

# Evaluation Report

## *Our Voices: Our Community Program*

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Our Voices: Our Community* (OVOC) is a youth leadership program that strives to include non-traditional leaders and youth at-risk. The Vermont Children's Forum (VCF) has offered the program throughout Vermont with support of a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) for the period, May 2004 - June 2006. VCF staff train youth and adult co-facilitators who then implement the program with young people in their school or community setting. The youth participants in the local programs learn the curriculum and carry out projects where they develop and practice leadership skills. Youth projects benefit others in their schools and communities.

This evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the OVOC Program at empowering a broad spectrum of youth to engage productively in their communities. Data collected for this report include a retrospective pre and post survey of participants, focus groups conducted with participants and facilitators, individual interviews with community recipients of youth service learning work, and documentation from sites regarding their activities and their participant and facilitator demographics. The evaluation includes statistical analysis of the survey responses as well as qualitative analysis of open-ended survey responses, focus group discussions, and individual interviews.

This evaluation focuses on those enrollees who participated in some aspect of the evaluation. This involved 67 adult and 126 youth facilitators who reached 798 youth participants, ages 10 to 22, at 12 locations in five Vermont counties. This number included 59

youth with disabilities, 66 youth in alternative schools, 40 youth enrolled in vocational schools, 4 youth enrolled in a GED program, and one youth not in school.

The following major themes emerged from the analysis:

- Youth and adults strived to work as equal partners, finding this both a rewarding and challenging endeavor.
- When given the opportunity, youth became engaged in their schools and communities. They enjoyed the rewards of helping their schools and communities through their service projects, gaining a connection with people of all ages and a lasting sense of making a difference.
- Youth service projects not only benefited the community in tangible ways, but also enhanced public perception of youth as contributing members.
- Youth increased their sense that they could be leaders and learn leadership skills.
- Youth developed assets of positive identity, positive values, social competencies and empowerment.
- Nearly a quarter of youth survey respondents indicated more frequent connections with at least one caring adult.
- Youth and adults found the OVOC trainings and curriculum guide inspiring and useful.

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## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The *Our Voices: Our Community* (OVOC) Program, a statewide venture of the Vermont Children's Forum (VCF) in collaboration with the Vermont Rural Partnership (VRP), involves youth and adults in a multi-layered youth leadership curriculum. It entails training of youth and adult co-facilitators who then engage youth participants in learning the curriculum and carrying out projects. As the youth participants carry out their projects, they in turn exercise leadership with other audiences. (See Appendix A for an illustration of the program model.) The developers pride themselves on the flexible design of the curriculum, which adapts well to varied school and community settings.

Facilitators of the curriculum can use it flexibly, for example, utilizing modules that fit their needs, and adapting the curriculum to their groups. Nine modules comprise the curriculum: 1) Who Are We? Where Are We Going? Getting Going Together! 2) Exploration of Leadership and Leaders, 3) Decision Making, 4) The Project, 5) Communication, 6) Conflict Resolution, 7) Team Building, 8) Embracing Diversity, and 9) Systems and Change (*Our Voices: Our Community Curriculum*, 2004).

Through the OVOC program, VCF and VRP intend to reach a variety of young people including those who are non-traditional leaders and youth considered at-risk. The program design focuses on strengths, and helps young people set goals and build the skills needed to

reach their goals. VCF and VRP base their curriculum on the experiential learning model and make it accessible to youth with diverse learning styles and challenges. They ground the curriculum on resiliency theory, which focuses on innate capacities and potential for positive growth. A staff person expressed the underlying philosophy of the OVOC program as, "All youth are capable of being leaders in the sense that they can realize that they matter and they can make a difference in their world."

The assets model of youth development outlines internal and external assets (Search Institute, 1997). This evaluation particularly explores the assets of identity development, social competencies, and empowerment. Positive identity includes a sense of purpose and control over what happens, optimism about the future and self esteem. Social competencies include interpersonal and friendship skills, such as comfort with people of different backgrounds. Social competencies also include the ability to plan and make choices, to resist negative peer pressure and dangerous influences, and to resolve conflicts peacefully. Empowerment involves youth serving useful roles in their schools and communities, and feeling safe and valued in those settings.

To enhance these assets, VCF staff trained teams of youth and adult co-facilitators to work together as partners and implement the curriculum at their local community and school sites. OVOC held statewide and local training sessions for facilitators throughout Vermont between August 2004 and June 2006, reaching a total of 156 youth and 116 adults. These youth-adult partner (YAP) teams then implemented the curriculum in their schools or communities. Along with experiencing the modules in various forms, the participants carried out projects. Some were self-designed, and others were chosen from available opportunities. Often, the participants implemented projects that responded to community needs. Youth worked as partners with adults. Most sites received grant funding from VCF to assist with the costs of the program.

