



2017-18 NBA Ministry and Mission Grantees
Impact Report:
Kitchen Apprenticeship Program at Sanctuary Cafe for Opportunity Youth
Chicago, Illinois

Inside of the cafe at University Christian Church, our home congregation, we want to offer certificate-level hospitality training in a paid work environment to youth who are disconnected from school, family, or work (Opportunity Youth). Each young adult will gain skills and be connected to resources/local businesses for larger opportunities after our program.

Mission Area: At-Risk Children and Youth **Innovation Grant:** US \$10,000

Goals, Outcomes, and Learnings:

Early in the year, we had to pause to reshape and reinvent the program when we discovered that we would need a bigger budget to run the program in the particular iteration we had envisioned. We had to discern the best ways to move forward with serving more young people and guaranteeing successful placements.

When we applied for the NBA Mission and Ministry Grant, there were four outcomes or goals we listed on the application. Below I will comment on each:

- **Goal 1-** *"10 people will receive direct services, moving from the prison pipeline to the jobs pipeline"* - If we had spent all of the grant, along with other funding, we would have easily met this goal. Ensuring that youth actually show up to their new jobs was another challenge, and we consider success not only entering a jobs pipeline but being able to equip them for sustained success.

- **Goal 2-** *"Offer a model for other organizations"* - We did accomplish this; several other cafe-based nonprofit organizations were interested in how we were able to keep high-risk youth sustained for even six weeks.
- **Goal 3 -** *"The Christian Church being visible as a change agent providing IMPACT in the local community"* - Many of the youth in our program offered feedback saying they felt so comfortable in our space, which was radically different from other work spaces they have tried to enter. They expressed feeling welcomed and challenged to grow, and they expressed that they would tell their friends to come by (this was why we had to stop and redesign the program). In all, there was a great interest in the Church as a result of these efforts, which exceeded our expectations and capacity.
- **Goal 4 -** *"To be in RELATIONSHIP with this population of high risk youth, not simply funneling from one program to the next"* - We took this goal seriously, to good effect. The youth felt like we were "family" and often reached out to say "thank you" or follow up post program completion. To really nurture these relationships, which is required in high risk populations, we needed to bump the funds-per-intern up to \$2500. Our limited resources ultimately meant we needed to redesign the program to meet the needs of more youth.

Challenges: There is a difference between "at risk" and "high risk" when describing the youth we are serving. "At risk" may mean they are in school but live in communities broken by poverty, violence, and opportunity drought. Still, many "at risk" youth are able to avoid the pitfalls of prison and poverty by remaining connected to a positive network through school, church, or other civic institutions. On the other hand, "high risk" indicates a severing from these networks in a way that is definite but not final; these youth have experienced such trauma that they lack trust for/are disconnected from school and other civic institutions, even family. "High risk"

youth are already involved in gangs, or recently detached from them, and are directly involved in (or usually, one degree separated from) the drugs and violence that break communities.

I say all this to say that our biggest challenge, which we did not see going into this project, was the difficulty young people would have reintegrating into their neighborhood, family, school, or a new job. Sometimes they would simply not show up for a new job, because the relationship and trust were not in place. This happened at the beginning of their 6 weeks here; sometimes they would "no show" and there would be no reason, only to find out later (after our relationship was formed) that they were leery of our intent. The instinct is to not coddle these youth that have lived such a difficult life - that we would be rebuffed for doing so ("that's soft") - but the opposite is true. Consistent follow up and deep expressions of love are required for this to be a success. This also cannot be seen as merely an "internship" because many job settings are simply not equipped for the variance that comes with this population. We are structured for deep tolerance and flexibility, while creating sustained accountability, and so we have restructured from a job setting to a *job readiness* program to create incentives and help ease the transition into the real workplace.

Learnings:

- Money does not matter as much in sustaining youth in the program; it was other things, such as patience, accountability, and tough-but-sincere love that created the pathway for sustained success. The current status quo thinking on high risk youth is "if they are making money over there, we'll need to give them as much or more money to get them away." The reality is the opposite; it is the community formed that is so compelling. For us to offer an equally compelling

sense of community and care, AND to have a little money and job preparation come with it, is the real attraction to what our program offers.

- Emphasize relationship/direct contact over placing high risk youth in a job setting too soon. They will not keep the job if they have not learned to adjust to what that newer, harsher reality will be like. The bulk of our six weeks was about giving them a job that got them ready for another job, and toward the end we shifted to a more relaxed workplace that prepared them for the next step in a loving way.
- The higher the risk/trauma experienced by these youth, the more intangibles will interfere with success. We have had no-shows and they did not even know why they did not show up; deep trauma begins to unseat logic, so creating a loving environment is key.
- Follow up afterwards is key. So many programs simply "graduate" kids and turn them loose on a harsh world. We were warned from many other programs that experienced this failure to do the follow up work.

Looking Ahead:

- We are going to move outside of the Sanctuary Cafe, because it is too dependent upon having skilled labor to meet its outcomes. To move slower with these youth, we also do not want to weigh down the cafe and its need to turn a profit (running restaurants is hard and the requirements are strict). We have a few new locations in mind and are starting the new iteration of this program.
- We will be emphasizing the communal/cohort aspect of the program, over a more competitive "get a job, keep a job" tone. Groups of kids will come in

together and work together on specific projects, while receiving counseling and job preparation skills, and they will be paid once they complete the program. This is to ensure sustained participation.

- These cohorts will combine youth of all risk levels. We have found that being around other successful or driven youth spurs a different type of competitive drive - a drive to succeed as their peers appear to be.
- We will be able to spend less per youth with the same outcomes met.

We are grateful for the support from the NBA Mission and Ministry Grant. When other organizations give money to this project, they come from a more regimented paradigm of success and failure, they want to know "whether this was worth it" or not, and that is often linked to outcomes like graduation or other STEM/STEAM related outcomes. These are fine, but it was good to have a different kind of support from NBA; one that allowed us to be more flexible, and even pause to reconfigure. What we have left of this grant we can use to make a significant impact in the months to come.

As the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. Founded in 1887 by six women responding to the needs of the day and on their doorsteps, for more than 130 years the NBA has continued to serve "the least of these." Learn more at www.nbacares.org.