



PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

Youth Transition Action Teams Initiative Leveraging Community Resources to Ensure Successful Transitions for Foster Youth

Digital Pathways for Tribal Communities

Submitted by: The Digital Pathways Program for Tribal Communities of Humboldt County

Community: Humboldt County

Key Partners: Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC), Hoopa Valley High School, Hoopa TANF, The Hoopa Tribe, Hoopa Tribal Education, Humboldt State University (HSU), County of Humboldt Economic Development Division, Humboldt County Workforce Investment Board (HC-WIB), HC-WIB Youth Council, Klamath-Trinity Joint Unified School District, and Northern California Indian Development Council (NCIDC)

Subject: Career Preparation, Cross-System Collaboration, Education, Occupational Skills Training

All Youth - One System Element: Career Preparation and Education

Function: Create Linkages and Connect Systems

The Challenge:

Youth from Eastern Humboldt County do not have the same critical mass of education, business and training resources as youth from the more populated areas of the county. The High School in that area, Hoopa Valley High, has had a low enrollment rate because of the perception that resources there are not as “good” as in others. Educators, economic development and training leaders were challenged by to create a chapter of the Digital Pathways Program for Youth, based on a model developed by the Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC). Digital Pathways is a program that has been run in San Francisco for the last eight years, and features a network of neighborhood computer labs throughout Oakland and San Francisco. . It was created by the BAVC for youth who wanted to learn skills to advance their potential for careers in technology and the arts. In the Humboldt adaptation of the BAVC model, students participated in intensive summer training and follow-up workshops totaling about 80 hours in class and in the field. All students received 3 units of Humboldt State University college credit for completing the program, as well as a stipend payment for their work completed in the program.

The Practice and Evidence

The Practice:

The Digital Pathways for Tribal Communities Program required 45 hours of classroom training and 35 hours of time in the field. Students learned how to use Final Cut Pro video editing software and GarageBand music editing software.

The Digital Pathways initial launch served 17 youth total, with fifteen 17-21 year old participants and two college students acting as lab assistants. Youth were engaged in film projects that were self directed and covered everything from a moving documentary about a champion softball team to a cultural & historical documentary about the history and origin of

dress worn by one of the local tribes . The program organized a community screening at Hoopa Valley High School. More than 100 people attended the screening. Attendees represented the local tribal communities including Hoopa, Pecwan, Orleans, and Willow Creek.

Contributing to the success was a film project coordinated by the American Indian Film Institute (AIFI) and scheduled immediately prior to the Digital Pathways project. Youth were lined up and ready to go from one digital experience to the next. . The initial Digital Pathways participants were recruited from the AIFI and Workforce Investment Board (WIB) caseloads, as well as high school upper classmen and recent graduates.

A second Digital Pathways class created in the Eureka-area has been slightly harder to recruit because there was no “linking” activity immediately preceding the training. Youth did not have the benefit of the film institute, but instead had to rely on case managers to refer youth to the program. Main referring sources for the second Digital Pathways project is Probation, Social Services Branch of Health and Human Services, Humboldt State University, the Workforce Investment Board, and the Northern California Indian Development Council, Inc.

Evidence that the practice or program is working:

The program tracks success by how many participants complete the class, go on to college, and/or enter employment. The program doesn’t have a lot of data yet because it has only completed one full class cycle. The first class cycle of Digital Pathways had a waiting list for the program which is very unusual for Hoopa Valley High School. The program had a high initial success rate. 16 out of the original 17 participants received college credit. The program provides the participants with confidence and transferable skills.

For example, 3 weeks after the first initial project screening two of the participants were accepted into a county wide film festival. Both youth received so much applause that they had to stand up for recognition. The crowd was extremely surprised when they heard this was their first film project. Additionally, due to their experience in the program, the participant, who hadn’t planned on continuing her education, has enrolled in school. She and another classmate have started exploring developing a film making business out of the skills acquired in the program.

Another example includes a teen participant who had been in and out of the tribal justice system most of his adolescent life. He made a music video and told the instructor at the end of the session that participating in the program was one of the “most meaningful experiences” of his life.

The Details

Process used to establish the practice:

The first planning meeting occurred 6 months prior to the start of the Digital Pathways Program and one month after the Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC) had made their initial presentation. This meeting included the Hoopa High School Principal, a couple of teachers, a representative from Humboldt State, and a representative from the State Department of Education. This initial meeting established that Hoopa High School would provide space to hold the classes, but that money would need to be accessed from other sources.

One of the greater challenges in getting all of the partners on the same page was to get them to understand the necessity of industry standard equipment and training. A lot of partners didn't necessarily understand why youth couldn't be trained on cheaper computers, video editing software and lower-end camera equipment. It took focused discussion and a local employer survey to explain why training youth on Apple computers, Final Cut Pro editing software, and higher-end camera equipment are equal to what is used in the local labor market, and is essential to providing youth with industry standard skills that are transferable to the workforce; the college credit was an added enhancement to youth participating.

The Digital Pathways Program purchased the curriculum from BAVC for \$16,000 which included technical assistance and training. The curriculum had to be approved by Humboldt State University (HSU) for college credit. This process was sped up by using curriculum that was already approved by San Francisco State University. Once HSU approved the curriculum, financial sponsors had to be found. It cost \$120 per student to receive 3 units for participating. The Hoopa Tribe was willing to make this financial commitment for 5 tribal youth participants and 2 assistants. The Workforce Investment Board paid for the rest using WIA funds.

In total the Workforce Investment Board contributed \$23,000 as an initial investment, which was leveraged with community partners for a total of \$60,000 obligated to the project in cash and equipment. Tribal support was contingent on Workforce Investment Board support as well as the program embracing a geographic focus that incorporated a high Native American population, in this case youth from Eastern Humboldt. The key to leveraging funds was sharing a common vision. For example, Hoopa Valley High School provided space in order to have a potential student enrollment increase. NCIDC supported building a lab if they could use it to host some additional classes and for making anti-smoking and drug public service announcements. Probation, Social Services and NCIDC sponsored several youth earning college credits, as long as two class spots were reserved for youth referred from their programs.

Lessons Learned:

The Digital Pathways Program did not have a budget secured until a few days before the program started. The only downside to funding through the sharing of common visions of multiple parties is that many commitments were interdependent. Thus if one party had changed their minds, this could have resulted in several parties backing out of their budgetary commitments. While this did not occur, it made fundraising a more delicate affair.

The other lesson involved the structure of participant pay. Incentive pay was more effective than other methods for teaching basic work skills. Please note that it is necessary to make sure that the total incentive pay works out to be minimum wage for the hours worked by the youth.

What's Next for This Promising Transition Practice?

A total of \$48,000 newly acquired startup funds provided by the Workforce Investment Board will be used for an expanded program in Eureka. It will also include a corresponding college credit model. So far this money has been leveraged into \$240,000 in facilities and equipment

including the construction of a new computer lab facility. The model will be adapted to reflect learning lessons from the initial program launch. Youth will be paid for their demonstrated capacity such as specific skills to the program, punctuality, attendance, ability to work independently as well as part of a team, taking initiative, and other work maturity skill that are valuable to employers.

In order to be self-sustaining, the program is aspiring to create a business enterprise model. Students will intern creating commercials and other media for local businesses. This is a service that local businesses will pay for, thereby creating a sustainable source of base funding for future projects.

For More Information:

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