## ISSUES AND OUTCOMES

The 2004 – 2006 *Our Voices: Our Community Program* seeks to address the following issues related to the developmental assets:

- The percent of adolescents who feel valued by their communities drops steadily from sixth grade to twelfth grade. Eighty-three percent of high school seniors in Vermont feel disconnected from their communities, compared to 77% of eighth graders (Youth Count: The Vermont Youth Report. The Vermont Children's Forum, 2002, p.10).
- Slightly less than half of all students surveyed reported having two or more adults in their lives with whom they looked forward to spending time, and who gave them encouragement and spoke with them at least once a month (Youth Count: The Vermont Youth Report. The Vermont Children's Forum, 2002, p.10).
- Fewer than 50 percent of all students surveyed reported possessing self-esteem. The gender differences are fairly notable here – 54 percent of boys reported having self-esteem, compared to 42 percent of girls (Youth Count: The Vermont Youth Report. The Vermont Children's Forum, 2002, p.12).
- Of Vermont youth surveyed, 45 percent reported a sense of interpersonal competence....Significantly, only 29 percent of boys reported a sense of interpersonal competence, compared to 60 percent of girls (Youth Count: The Vermont Youth Report. The Vermont Children's Forum, 2002, p.12).
- Cohort graduation rates are below 80% in Vermont high schools.

The OVOC project has the following goal: to increase leadership skills among teens and expand youth and adult partnerships across Vermont to help improve young people's self-esteem and social skills; and to empower them

to be involved in their communities and schools. Ultimately, the OVOC project aims for the following five outcomes:

1. Genuine youth and adult partnerships are forged between adult-youth facilitators through facilitator trainings and through support provided as they facilitate their classes.
2. Youth participants make connections with adults, other young people and children through their required service work in their school and/or communities
3. Youth identify and strengthen their leadership skills through OVOC class activities and through their service work.
4. Youth and adults design leadership networks to increase involvement of communities and schools in youth leadership work.
5. Targeted at-risk youth involved in the OVOC pilots and young adults in the correctional system can demonstrate increased leadership skills and identify at least one caring adult/mentor in their lives.

These five outcomes will provide a framework for articulating the findings of this evaluation study.

## PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of the evaluation of the *Our Voices: Our Communities Program* is to understand the experiences of those involved with the program from the perspectives of youth participant, youth facilitator, adult facilitator, and community member. The ultimate goal is to assess and improve the program's effectiveness at empowering a broad spectrum of youth to engage productively in their communities. The evaluation's purpose encompasses assessment of the program's design, delivery, implementation, and impact.

Primary evaluation questions include:

- 1) How do youth participants, and youth and adult facilitators, describe their experiences with the program, including group learning sessions and the project?
- 2) What changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and/or behaviors do youth participants report as a result of their involvement in the program?
- 3) In what ways did youths' participation in the program influence their definitions of a leader and their perspectives of themselves as leaders?
- 4) In what ways did youths' participation in the program influence their identity development, social competencies, and sense of empowerment, both immediately after the program and a year after their participation ended?
- 5) Can at-risk youth in schools and youth in the correctional system identify at least one caring adult/mentor in their lives?
- 6) How do youth and adult facilitators describe their experiences with the facilitator training and technical support?
- 7) How do youth and adult facilitators describe their experiences with youth-adult partnerships and their development as teachers and facilitators?
- 8) How do community members describe their experiences with the youth participants' community service projects?
- 9) What were the impacts of the youth participants' community service projects on their communities and on individual community members?

The first question explores how participants perceived the modules and how the projects unfolded, including what barriers participants

encountered as they pursued their goals and how they overcame them. The second question is intentionally broad enough to capture a variety of levels of attainment among diverse youth with different learning styles. For example, one youth might increase communication skills while another might find new motivation to participate after considering dropping out. The third question explores changes in youth participants' understanding of leadership as a result of their participation in the program. Of special interest is how a youth's self concept as a leader may have changed.

The fourth question explores the development of particular assets targeted as outcomes in this program. The fifth question looks specifically at connections between adults and at-risk youth. The sixth question gathers feedback on training and support provided by VCF to the facilitators. The seventh question delves into the youth-adult partnership model as well as leadership development among facilitators. The eighth and ninth questions gather community members' perspectives on the process and impact of the youths' project work.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Between 2004 and 2006, evaluation data were collected from program participants through focus groups and a retrospective pre and post survey. In addition, demographic and participation data were collected to answer questions about how youth participants and facilitators were heterogeneous in age, gender, race/ethnicity, and disability (See Appendixes B and C for demographic forms). Individual interviews were conducted by the evaluator and the staff consultants with 21 community recipients of the youth service learning projects (See Appendix D for community interview questions). VCF staff consultants and site contacts also submitted overviews of the programs.

I conducted six focus groups at selected sites, often with the assistance of a notetaker. Two focus groups targeted teens affiliated with

community-based organizations. The first involved 11 youth participants. The second included six youth participants who were involved in a program targeting at-risk youth. (See Appendix E for participant focus group questions.)

The third focus group involved four youth (two youth facilitators and two youth participants) and one adult facilitator at an alternative high school program serving 20 at-risk youth. The fourth focus group involved two middle school age youth facilitators and one adult in their youth–adult partnership team. This particular group involved three individual interviews due to unforeseen schedule conflicts of the youth. (See Appendix F for facilitator focus group questions).

