Positive Youth Development Opportunities in Vocational Programming

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Rev. Edgar Helms, founder of Goodwill International, said "Friends of Goodwill, be dissatisfied with your work until every handicapped and unfortunate person in your community has an opportunity to develop to his fullest usefulness and enjoy a maximum of abundant living" (*Goodwill's Heritage, Mission, Vision and Values*, 2009). This defining foundation of his work is reflective in the current mission statement for my employer, Goodwill of the Heartland "to advance the social and economic wellbeing of people who experience barriers to independence" (*Goodwill's Heritage, Mission, Vision and Values*, 2009).

In a moment of serendipity in my life, I started employment five years ago at Goodwill of the Heartland the day after my family and I found our new church home at Solon United Methodist Church, the first congregation that Rev. Edgar Helms served. Although Goodwill was born in Boston, well after Helms had been called to serve that urban community, I have always felt this connection was a sign I had landed in the right places for me. I have spent five years serving the mission through supported employment for adults with barriers to independence, carrying a client caseload and coordinating, training, and supervising the staff in my department.

Although Goodwill carries out its mission in a variety of settings, I had not personally been involved in our youth services programs, and until the combined impacts of COVID-19 and the Derecho storm, I planned to complete my internship somewhere else. In another moment of clarity, and the assistance of my graduate advisor, my path turned to Goodwill again. I met with Iowa City youth services program staff member [name redacted], and her supervisor Carol, and formalized plans to assist with Iowa City area youth services programming during the spring 2021 school semester for my project.

The youth services programming for the Iowa City area is small, and [name redacted] was the only employee (however, [name redacted] eventually left Goodwill in April 2021). She spent the bulk of her time providing Making the Grade services for high school students in grades 10-12, attending City High School in the Iowa City Community School District (ICCSD) who are referred to her program by their Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) case manager. These students qualify for services as "potentially eligible" for IVRS and receive pre-employment transition services (Pre-Ets) as their families choose whether to navigate through the application process for formal IVRS eligibility, if desired. Criteria for Pre-Ets service include the following: at least the age of 14 but no older than 21, continued enrollment in an educational institution, and a documented disability through a 504, IEP, or alternative documentation of disability. [name redacted] provided programming in the five approved Pre-Ets areas: job exploration counseling activities, workplace readiness trainings, instructions in self-advocacy, work-based learning experiences, and counseling on opportunities.

Each student's personalized Making the Grade plan was created in conjunction with IVRS planning meetings, and the student's IEP meetings and ongoing communication with the student's support team. Students aged 14 and above are required to have transition planning, including vocational support needs, included and updated in their IEP plans and although not required by law, 504 plans generally include vocational transition planning and relevant goals as well. [name redacted] participated in providing input before, during, and after these meetings to ensure goals were developed that fit each student's individual plan. Although the service is individualized, Making the Grade programming often included group-based learning opportunities, which were relied on heavily throughout COVID-19 as ICCSD began the year solely online and then transitioned into a hybrid model for most of the year. Visitors to the

school were relegated to only minimum necessary interaction and did not include Making the Grade services, which had to be adapted for virtual delivery.

[name redacted] spent the remainder of her time working with students at the ICCSD's Elizabeth Tate alternative high school, an opportunity funded with United Way grant funding. These students were referred to [name redacted]'s Career Track program via Johnson County Juvenile Court services, as youth who are currently involved with court supervision and have a financial obligation (fines or restitution) to fulfill or are considered at-risk students (any student in attendance at Tate falls under this umbrella of criteria). Career Track met as a weekly small group of around 15 students and content was delivered that followed student interests: generally applying, interviewing, and obtaining employment, as well as Career Track objectives: vocational and life skill development and educational and vocational interest identification and goal mapping. [name redacted] reported that they had learned from previous years to balance immediate goals for students with longer-term skill building to increase engagement and retention of students in the program.

[name redacted] was eager to begin utilizing the online platform www.virtualjobshadow.com, a new program Goodwill acquired to provide interactive experiences virtually during COVID-19. [name redacted] planned to work individually with students to define vocational interests and skill matches, life skill development, and bridge this program into real life vocational assistance by providing employment support for participants looking for and maintaining a job. [name redacted] reported that first semester attendance of Career Track was sporadic and attributed this to the hybrid attendance model used by the district, and the requirement that Career Track be held remotely due to ICCSD policy minimizing visitors. [name redacted] and [name redacted], the juvenile court liaison who assisted her, met

solely via Zoom with individual students during the first semester and had little success to report, as a lot of the activities of years past were meant for in-person student groups, and there were little employment opportunities available for students looking for work, due to COVID-19 restrictions in Johnson County. In addition, students failed to show for Zoom appointments they had signed up for.

