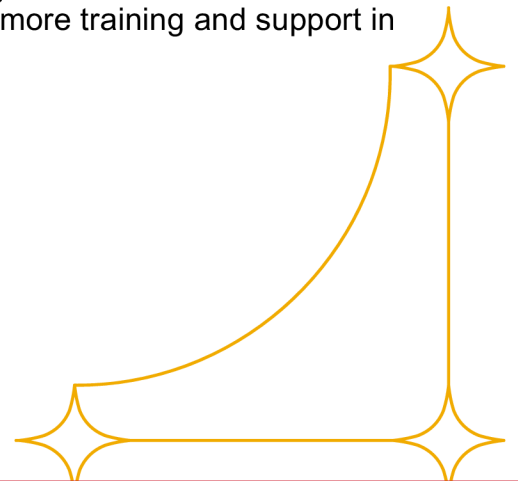
SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Nonparametric analysis description:
The indicators in the instrument used to measure youth experiences and outcomes of their time with YVC were analyzed utilizing a nonparametric test to account for a possible wide-ranging distribution of volunteer hours and experiences. It allows for a holistic analysis of all indicators as an entire measure of the experience and provides a statistical estimate of the percentage who self-reported improvement. For all Youth Outcome measurement indicators, results were statistically significant at the $p<.005$ level. Pgs. 9-14.

Post-Test and non-YVC Assessment Analysis:
YVC youth and non-YVC youth volunteers were provided with a set of self-assessment questions regarding academic and social impact indicators. The reported percentages and differences between the two groups were summarized. Pgs. 15-16.

Mean difference and t-tests to Assess Volunteer Hours Impact:
A mean difference analysis compared the average (mean) values of volunteers' negative and positive score differences to the number of volunteer hours. This determined that the number of hours and positive scores results in a meaningful threshold and is not by random chance. This does not necessarily account for volunteers who would have positive scores regardless and/or volunteer for many more hours residing on the far tail of the dataset. Still, it allows us to see the average to expect. Additionally, a t-test lets us see the difference between positive and negative scores across hours. Pg. 18.

YOUTH OUTCOMES

This table represents the average pre and post scores of each Life and Career Skill indicator across all youth before YVC and after YVC on pages 9-14. Pre and post-tests were provided at the same time. The percent of improvement column only calculates the respondents who had a positive change. It does not reflect respondents who had no change or a negative change in their scores.

Indicator	Average Before Rating	Average After Rating	Percent of Youth Who Improved	Percent of Improvement
I easily manage my time.	2.9	3.4	44%	17%
I reflect on my experiences so I perform better in the future.	3.0	3.5	43%	17%
I am able to complete tasks without direct oversight.	3.2	3.6	36%	13%
I am comfortable with uncertainty.	2.6	3.1	43%	19%
I can easily handle changing priorities.	3.1	3.5	39%	13%
I handle criticism well.	2.9	3.3	37%	14%
I meet the goals I set for myself, even in the face of obstacles.	3.0	3.4	38%	13%
I am able to act professionally in all settings.	3.1	3.5	38%	13%
I can manage my work to achieve high quality results.	3.3	3.6	33%	9%
I can inspire others to be their best.	3.0	3.4	40%	13%
I can lead others to accomplish goals.	3.0	3.4	38%	13%
I understand how my actions impact both me and other people.	3.3	3.7	32%	12%
I am dependable.	3.3	3.6	28%	9%
I am able to work effectively with people not like me.	3.1	3.6	43%	16%
I know when to listen and speak when working in groups.	3.3	3.7	36%	12%
I take action to meet the needs of my community.	2.7	3.4	57%	26%
I understand the needs of my community.	2.9	3.5	53%	21%
I understand what jobs are available in my community.	2.8	3.4	50%	21%

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