The fifth and sixth focus groups were conducted in a high school that has continued its year-long OVOC program for a second year. The fifth group included 12 youth facilitators, of which nine had been facilitating for their second year. The other focus group involved 11 graduate participants of the previous year's program who were now planning to become youth facilitators themselves. These last two focus groups began to give some indication of the impact of the OVOC program over time and in some cases, the impact of continued involvement over a two year period (See Appendixes G and H for 'returning youth facilitator' and 'graduate participant' focus group questions).

A written survey was developed to assess impact on self-esteem, connections to community, and feeling of empowerment. It particularly sought to measure the developmental assets of positive identity, social competencies and empowerment. Quantitative and open-ended responses comprise the instrument (see Appendix I). In 2005, 223 participant surveys were returned, a 59% response rate that represented two out of the four sites. In 2006, 278 surveys were returned, a 67% response rate that represented nine of the ten sites. Likert-scale data on the participant surveys

were aggregated and statistically analyzed by Dr. Ron Rossi at Lyndon State College. Statistical significance was discerned using a sign test, and gender differences with Mann Whitney U comparisons (See Appendixes F, G, H, and I).

I coded and analyzed the data from the community interviews, the focus groups and the survey's open-ended responses, also making cross-sectional comparisons (Patton, 2002, Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In 2005, open-ended responses from 223 participant surveys included two school sites. One of these schools was represented by both survey and focus group data. Two additional school sites participated in focus groups. In 2006, open-ended responses from 278 participants represented five community sites, and four schools, including one alternative school. An additional community site was represented by one of the two participant focus groups. I recoded the open-ended survey questions from 2005 to be consistent with a new way of weighing themes in 2006.

In addition, I conducted a separate analysis of the answers to the last two Likert-scale questions on the survey pertaining to student perceptions regarding their own leadership and their ability to learn leadership skills, in order to provide information on the degree of change. In this final report, I have summarized the analysis of the data from the focus groups, the participant surveys, the community interviews, the program overviews provided by VCF staff, and the demographic and participation forms.

This two-year evaluation addresses several limitations from a prior study (Baege, 2004). At the end of the prior study, a recommendation was made to consider a retrospective survey instrument instead of a pre and post test administered at the beginning and end of the courses, in order to improve the problem of numerous unmatched surveys. This was implemented and has increased the valid response rate from 37% in 2004 to 59% in 2005 and 67% in 2006.

In the 2004 study, only two out of 10 questions showed statistical significance, and all the answers were skewed to the high end of the Likert scale. The current evaluation instrument showed statistical significance for all 22 questions, and none were reported as skewed. However, in 2005, the number of programs that filled out questionnaires needed improvement. This was addressed in 2006, with nine sites returning surveys instead of only two.

Another recommendation from the prior study was to time focus groups so they could explore and expand on information provided by the survey analysis. It has continued to be a challenge to follow survey analysis with focus groups due to timing and scheduling factors. However, because the retrospective survey yielded consistently positive statistically significant data, there was not as much of a need to understand issues such as skewed scores that seemed important in the prior study.

Another suggestion made at the end of the prior study was implemented: a demographic summary sheet for local site leaders to complete. This was more effective than gathering demographic information on individual surveys, however, some sites did not return their forms which required considerable follow up and when they did return their forms, information was not always completed thoroughly.

Nevertheless, considering the challenges of collecting data from sites spread out across a rural state, the improvements made in this evaluation cycle were effective. The survey instrument seems capable of generating useful and valid data. The focus groups supported data gathered through the surveys, and provided rich perspectives on the use of the OVOC curriculum in different settings.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC & PARTICIPATION DATA**

This evaluation report discusses the findings of two years in the program, and compares findings for the survey and demographic data

collected by June 2005 with that collected by June 2006. The 2005 data represents 381 youth participants, 43 youth facilitators, and 21 adult facilitators at four sites in four Vermont counties: Caledonia, Chittenden, Franklin and Orange. This number included 31 youth with disabilities and 20 youth in an alternative school program.

Out of these 381 participants in 2005, 52% were male, and 48% were female. Nine percent of the participants were in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 14% were in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 72% were in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and 5% were distributed evenly among the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. One percent of the participants were identified as American Indian, 2% as African American, and 1.5% as Hispanic. Another 0.5% of the participants were identified as racially mixed, and 95% as White/Caucasian.

Out of the 43 youth facilitators in 2005, 40% were male and 60% were female. The middle school group involved one 6<sup>th</sup> grader, one 7<sup>th</sup> grader, and one 8<sup>th</sup> grader. In the high school age group, 33% were in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and 67% in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Seven percent of the youth facilitators were identified as Asian, 5% as African American, and 88% as Caucasian. Of the 21 adult facilitators that made up the youth-adult partnership teams, 29% were male and 71% female. Age, race, and ethnic data were not collected for adult facilitators.