When discussing youth services programming overall, [name redacted] reported one of the biggest challenges is securing funding for youth who need vocational assistance. IVRS will fund services for youth with diagnosed disabilities, and she had a grant from Juvenile Court for youth formally involved in supervision and the other at-risk students she was able to serve in the small time she had for Career Track, but this left a large group of youth in the community unserved. [name redacted] felt there was a need to expand meaningful supported employment services to at-risk youth, youth in poverty, and youth in foster care. Goodwill of the Heartland has a grant writer on staff, and recently received a private donor grant of 10 million dollars and has committed to using that money to reach underserved populations. [name redacted] hoped that youth employment services expansion would be prioritized as these plans came to fruition.

Positive Youth Development and Vocational Services

When Dr. Gillette encouraged me to look for opportunities to complete my internship at Goodwill, I was aware of the services the agency provides assisting youth with disabilities reach independence through vocational goal achievement and assisting at-risk youth with securing employment to pay court ordered fines and restitution. However, I was unsure how these services fit under the Positive Youth Development umbrella. Throughout my graduate program it was obvious that Positive Youth Development largely ignores youth employment as an out of school time activity of choice or obligation. There was virtually no reference to adolescents who

work in any of my course content or discussion board posts. As I attempted to research this topic to support my internship, I was unable to find any clear research into connections, considerations, or concerns of youth employment and Positive Youth Development. I did find a checklist called the PILOT Assessment for assessing PYD concept integration in workforce development programming (Moore et al., 2018) and I thought it may lead to more research articles, but upon searching the references for that article, I found no other connecting research involving both PYD and vocational programming. This solidified in my mind the delineation between the work I am currently doing in vocational services and the lack of consideration given to it by the field I am studying.

Youth in the Workforce

Youth participation in the workforce is a complicated field to study. Youth have competing demands on their time (school, church, extra-curriculars) and may be less attached to seeking regular paid employment than older workers, and thus are not included in formal labor surveys of unemployment statistics, which require willingness and availability for full time work if offered. However, the Department of Labor has tracked a steadily declining rate of employment for 16–24 year-old workers through the years 2000-2017 that is attributed more to lack of prospects than lack of interest, and in fact recorded a 14% rate of unemployment of Black males in that age group who were unable to find desired employment (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2018). It is important to note that during that time frame, two major economic recessions occurred, and disproportionately impacted youth work opportunities. COVID-19 has contributed to an increase in year-round employment for youth, an increase of over 13 million employed 16–24-year-olds during the three-month period from April-June 2020, attributed to the closure of schools (*Employment and Unemployment Among Youth Summary*, 2020).

Youth workers were eager to fill the employment gaps left as older workers left the workforce due to COVID-19 concerns. Although this drastic increase was mitigated in part by the decrease of seasonal employment during the summer of 2020 as seasonal hospitality and leisure industry closures sharply limited work opportunities for the youngest job seekers, it is potentially a sign of a continued boom in youth interest in employment as COVID-19 economic recovery continues. If past recessions inform COVID-19 recovery, youth unemployment rates will remain significantly higher than general population rates; as high as twice the average for minority youth, particularly those in lower income families and at increased risk of teen pregnancy, high school dropout, and teenage parenthood (Urban Alliance, 2018). Employers who were eager to utilize these young and available workers due to the critical need during the pandemic may pass them over as more experienced employers are ready to return to the workforce post COVID-19.

Especially troubling is, the higher unemployment rates for at-risk youth, including those from low-income families, also equate to lower income over the entire lifespan, an average of $700,000 in missed opportunity per youth (Urban Alliance, 2018).   Over one in every seven American children currently lives in poverty. Of these 11 million children, children of color are represented in disproportionate numbers, thus perpetuating the cycle of systemic inequality in our country.   The American Psychological Association (APA) states that socioeconomic status (SES) is a consistent indicator of outcomes spanning across all realms of health throughout the entire lifespan (McLaughlin & Sheridan, 2016, p. 241). While employment increased for young people, *un*employment *in general* increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. At one point in 2020 a record 21% of children had at least one parent out of work, and many more families were impacted by the closure of schools, daycare facilities, and loss of natural support systems for

childcare (Hendricks & Roque, 2021).   At this point, it is uncertain how many of those youth who were eager to fill employment gaps early in the pandemic as schools shut down, did so solely due to parental loss of income, but it is a hard factor to ignore for many youth.

Although current policy does address poverty through various initiatives, COVID-19 and the need for an economic recovery plan that addresses the needs of all Americans, including youth, has given us a unique opportunity to utilize federal policy initiatives designed to reduce poverty and stimulate economic recovery while strengthening the skills and engagement of the youngest members of the workforce. Imagining the possibilities of vocational PYD as a federally funded policy initiative could be a game changer. A bustling cash infused economy flush with career opportunities, communities with tax revenue to support community initiatives to improve quality of living and better futures for generations to come, and at-risk youth who can enter the workforce with the skills needed to compete with other workers can change the trajectory of family SES status.