The 2006 evaluation represents 417 youth participants, 83 youth facilitators, and 46 adult facilitators at ten sites in five Vermont counties: Caledonia, Chittenden, Franklin, Orange and Windham. These numbers included 28 youth with disabilities, 46 youth in alternative schools, 40 youth in vocational schools, four youth in a GED program, and three youth who were not in school.

Out of these 417 youth participants, 48% were male and 52% were female. The youth involved as participants or facilitators ranged in age from 10 to 22 years old. Unfortunately, data received on numbers of youth in each age

group was incomplete. Estimates of grade level based on knowledge of the programs indicate that approximately 16% of the youth participants were in 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades, 72% in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and 12% in 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Racial data was received on 410 out of the 417 participants. Of this group, 88% were White/Caucasian, 5% were Asian, 3% African American, 2% Hispanic, and 2% either American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or Racially Mixed.

The gender and age data of youth facilitators were also incomplete. School grade level was reported on 68 of the 83 youth facilitators. Of these, 47% were in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, 44% in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, 4% in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 4% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and 1% in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Racial data was received on 78 out of the 83 youth facilitators. Of these, 95% were White/Caucasian, 3% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1% Asian, and 1% Racially Mixed. Out of the 46 adult facilitators that made up the youth-adult partnership teams in 2006, 30% were male and 70% were female. Age, race, and ethnic data were not collected for adult facilitators.

In 2006, there was adequate data to report that out of those youth participants and youth facilitators who started the program, 94% completed the program. The other 6% experienced a variety of barriers to participation such as school transfers, schedule conflicts, personal issues, conflicting interests or a loss of interest.

## **FINDINGS**

Youth became involved in the OVOC program in a number of ways, depending on how youth-adult partnership teams designed the program at their site. At one school, youth facilitators went through an application and interview process. At another school, 9<sup>th</sup> grade participants registered for a peer leadership course. This summary evaluation includes survey and/or focus group data from 12 sites: six community-based organizations and six schools,

including two alternative schools. Following is a description of each site:

Community Site B: This site has returned for continued involvement with OVOC. The current program involves collaboration between a youth organization and area schools. Youth experience the curriculum modules during a two-day retreat followed by monthly meetings throughout the year. For their project, they plan trips, such as hiking and visits to local museums, for 5<sup>th</sup> graders from several elementary schools. Their goal is to help the 5<sup>th</sup> graders get to know each other before they reach middle school, in order to facilitate a smooth transition from elementary to middle school.

School Site C: This site participated in OVOC from 2003 - 2005. Students experienced the curriculum modules during a semester long peer leadership course. The elective course met for 120 hours over the fall semester. Course meetings involved students in activities that sparked discussions about leadership topics. The class worked as a team on its project, where they developed a survey and interviewed students, staff, faculty, and parents about the presence of the School Resource Officer at their high school.

School Site D: This site has completed its third year of OVOC. The curriculum is used in a year-long program for 9<sup>th</sup> graders, designed to ease their transition to high school. Students in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades partner with adult staff to lead the program. They work in teams of two or three youth co-facilitators and one adult. In 2006, youth adult partner teams, involving 62 youth in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades and 23 adults, facilitated the program with 226 youth in 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Youth facilitators at Site D participated in a training and a year-long course, which utilized the OVOC curriculum. The youth and adult teams facilitated advisory groups for first year students twice a week throughout the school year. They planned the activities for their groups, using the OVOC curriculum as their

resource. Later in the year, they helped the participants in their groups plan a community service day as their project.

Sample service projects at Site D included: visits to elementary schools to work with a school gardening project, to “green up” the school grounds, to interact with school children, and to shadow and mentor them in their school classes; visits to summer camps, a community recreation center, a science museum, and a state park to help prepare the facilities and grounds for the summer season; a car wash to raise money for the Humane Society; a visit to a nursing home to interact with residents; and preparation of a meal for a homeless shelter, involving interaction with families and children.

School Site G: This middle school site participated for two years, although evaluation data for 2005 was not received in time for the 2005 report. Eight students were involved in both 2005 and 2006. They utilized the OVOC curriculum for 14 hours in 2005 and 44 hours in 2006. Their project entailed a renovation of the school locker room to enhance school pride and respect.

Community Site H: This county-wide youth council of 13 members utilized the OVOC curriculum at its monthly meetings and two day long retreats. The council partnered with multiple community organizations, schools, and foundations to host a day long conference, planned by and for youth. The conference provided a forum for dialogue on issues important to youth and for learning leadership and youth-adult partnership skills, all with a focus on improving the community environment for teens. An additional 13 youth assisted in leading the conference, attended by 200 youth and 65 adults.

Community Site I: This seven member teen group resulted from collaboration between three community organizations seeking to enhance youth life skills. The youth met with their three adult partners 13 times over four months, utilizing the OVOC curriculum in their meetings

and on three adventure based outings. The teens took turns co-facilitating activities with their adult facilitators. For their project, the teens created a live television show, also available as a video, documenting positive activities of teens in their community. The teens invited the community to a showing of the video and discussed OVOC and their project.

Community Site J: Students from two alternative programs were involved in this community partnership that connected youth at-risk with the OVOC curriculum to build leadership skills and find a voice in their communities. The teens and adults met eight times to work with the OVOC curriculum and to prepare a “speak out” event for young people at National Youth Service Day.

Alternative School Site K: This alternative high school engaged seven youth facilitators working with two adults in utilizing the OVOC curriculum for teambuilding and facilitation skills. For their project, the youth planned and implemented a maple sugaring demonstration. They invited area children and school groups to visit the school grounds and participate in the demonstration for educational enrichment.

Alternative School Site L: This school utilized the OVOC curriculum to curtail an accelerating dropout rate among students. Inspired and empowered by their OVOC training, the youth-adult partnership team planned and implemented a weekly meeting where youth facilitators led OVOC activities. The meetings attracted students to school and resulted in improved attendance. For their project, students created a library and community space in their school where students could congregate.

Middle School Site M: During two years of involvement with OVOC, this school used the curriculum as a springboard for expanding youth leadership in school. Through retreats and in-school committees that met weekly throughout the school year, the trained youth and adult facilitators involved participants in transforming the school governance structure into one that



was inclusive and responsive to youth voice. Remarkably, the amount of students involved in school leadership grew from 10% to nearly 75%, taking on issues they defined as important, from school climate to health and fitness.

Community Site N: A core group of community teens and adults utilized the OVOC curriculum and project work to revitalize and re-open their community teen center. With a two-day retreat and additional meetings, they focused on building leadership and team skills, setting goals and policy for the teen center, and reaching out to the community. Project work included not only re-opening the teen center, but also planning for its sustainability.

Community Site O: This community action teen program operates through collaboration between three local youth organizations. The group meets twice every month throughout the school year and has focused on one OVOC curriculum module per month. The youth divided into teams to plan and implement projects such as planning a social event for the elderly at a local retirement home and painting murals to beautify the local area.

**Outcome 1: Genuine youth and adult partnerships are forged between adult-youth facilitators through facilitator trainings and through support provided as they facilitate their classes.**

***Youth-adult partnerships invited youth to take more initiative in matters that concerned them, such as school policies***

Youth-adult partnerships strive to treat youth as equal partners in order to empower youth to engage productively in their communities. Across the focus groups, this effort was apparent. At Alternative School Site L, two female high school seniors discussed their partnership with the adult co-facilitators. They explained how the youth facilitators plan for their meetings with the youth participants, but if they have “a radical idea,” in other words, an

idea that takes power away from adults, they seek approval from their adult co-facilitator. One of their radical ideas included allowing youth to vote for student of the week, a role that previously belonged to teachers.

Youth co-facilitators at Site L also empowered their younger peer participants by gathering their input on study hall policy. One youth facilitator explained, “Study hall gets people mad, pissed off, suspended.” She described how they posed questions to the students such as, “Why did teachers create study hall? Does it work? Why or why not? What could we do instead?” She added that after the discussion, “people were still talking about it....people were surprised we were giving them that power.”

The adult co-facilitator at Site L responded with enthusiasm about involving students in making policies, especially addressing the controversial ones. She sees student ideas and leadership as key to keeping students interested in school and avoiding power struggles. She is continually asking, “What can we give up power on? What can they own?” She added her belief in “empowering them to look at what it takes to give up the rules and if they create it, they can live by it – they can’t blame anyone else.” One youth facilitator shared that she felt it was easier for the youth facilitators than the youth participants to become empowered. She said she thought it would take more effort to help the participants “understand they can change school and change the way things are run. The more policy work we do, they’ll see it.”

The adult co-facilitator at Site L discussed the balance between youth and adults in the partnership. She engages youth in developing their ideas, and coaches them in running effective meetings with their peers. Teachers still have time to share information during the student run meetings.

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One female youth co-facilitator at Site L described her role as a “middleman between staff and students.” She wanted to help with student and staff understanding, in other words, she wanted to create a better foundation for youth-adult partnership. She cited the “need for communication – if not kids will keep dropping out.”

Another female co-facilitator particularly valued her role as a peer mentor with students who break rules of safety, respect and responsibility. Instead of only adult teachers working with these youth “to make it right,” she said that now the youth co-facilitators have helped with this process, with permission of the adults. This youth facilitator was interested in seeking further training to gain more skills in helping her troubled peers, in order to “leave the teachers free to do teaching with other kids.” Another youth co-facilitator at Site L commented on the results of their efforts so far. She saw the bridge between staff and students as shorter. There is “not so much of a gap between students and staff.”

***Youth-adult partnerships challenged adults to join with youth as equal players, to relinquish power while staying involved and connected.***

At the Middle School Site M, the adult co-facilitator expressed the importance of adults working together with youth without dictating to them. As their program expands, she orients teachers one by one to the youth-adult partnership component of their OVOC program. She emphasizes “working, deciding together, creating together, flexibility,

exploration” and helping youth “feel better about being in school and that they have a voice.” She worries about the teachers who might tend to “take over.” She thinks the continued success of the program “depends on teachers deciding to be part of this [OVOC] committee and their relationship with the kids.”