Generational poverty and the cascading impacts for youth and families have huge economic consequences. PYD-rooted vocational programs have the potential to create impacts that spread far beyond the youth served. Urban Alliance reports in a 2018 policy brief " 81% of high school dropouts responding to a survey commissioned by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation said that having real-world experiences that connected school with work would have helped keep them in school. High-quality youth workforce development programs provide vital support systems that young people need, and they can dramatically improve young people's academic, social, and financial outcomes in numerous ways." Quality PYD-rooted vocational programs that prepare the younger workforce to respond to the needs of the new post COVID-19 digital and technology-centric needs of employers could have a secondary effect of strengthening

school-student connections and encouraging school engagement and graduation. This may have the potential to interrupt generational poverty and bolster engaged and work-ready employees.

Internship Plan

Thus, the goal of the internship was to engage in youth services programming while examining opportunities for improvement from a PYD perspective, particularly in response to the need for providing services to a larger group of unserved youth who may not need employment services to close skill gaps. The Making the Grade program grant required [name redacted] to provide the direct programming herself in order to bill the funders, but I would be able to co-facilitate, assist with planning and preparation, or work with smaller groups of students in synchronous activities.   Career Track at Tate program funding would allow me to work without restrictions, and [name redacted] and I planned to meet with the teacher liaison to identify opportunities for me to present curriculum material, as well as work individually with students in Virtual Job Shadow assignments and developing personal career plans.

Initially I planned to have a Monday meeting with [name redacted] each week to go over the curriculum for both programs and identify the specific plan for my assistance for that week in order to remain flexible as the district and programming adapted from the hybrid model at the beginning of the second semester to the eventual return to full in-person learning. I would research funding possibilities and opportunities for future youth services program expansion in coordination with other Goodwill employees and [name redacted], in order to assist with [name redacted]'s goal for expansion of youth services offerings.

The mission of Goodwill of the Heartland may involve providing services to people with "barriers to independence" but every program focuses on developing interests, assets, skills, and

clients' independence. Our Youth Services programming is no exception. [name redacted]

worked closely with each youth in the program to identify specific skills, interests, and assets,

and provide programming designed to build on each participant's strengths. Not just geared to

vocational specific skills, much of her curriculum involved soft skills, transferable to increased

confidence in participant interaction with classmates, teachers, and their families. From a PYD

perspective, I identified Goodwill of the Heartland strengths in current youth programming, as

well as opportunities to improve programming with an increased focus on PYD components.

One opportunity [name redacted] and I spoke about is the potential to develop Vocational

Mentorship programs to connect youth in services with caring adults actively engaged in careers

of interest. For youth who may not feel especially connected with the education system or see

themselves pursuing higher education, this alternative could lead to lasting positive impacts on

their develop and vocational opportunities.

In summary, the formal objectives for this internship were as follows:

1. Research and present ways to expand youth services including programming ideas and
    potential funding sources.

2. Sit in and support the Making the Grade program (youth who have active IVRS files and
    IEPs) and help to increase online engagement of students in program.

3. Co-facilitate the Career Track program at Tate alternative high school and identify ways
    to increase engagement in the program and in employment of students in program.

4. Guest present for other youth serving programs as opportunities arise.

5. Participate in weekly planning meetings and ongoing weekly planning correspondence.

Deliverables

My objectives were developed prior to the beginning of 2021 and there were many optimistic plans in place to resume regular in-person services but due to continued limitations because of COVID-19, I was unable to guest present for other serving programs (Objective 4), as we had to delay groups that met in person at my agency, which had been the intended venue for my presentations. I also found that I was rarely able to engage in weekly meetings and/or planning correspondence with [name redacted] (Objective 5), due to a variety of factors outside of my control that unfolded throughout the semester. Regardless, I found guidance from program director [name redacted] and was able to expand Career Track time in order to utilize my internship time effectively. I was able to meet the first three objectives, which are discussed in turn.

Ways to Expand Youth Services

Initially, I was hopeful that I could find an existing program structure that supported PYD and vocational outcomes that could be replicated utilizing grant funds. I found promising programs utilizing vocational mentorship that had been implemented in various urban cities in conjunction with juvenile court services to target at-risk youth. As a natural expansion of our Career Track program, I approached my Program Director, [name redacted], to discuss potential ways to pose this program to Goodwill as we looked to allocate the large private donation. At that time, I found out that the Making the Grade grant had not been renewed, and [name redacted] would need to be an active participant in advocating for youth service program alternatives to fill that gap in funds for her specific position at Goodwill, before expansion to include additional staff could be considered. However, one short term project, the Future Ready Iowa summer STEM program grant, had been submitted already and [name redacted] and I

agreed that the network of employer connections made through that grant, if funded, would be useful for future vocational mentorship opportunities.

PILOT Checklist

Although [name redacted] would need to take the lead on short-term program development, I shared the resource with [name redacted] that I found regarding evaluating work-based programs for youth in order to assess integration levels of PYD concepts. The PILOT checklist (Appendix A) is a comprehensive assessment of holistic PYD inclusion specifically designed for utilization in youth workforce training programs, especially those for at-risk youth (Moore et al., 2018). PILOT is an acronym used to describe the various PYD-based strategies vocational programs utilize: **P**ositive relationships, **I**mproved skills, **L**inkages across schools, work, families, and communities, **O**pportunities to contribute and belong, and **T**rustworthy and safe settings (Moore et al., 2018). Upon reviewing the checklist, we found that there were several boxes across all five category areas already checked by our current Career Track programming.