The youth co-facilitators at Site M had positive comments about their relationship with the adult co-facilitator. “She will have different ideas – see things – expect things we didn’t expect,” explained one youth. She “let us kids do a lot of it. We had a plan – schedule. We took turns leading.” This 7<sup>th</sup> grade female also enjoyed the diversity of views among her peer co-facilitators. “It’s neat having different people’s insights in planning.” For instance, she commented that her 6<sup>th</sup> grade peer “knew her class better than we do.” The 8<sup>th</sup> grade youth facilitator also appreciated the support of her adult co-facilitator. When they led a student retreat together, they planned out “who would say what.” As they implemented it, they would take turns. Referring to her adult co-facilitator, this 8<sup>th</sup> grade youth added, “She would pick up where I left off.” For her, the youth-adult partnership made quite an impression. She said, “No teachers have ever done anything like that before.”

At School Site D, several students who were second year youth facilitators commented on improved youth-adult partnerships in their second year. A 12<sup>th</sup> grade male described how last year was “not a good experience” because the adult “only got involved for disciplining.” This year, the adult “lets us control, gets involved” and is “relaxed.” Their program director reiterated the “tenets for success of the adult facilitator” which include being involved, a mix of empowering youth, and not just being the disciplinarian.

A 12<sup>th</sup> grade female at Site D described an effective relationship with her adult co-facilitator. “She was very energetic – led good things. She brings a lot to the group.” She “lets us take as much ownership as we want to” and

“jumps in” when necessary. Students appreciated being able to rely on the adults as needed but also to have the adults participate and get “involved with students.” One second year youth facilitator saw the adult’s role as helpful with discussion when needed, but also in being able to “step back.” One 12<sup>th</sup> grade female felt it was important for adults to allow the youth facilitators to “take more of a leadership role,” because then “kids respond more.”

Graduate participants at Site D also benefited from the youth-adult partnerships they experienced in OVOC. One 10<sup>th</sup> grade female commented on how useful it was to see teachers in a non-classroom environment. “You can learn more things that way.” Another 10<sup>th</sup> grade female added, “I had a really great...leader and that kind of helped make me more open to talking with teachers.”

**Outcome 2: Youth participants make connections with adults, other young people and children through their required service work in their school and or/communities**

*Youth enjoyed the rewards of serving their schools and communities through their service projects, often gaining a greater sense of connection with people of all ages, including their peers.*

Sixty-four percent of the 2006 survey respondents and 85% in 2005 discussed ways in which the projects were meaningful to them. Individual comments often contained more than one theme. Survey responses consistently emphasized how rewarding the youth participants found the process of helping others in the community through service projects. Many of these survey respondents who commented on the most meaningful part of their service projects (54% in 2006 and 68% in 2005) named helping others and making a difference in their communities. This sometimes came with a feeling of accomplishment and pride.

For example, a 15 year old male appreciated “knowing I helped better the

community and made a better place for the kids.” A 13 year old said he enjoyed “doing something good for the community - making a difference.” A 12 year old girl felt good about “spending time with younger students” and feeling like she “made a difference.” Another youth found it meaningful “knowing I could make a big difference without having to be asked.” A 14 year old male enjoyed “helping a little boy with making complete sentences out of questions from a book he was reading.”

Another student enjoyed the sense of how her project would benefit others: “I know someone will enjoy them even though I know I won’t get to use them.” One respondent wrote that she “helped out others and it was actually sort of fun.” A 9<sup>th</sup> grader found most meaningful that he was “giving back” to his community.” Others liked the feeling they got when helping the community or as one young person put it, “helping someone realize their true potential.”

Another 15% of the respondents in 2006 and 11% in 2005 found meaning in the specific goals or actions of their service projects. For example, a 13 year old boy liked “helping clean my environment” and a 12 year old girl enjoyed “making the cookies for firefighters.” Another youth found meaning in “reopening the teen center” and an 8<sup>th</sup> grade male enjoyed knowing “that we were going to have a good graduation.” A 15 year old male highlighted “working hard at something I wanted to achieve and then seeing it come true and flourish.”

“We worked well together and got a lot of work done.”  
(14 year old male participant)

Teamwork was mentioned by some of the youth as a meaningful part of the service project experience (13% in 2006 and 4% in 2005). One 10<sup>th</sup> grade female wrote about “the comradery experienced when accomplishing a task with others, even when it doesn’t benefit you.” One student valued “working with a team” and a 14 year old male

described his project team this way: “We worked well together and got a lot of work done.”

Eleven percent of the youth in 2006 appreciated having input into their communities through their project work. In some cases they felt more like a leader through this process. (This was true for 2% of the comments in 2005 as well.) For example, a 15 year old female involved in planning a youth conference enjoyed “helping plan a project that other kids would enjoy and maybe take something away from...” A 15 year old male at the site where OVOC was used to increase youth inclusion in school governance appreciated that “everybody got input on it and gave opinions.” A male peer highlighted the importance of “sharing words to the school that helps everyone feel better about themselves or make them a better person.”

Another 15 year old in this school commented on his personal growth in the process, “Everyone got to hear a different voice every week and I did really well when it was my turn every time.” One of his peers said she enjoyed, “being a part of my own graduation.” A 16 year old female who helped plan the youth summit commented on, “feeling like a leader.” A 16 year old male in a teen group at Community Site I enjoyed “being a ‘leader’, directing people and asking open-ended questions.”

Other students (8% in 2006, 5% in 2005) commented on learning new things through their project work. For some this involved learning what it takes to accomplish a community project, and for others it meant learning more about their communities. For example, one 14 year old female enjoyed “learning what it takes to put something like this together.” Another youth said he appreciated learning more about other youth services. A 15 year old male from a teen center (Community Site N) commented on “understanding the importance of facilitating a workshop” and a 15 year old female working

with school governance wrote about “learning more rules that I never thought we had.”

Lastly, 6% of the youth in 2006 and 16% in 2005 commented on connecting with others through their community service. A 14 year old female discussed “being a part of the community and interacting with the kids - I feel more like a part of the community because I know the students.” Another 14 year old said she enjoyed “connecting with the kids” and one girl enjoyed “meeting new people.”

Those youth that visited elementary schools and nursing homes commented on their connections with the community. Those who visited with younger youth commented that they enjoyed connecting with children and making them happy. They also enjoyed being looked up to by younger children. Some gained valuable life lessons in the process. One 15 year old female came to “understand how much work, time, and effort people put into teaching young children.” Several youth commented on the meaningfulness of “interacting with the elderly and making them feel good.” Participants enjoyed “being appreciated” by those they helped.

In addition to connecting with the communities they visited, students commented on a greater sense of connection with peers. On their survey responses, several youth cited “working with others” and “getting to know other people better” as most meaningful. Others enjoyed “learning and making friends.”

“Helping others is a great thing to do.”  
(9<sup>th</sup> grade participant)

When asked about the most important ways they had grown through participation in the OVOC program, service projects rated highly. A 15 year old male wrote, “I now know that if you work together, many things are possible.” One student commented on wanting “to help people more, do more community service.” A 9<sup>th</sup> grader wrote, “Helping others is a great

thing to do.” One student described “feeling I can be more involved in my community.”

“I now know that if you work together, many things are possible.”  
(15 year old male participant)

Youth in the participant focus groups also enjoyed knowing they were helping and making a difference with their projects. One 10<sup>th</sup> grader discussed how her group’s video was breaking negative stereotypes of the town. She added, “we’re doing good things also.” A 12<sup>th</sup> grade female in her group said, “We’re trying to tell everybody that [this town] is a good place to be.”

A 16 year old female discussed her satisfaction at planning a social event for the elderly. “Even the smallest thing can make someone’s day.” A 15 year old concurred, “They really enjoy having us come. That makes a difference.” She added, “Helping people is a good feeling and in the future something I want to do again. If I hadn’t done this, I wouldn’t know I like visiting the retirement home and that the people are really cool.” Her 15 year old peer said, “Even after this is done....We’ll go back and help them at the retirement home and go for fun.”

Students in the participant focus groups also highlighted the value of learning to work together as a team when they planned their projects. For the Community Site I, this occurred when they planned the storyline for their video. One 17 year old male in this group described OVOC as “more than a project or video. It brings more people together than before.” A 16 year old female added that it “makes them become closer.”

Planning and implementing projects was an ‘eye-opening’ experience for some teens. For example, in a focus group interview, one 17 year old male acknowledged, “It’s a lot more complicated than it seems.” A 15 year old female said, “I look at community projects

differently - how much planning it took. You don’t always think about how much work it took to make it happen.”

A 15 year old female said, “I’m out doing something to help other people on Sunday afternoon. Helps me care more and appreciate what other people do – all the hard work that went into it.” Another student added, “It’s raised my awareness of things that need to be done. I’ve realized there’s things you can do to make a difference.”

***Youth service projects not only benefited the community in tangible ways, but also enhanced public perception of youth as contributing members.***

The community interviews confirmed the benefits of the youth service projects to the community. The projects resulted in an enhanced public perception of youth and of the community as well as tangible improvements to facilities and grounds used by the community. The projects increased connections between community members and helped everyone see the youth as contributing community members, including the youth themselves. Community members sensed that youth improved their own self image as a result. In some cases, the projects benefited the community with experiential education, a sense of tradition and “something to look forward to.”

Over a third (38%) of those interviewed mentioned that the projects enhanced public perception of youth and of the community. One community member commented, “Kids were so obviously proud of themselves. Seeing adults see that pride and sharing was a wonderful community binding episode.” This comment came from a community that suffered a poor public image. One person interviewed put it this way: “some people literally wince when I tell them that I work at [the local] High School - there is such a negative perception out there.” After seeing the videotape the teens produced, another adult commented, “they have the power

to change the issue of a poor image - changing it to the positive.”