The Career Track curriculum, it appeared, had been abandoned years ago, and [name redacted] and I were unable to locate it when we began searching. However, reviewing the grant reports, the PILOT checklist, and my personal experiences facilitating the program, the more individualized supported employment model had effectively met outcomes expected as well as displayed PYD program characteristics. Career Track programming showed the most strength in developing linkages across school, work, families, and communities. Born of necessity, from the first session, students are tasked with identifying and strengthening their personal support networks of family members, teachers, and other caring adults that can assist them with obtaining vocational goals. Limited in staff, short on time, and bound by confidentiality due to

program restrictions, engaging other adults to work in conjunction with us to assist each student with their individual goals was essential. It was obvious there were many community allies, both within Tate and the larger school district and in the larger community who were eager to share their knowledge and devote time to student needs. This could be an asset in marketing Career Track for program expansion and funding for a larger audience in the future.

A second strength of Career Track programming was improved skills of participants. Sparked by each individual student's goals, skill development included specific vocational skills such as reference selection, application completion, and interview practice. Soft skills such as communication, customer service, and co-worker relations were practiced in role-play settings when scenarios arose from students' recounts of on the job interactions. Students were encouraged to identify connections between current vocational goals and long-term education and career goals and ways to utilize skills and experiences now to reach long term success. Opportunities for informal conversations provided excellent conversations about using the internet safely to look for employment, guarding personal information while completing applications, and utilizing personal networks appropriately for a more effective and personalized job search.

Additional Services

[name redacted] and I also discussed the possibilities of utilizing group-based programming such as Career Track to refer individual students to other services when the need and student matched. For instance, Goodwill of the Heartland recently received a contract to provide SNAP Employment and Training (E & T) services in the state of Iowa. Food benefit recipients as young as 16 qualify for supported employment services given they meet education requirements: attending high school, completion of high school, or GED. SNAP E&T

participants receive supported employment services in addition to assistance with tuition, books, fees, childcare, transportation, and uniforms. Although continued qualification for this program requires a commitment of time and availability to work that may be out of reach for some high school students, this new funding stream opens up supported employment services to youth under 18 that do not have traditional barriers to independence (i.e. disabilities). For context, SNAP recipients in Iowa number just over 300,000 residents (10% of state population) and families with children are almost 70% of those served (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). Specific numbers of youth receiving SNAP benefits by age are not available, however Tate students are almost twice as likely (64%) to receive free/ reduced lunches than other Iowa students (37%) and SNAP eligibility is often the ticket into free/reduced lunch as it is an automatic qualifier (Groeger, 2021). It is reasonable to assume that many students 16 and older at Tate would be eligible for SNAP E&T based on this information.

Students have also been referred from Career Track programming into Making the Grade programming in the past through the Pre-Ets process for students that met eligibility and had a demonstrated need for IVRS services. [name redacted] would then provide the Making the Grade Pre-Ets services alongside the Career Track programming to the student. Although in the future IVRS referrals would not be serviced by a Goodwill of the Heartland program, due to the grant ending, this is still a valuable service for the students whose vocational support needs to extend beyond Career Track parameters and could potentially open up partnerships with IVRS to capacity build for programming. I met with the IVRS staff member that served the students at Tate and discussed possibly meeting together in the future, when IVRS was cleared to meet in person and ways to best utilize shared time and meeting content.

Making the Grade Program

[name redacted], in conjunction with IVRS staff members, organized group Zoom classes for Making the Grade students to increase engagement while in-person activities were on hold. I sat in on several sessions of Customer Service Academy and was very impressed with the quality of content and presentation of materials.   Students assigned to hybrid attendance groups attended sessions of the same content on different days, and students identified as benefitting from repetition of content were signed up for both sessions if time allowed in their schedules. Although the content and presentation was engaging, student participation was low and staff spent a good portion of each session encouraging student participation through chat box questions, interactive quizzes, and jeopardy style games.

[name redacted] and I discussed the presentation style set up of the zoom sessions and the issue of student disengagement, and she informed me that they had some previous sessions of mock interviews and student-chosen guest speaker Q & A sessions that were more successful. It had been a long school year without in person work-based learning opportunities, and everyone seemed to be running out of steam.   The content areas I observed were selected by Making the Grade and IVRS staff and [name redacted] and I discussed enriching these sessions by including more student-selected topics presented by the students themselves, utilizing the youth-adult partnership (YAP) between staff and student for facilitation assistance when needed.   As these sessions had a class or club type setup due to COVID-19, leadership opportunities for students to select, present, and show mastery of concepts may work to increase engagement of peers as well as increase confidence in the skills themselves and in communicating in front of others.

The 5 C's

There seemed to be ample opportunity to incorporate the 5-C's of PYD into these Zoom sessions to provide a better experience for all involved. The 5-C's are identified as indicators of

thriving adolescents and PYD programs that are designed to promote high levels of C indicators (confidence, competence, connection, caring, and compassion) are found to lead to adolescents who exhibit those 5-C's and the additional bonus 6th C of contribution to society (*The Five Cs Model of Positive Youth Development*, n.d.).   Making the Grade programming offered an ideal opportunity to increase confidence, competence, and connection with students. Entrusting students with researching, preparing, and leading individual sessions, with adult support, could increase their connection to other students, their schools, and the program. In addition, active engagement and ownership over their own session could lead to increased confidence in future situations (*The Five Cs Model of Positive Youth Development*, n.d.).   Students actively engaging in leading sessions and carefully selected activities designed to encourage active participation of all students in problem solving, decision making, and working in conjunction with others on a sustained activity, would not only increase perception of student connection to the program but competence in utilizing the skills learned (*The Five Cs Model of Positive Youth Development*, n.d.).

Career Track Program

The Career Track program is where I spent the majority of my time. At our planning meeting in early January, [name redacted], the student advisory center liaison, informed us that we would be allowed to meet in person individually or in small groups with students as the school had determined that the benefits of the program necessitated approval. Most sessions, I was in person at Tate with students and facilitated Zoom sessions with [name redacted] and [name redacted], who remained off-site, in order to maintain social distancing requirements and maximize efficiency. At the beginning of the semester students were on a hybrid schedule and low attendance and lack of participation from students on the virtual day contributed to an almost

1:1 ratio of adult to student for most sessions. In order to accommodate both hybrid A and B

groups in person, most weeks I spent an additional day at Tate alone, due to schedule conflicts

for [name redacted] and [name redacted]. Each session, students were referred by [name

redacted] or requested by [name redacted], [name redacted], or myself to follow up on previous

session work. Throughout the semester, we worked with over 30 students at least once, and

[name redacted] and I tallied 21 students that we had significant engagement with (regular

attendance of more than three sessions). These students were eligible to receive credit from Tate

for their attendance in Career Track.

[name redacted], [name redacted], and I shared a Google document and upon meeting

with each student collected important intake information that allowed for us to work with them

on a student directed vocational plan. Updating this document and dating and highlighting

follow up items allowed for easier transition between staff and more efficient utilization of the

time we had for each student. This intake information was not pre-planned and evolved

throughout the semester as I became more aware of the essential information needed to assist a

student successfully. It is a simple document (Appendix B) of information requested from

students through informal question and answer conversations. Students are informed up front

that we do not obtain releases to discuss anything they tell us with outside parties, unless on the

rare occasion it is necessary to assist them with obtaining employment and then we will request

signature or verbal consent from both a parent/guardian and themselves, if under 18. Students

are also free to decline to answer any questions at any time.

Career Track intake information elicits a lot of important information that drives program

participation for each student. I-9 documents, a federal requirement for employment eligibility,

are a first priority for students who wish to apply for jobs. Students who need the identity

document piece faced additional challenges this year due to COVID-19 shutdowns at the Iowa DOT and appointment-only hours when they reopened. These students also did not have driver's permits yet, so we researched, downloaded, and discussed practice strategies for the permit written test, an essential first step to transportation independence, and a smart logistical use of the appointment time. One student did not have a parent available to take him to his appointment, and we connected him with a teacher who was able to transport him there with a signed parental release and all of the identification information we researched ahead of the appointment. Luckily, we did not have any students missing the citizenship document piece, typically the Social Security card, and did not have to navigate that process.

A second logistical process that proved important for the majority of students was their radius for employment. Students at Tate may live within or out of the district and have a variety of transportation methods, many impacted by COVID-19, such as the city bus schedule. Very few students had drivers' licenses AND access to working vehicles on a regular basis. We did not apply for jobs outside of an agreed upon distance that students had more than one option for regular transportation to and from work. Students were vague about this information and their plans for getting to and from work, even if they had left or lost previous employment due to lack of rides. Many students who were not signed up for Tate to transport them, routinely needed a last-minute ride to or from school by staff because their ride to fallen through.

Goal setting was an important step during intake meetings and most students had clear ideas of what they would like to do post high school including some sort of vocational or college course and a career path in mind. Students, on the whole, could not identify the process to begin achieving these goals in a practical way, such as the FAFSA and scholarship process, college visits and applications, and ensuring that their high school courses met the entrance

requirements. Although beyond the immediate vocational scope of our Career Track programming, we explored with students these topics and identified supports within the school and their families to begin the process. I assisted one student with co-enrolling in a vocational program at Kirkwood Community College, as she was frustrated with the lack of help she was getting elsewhere, and the deadline had approached. Many times, the immediate vocational goals did not align with long term goals, and students wanted jobs that were fun or accessible to them, meaning other students or friends worked there and they felt the jobs were not going to be too hard. Even if we were assisting with looking for jobs now that did not quite match future plans, we encouraged students to begin looking at entry level jobs in their fields, just to get an idea of what is out there and the requirements for the position. We also stressed the importance of an employment resume that reflected solid employment skills regardless of the field the work was in. Connecting attendance, reliability, and responsibility in current employment with long term goals before the job was obtained to reinforce that decisions matter far into the future.

[name redacted] and [name redacted] had warned me that engagement during first semester had been very sporadic, and they could not get students to return emails or show up for Zoom appointments. Whether it was due to my on-site presence, the eventual return to full on-site learning, or a general readiness for work, we did not have an engagement problem this semester. Conversely, we had a lot of students to juggle but with three staff and a larger space to use I was able to spread students out to meet over Zoom with [name redacted] and [name redacted] and then meet with remaining students in person.   Most weeks I needed at least one additional day to follow up with students who had submitted applications and needed to prepare for interviews, or had job offers and needed to prepare for onboarding. Attendance was sporadic, COVID-19 quarantine procedures kept students out for weeks at a time, and we decided to keep

the program open for student enrollment throughout the semester, a change from previous years, which was helpful as student enrollment in the district fluctuated as well. Unfortunately, we lost several students to other schools.

The flow of the semester, due to all those quickly changing variables, was intense and organizing students to prioritize before I arrived at Tate and emailing [name redacted] their names was essential. Having a backup plan when inevitably most of them were out that day was important as well. Although [name redacted] enrolled all students onto the online platform she selected, it was not of interest to any of them. Every student that chose to participate in Career Track wanted to actively look for employment. At the end of April, when I completed my internship, 11 of our 21 actively engaged students had obtained employment with our assistance, and several others obtained employment before the end of the school year.

The 5 C's

There were predominantly two C's present in the Career Track program: confidence and competence. By far, the biggest gain Career Track students saw was confidence. Many students had never called an employer before, filled out an application, or downloaded and reviewed financial documents. With our small program and individual support students were empowered to practice these skills with assistance to gain confidence in their ability to self-advocate. Later in the semester, new students who joined us received peer support filling out applications, practicing interviews, and researching bus routes. Students not only gained competence in skills through the program, but on the job as well, and recounted stories of mastering job tasks quickly, a relief to many of them who were very nervous before they started work. [name redacted] recounted that student attendance to both school and Career Track improved after they began

working, an anecdotal example of research in the field that vocational engagement increases school engagement.

Although Career Track was designed to provide linkages between students and people in their networks that could assist them with their vocational goals, a necessity due to program constraints, connection was not a strength of the program. An opportunity for both expansion and improved outcomes in the future would be the inclusion of guest speakers, vocational mentors, and additional program facilitators outside of Goodwill and Juvenile Court. Most students could not identify by name the Tate faculty they needed to consult with to begin planning post-secondary education plans, a sign of a disconnect between student and school resources. Positive bonding and reciprocal relationships between student and others in their network could increase connections and success in goal achievement (*The Five Cs Model of Positive Youth Development*, n.d.).

Conclusion

This internship project was full of curve balls and limitations. I had hesitations from the beginning, because I had always intended to widen my professional circle and choose a project at a fully immersed youth serving agency in my community. COVID-19 logistics made this project a much smarter choice, and in the end has probably changed the trajectory of my career for years to come. I realized shortly into my internship that [name redacted], my coworker and internship overseer, was disengaged in the youth programming my agency was offering. Due to complexities with working relationships, I navigated carefully, and received permission from my program director [name redacted] to participate independently in programming in person, even though [name redacted] was not. This allowed me to fulfill the obligations to the students in

Career Track as well as independently navigate my way through the internship as my emails and meeting invites to [name redacted] were often left unanswered.

As the school semester unfolded, Goodwill of the Heartland found out that Making the Grade grant funding was not renewed, and [name redacted] was tasked with identifying alternative funding streams for future programs. As this was an objective for me as well, I envisioned we would collaborate on this and planning for the Future Ready Iowa summer STEM camp grant we received. Instead, [name redacted] resigned, and I was asked to take over her youth programming duties in addition to my adult service program duties. To pare these down to a manageable level, the Future Ready Iowa summer STEM camp grant was reallocated to a different service location, and I will be responsible for Career Track and the remaining five months of the Making the Grade grant in addition to my current responsibilities. This abrupt change impacted the initial objectives I had selected, and required some consultation with Dr. Gillette, but resulted in immense growth and understanding for me personally.

[name redacted] and I met and discussed possible future directions for Career Track, as that program will continue into the future. We were able to reflect on what we learned during this COVID-19 roller coaster and use PYD concepts to strengthen future participants experiences. While remaining flexible as students and teachers mitigate COVID-19 situations, [name redacted] and I identified top priorities for next year using the following framework (*Positive Youth Development (PYD) Framework*, n.d.):

- Assets: flexible and bite size skill development at each session led by student choice and centered on vocational outcomes: customer service, interviewing skills, soft skills, interpersonal communications, and self-advocacy;

- Agency: Goal setting and self-efficacy by encouraging and assisting students with setting vocational goals and following up with references, employers, and make and keep deadlines for program activities;

- Contribution: Student engagement with others in attendance (dependent on COVID-19 policy) and follow up with commitments to the program;

- Enabling Environment: Safe, pro-social and inclusive environment, encouraging of YAP partnerships and connections with school staff, community support, and employer partners in areas of vocational interest

We both agreed we had learned a lot, and although the grant allows for only seven weekly hours of each of our time, we have the opportunity to increase employer connections by networking and partnership development. We also have the opportunity to increase follow up with students between sessions, and prioritizing activities to maximize program efficacy. COVID-19 shifted Career Track to a more individualized service and redirecting the program back to the intended small group format while keeping the increased engagement is a priority. We are both going to actively research and advocate for increased funding for this program, to reach more students and provide more comprehensive programming and longer-term employment support.

Another future advocacy plan of mine for our Goodwill mission of reaching beyond traditional audiences is the use of vocational mentorships and PYD components with all adolescents. COVID-19, again, made the Future Ready Iowa STEM internships a daunting task as employers were hesitant to commit to non-mandatory visitors on site. We cannot expect a switch to flip in the near future and to return to pre-pandemic programming. If we can offer programming to employers that provides smaller numbers of work ready adolescents that can

provide quality paid labor for the employer with our trusted supported employment services, this has the potential to reap bigger rewards for participants (who have a financial incentive to participate). Managers who need labor and know and trust Goodwill to provide needed support to new employees may be willing to accept small numbers of adolescent interns who are able to provide needed labor and have trained support ready to assist both the employer and student maximize mutually beneficial outcomes.

The biggest takeaway from this program is the removal of the delineation between what I do now, "vocational services" or what I did 20 years ago "juvenile justice services" and what I did for years at ISU Extension "PYD services." Dr. Gillette had to coax me along in the beginning, but through this semester, and reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the absolute social injustice of the compounding impacts on vulnerable families, I am convinced now that PYD concepts and applications belong firmly in programs where youth and families can benefit in ways that benefit them in practical and immediate life changing ways.

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Appendix A

P Positive Relationships

These items assess the degree to which an organization creates positive, consistent, reliable, and supportive relationships with participants—relationships that provide individualized guidance, positive communication, recognition of diversity and inclusion, and social support as young adults work to reach their goals.

PYD Characteristics	True All of the Time	True Most of the Time	True Some of the Time	True None of the Time
Staff Practices and Programming for Young Adults				
Staff interact with all participants in a supportive, affirming, reliable, and caring manner while maintaining professional boundaries.				
Staff model how to ask and respond to questions in a respectful and nonjudgmental manner.				
The program has a system in place to identify staff members who are not creating positive, reliable relationships.				
Expectations in the program are explained clearly at the beginning of program participation and enforced consistently.				
Staff show respect for each young adult's culture, religion, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.				
Staff are aware of, and avoid using, language and practices that are insensitive to participants' culture, religion, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.				
Staff encourage participants to communicate regularly with supervisors in their jobs.				
Staff model healthy professional relationships with others and support participants to do the same.				
Staff Training				
Staff are trained to proactively engage in a positive manner with participants who are acting out, disruptive, or withdrawn, without singling anyone out or using public humiliation strategies or threats.				
Staff are trained to not make promises they cannot fulfill or set false expectations.				
Staff are trained to make participants feel comfortable, supported, and safe.				
Staff are encouraged to ask participants to speak up if they do not feel supported.				

ⓘ Improved Skills

These items assess the degree to which an organization provides opportunities for technical, intellectual, emotional, and social skill development for all participants.

PYD Characteristics	True All of the Time	True Most of the Time	True Some of the Time	True None of the Time
Staff Practices and Programming for Young Adults				
Staff engage participants in identifying positive goals and the skills needed to achieve those goals.				
Opportunities for developing skills are made available within the organization or with referrals.				
Staff help participants achieve their goals through college/career fairs, scholarships, practice with job interviews, and application support.				
Participants are provided with opportunities to work collaboratively to accomplish a goal or activity.				
Training and job development staff communicate regularly to link current training opportunities with available jobs.				
Staff encourage participants to make connections between the skills they learn and workplace success.				
Staff encourage participants to develop skills regardless of their race/ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation.				
Staff are aware of and address destructive stereotypes that limit aspirations and skill-building.				
Staff Training				
Staff are trained to help young adults identify their goals, providing both autonomy and positive guidance.				
Program staff are trained to communicate with job development staff to incorporate employers' skill development goals.				
Staff are trained to identify opportunities for participants to learn and apply skills to real-life settings.				
Staff are trained to assess hard/technical skill development as well as soft skill development.				
Staff are encouraged to support participants to think strategically about internships, job-shadowing, or short-term placements that provide professional skills and connections.				
Workplace communication skills are taught and modeled by staff and participants.				

L Linkages Across Schools, Work, Families, and Communities

These items assess the degree to which an organization emphasizes coordination and collaboration with school, work, family, and community partners, recognizing that participants' lives take place in several important spaces.

PYD Characteristics	True All of the Time	True Most of the Time	True Some of the Time	True None of the Time
Staff Practices and Programming for Young Adults				
Staff help participants learn about professional networking, expectations, and professional relationships.				
Staff support participants to create relationships with peers that are both emotionally and professionally supportive.				
Staff work to link participants to other services such as health care, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), childcare, and financial institutions.				
Staff recognize competing obligations and time commitments, such as GED or college courses, children, and families.				
Family members are engaged with activities, childcare, newsletters, websites, or celebrations for program completion.				
Spouses, children, and family members are welcomed so that they value the program and understand how to be supportive.				
Participants learn questions to ask supervisors about job scheduling, hours, eligibility for benefits, insurance, and leave.				
Participants learn about labor standards and laws and can be linked to other agencies if there are issues with pay or safety.				
Staff link participants to mentors who share their experiences and backgrounds.				
Staff know about and celebrate community holidays.				
Staff Training				
Staff are trained to help participants whose family members are not supportive or who play a disruptive role.				
Staff have professional development opportunities to learn to engage with families, schools, and community partners.				
Staff know transportation needs and support participants to get to and from training and work in a timely manner.				
Staff are trained to work with schools and colleges to facilitate transitions to work.				

⊙ Opportunities to Contribute and Belong

These items assess the degree to which an organization supports participants to take on leadership roles in their communities, workforce development programs, and workplaces; and the degree to which it makes a concerted effort to include all participants, support diversity and inclusion, and encourage participants to give back to their communities.

PYD Characteristics	True All of the Time	True Most of the Time	True Some of the Time	True None of the Time
Staff Practices and Programming for Young Adults				
Staff use inclusive language; materials such as posters displayed at the site represent the population served.				
Participants are encouraged to feel proud of themselves for their efforts to find successful employment.				
The program is branded to help participants feel like they are a part of something special.				
Participants think critically about what influences their lives and decisions, such as the media, family, values, culture, or gender.				
Staff create meaningful opportunities for leadership and initiative for participants.				
Participant voice, such as an advisory committee, is a formal part of the program.				
Participants can give feedback to the program in both structured and unstructured ways.				
Participants contribute to program development (opportunities to make suggestions in structured and unstructured forums).				
Staff Training				
Staff receive training in diversity and inclusion, particularly as it relates to race/ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, and sexual orientation.				
Staff receive training and supervision on providing participants with leadership opportunities.				
Staff are instructed to urge participants to learn about their employer and coworkers, once they are employed.				
Staff are taught to encourage participants to help their coworkers in settings where help is appropriate, once they are employed.				
Staff are taught to support participants to be engaged in their communities and make linkages to their professional development.				

T Trustworthy and Safe Settings

These items assess the degree to which a local partnership creates trustworthy and safe physical and emotional settings for participants, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. Settings are both relational spaces and physical facilities and spaces to accept challenges that promote growth.

PYD Characteristics	True All of the Time	True Most of the Time	True Some of the Time	True None of the Time
Staff Practices and Programming for Young Adults				
Staff model respectful and constructive interactions when discussing workplace conflict, expectations, and criticism.				
Staff encourage all participants to ask questions and seek help when needed.				
The programs provide opportunities for all participants to interact positively and professionally with one another.				
Staff model appropriate work behavior, such as wearing suitable clothes, showing up on time, and managing time.				
All racial and ethnic, religious, gender, and sexual orientation groups are treated with respect.				
Participants practice telling their supervisor if they need more support or have concerns about emotional or physical safety.				
Staff Training				
Background checks are conducted on staff members.				
Policies and training indicate that physical and sexual harassment, violence, discrimination, and bullying are not tolerated.				
Staff are trained to respect privacy, keeping information confidential as needed.				
Staff are trained to provide explanations for rules so that participants can understand their rationale.				
Potential employers are screened for safe spaces and interactions.				
Staff are trained to encourage participants to know workforce physical and sexual harassment and violence policies.				
Lessons about workplace safety laws and avenues for reporting problems are discussed during training sessions.				

Appendix B

	A	B	C	D
1	Name		Activities	
2	Cell		Work Radius	
3	Email		Bground Check	
4	Contact (best way)		Availability	
5	Live (City)		Work Experience	
6	Live (with)		Where	
7	Age		When	
8	Birthday		Why left	
9	Grade		Working now	
10	I-9 doc Identity (ID)		Looking for work	
11	I-9 doc Citizen (SS)		Applied anywhere	
12	Transportation		What kind of jobs	
13	License Y/N		Short Term Goals	
14	Drivers ED Y/N		What help needed	
15	Permit Y/N		Long Term Goals	
16	Support at Home (name)		What help needed	
17	Support at Home (relationship)		Big Goals	
18	Support at School (name)		What help needed	
19	Support Other			
20				
21	Session Date	Activities	F/U	
22				