Incidentally, at the presentation of their video to the public, the youth from Community Site I wore OVOC t-shirts that they had designed. On the back of the t-shirts was a quote from Margaret Mead that read: “Never underestimate that a small group of committed individuals can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

One community member said, “Every time there's a chance for teens to speak out, these teens seem to be involved. Adults have given kids a voice - not just given it lip service.”

A third (33%) of the community members who were interviewed appreciated the tangible results of the youth service projects. One manager of a state park beach was extremely grateful for the assistance of the youth. Citing staff shortages due to budgetary constraints, he said he, “wouldn't have it done by opening day - wouldn't have opened the beach.” A summer camp director had similar comments: “if we didn't have volunteers it would be difficult to open camp on time.” Another said, “they really help us - they save us.”

Over a quarter (29%) of the comments focused on connections between youth and the community. In one case this involved bridging the “gap between adults and teens and advancing understanding of what's going on for teens. Great to break the stereotypes.”

Youth not only connected with adults and elders in their community, but also with young children from local elementary schools. In one case, a visit from the high school youth had become a much anticipated tradition among elementary school students: Their guidance counselor commented: “They love that excitement of bigger kids to challenge them....The first year was really funny, they didn't know who would win. That's what set off the tradition.” Connections with peers was also

mentioned by some who benefited from a youth sponsored conference for teens. An interviewer commented, “it was clear that the most valuable aspect of the day was the exchange with their peers on important issues in a safe setting.”

Nearly a quarter (24%) of those interviewed observed that they and the youth experienced an increased sense of the youth as contributing community members. In one case, the youth were exposed to controversial community development issues through their service activity. One person appreciated “seeing kids in a different context beyond stereotype.” They liked knowing that kids were breaking the negative images. In other words, this person described the youth as “members of community that help the community.”

Youth self image improved according to 19% of the community members interviewed. One said, “Those kids were so proud of themselves and they really felt they had collaborated and they saw how effective that collaboration was.” One teacher described a teen who talked with her “about how happy she was to be part of such positive change.” An interviewer wrote, “the most impressive thing was to hear one OVOC participant say how important it was to spend time on team building, how it helped them be successful. The comment was unprompted. That was great.”

The experiential aspect of the projects was also seen as a benefit to the community. For example, in discussing the maple sugaring project at one alternative high school, one person said “There was a 'hands on component' that allowed the children to participate in gathering sap and collecting buckets.” Another discussed the “mixture of physical and cognitive work”, the “modeling for other staff” as well as the “product to share” and the “fun.”

When community members were asked about the highlight of the project events for them, they mentioned witnessing youth involvement in their communities, seeing young people demonstrate new skills and

accomplishments, and watching young people enjoy themselves and feel a sense of pride. Over a third (38%) of the comments discussed youth involvement in their communities. For example, one person who watched the youth videotape liked "Seeing how involved teens are - so dedicated, committed...to changing their community. It's amazing that this small group has done so much." Another said, "They didn't dwell on negative stereotypes but focused on the positives - very constructive."

Nearly 25% of the comments discussed how they enjoyed seeing the youth overcome challenges and learn new skills. One enjoyed "watching...a ninth grader...talking in front of about 100 people about her experiences of sugaring, including what she learned and the connections she made with the younger students who came to the school..." Another said, "Students overcame difficulties of coordinating logistics and navigating the dynamics of living and working together in a small community." Another liked "Seeing how proud the kids were of themselves and the people who came down and said you are important." One person felt that the youth projects provided "proof that the community is really working together."

An adult at Alternative School Site K said, "It was great to watch the...students throughout the process of setting up the unit. At first, they had to learn about making maple syrup and by the end of the month they were experts and were both facilitators, hosts and educators. It was a big commitment on their parts and most did a good job following through."

When asked about the kinds of connections they noticed youth making with others during their project work, several people named meaningful and caring interactions as well as empowering connections that helped youth speak out and be heard. One community member said, "Every time there's a chance for teens to speak out, these teens seem to be

involved. Adults have given kids a voice - not just given it lip service."

One community member noticed that the youth were making "positive connections" and that they were seeing "that there are people who want to work with them"- people who are "open" and "trustful." Another community member discussed how the project helps the teens make "connections, so they don't live in isolation." He felt it was important for youth "to have adults to help sort out the meaning of life." Another commented, "Clearly the relations between the high school students and the elementary school teachers got a real boost." Others appreciated the attitudes of the youth, "Kids are respectful and want to help. Impressed me with their positive attitude."

Another community member who saw the youth present their video said, "Teens were looking for approval and recognition and I think they got both of those things abundantly. They probably felt successful in dispelling negative myths." Another person commented on "the fact that adults came - that says something. There is a strong network in this community." One interviewee added, "I'll be encouraging them to present again", saying, it is a "terrific community building message."

Community recipients of the youth project work estimated the impact of the service to benefit a total of approximately 31,250 people, including children, youth, adults, and seniors. The 21 community members interviewed included camp staff, park rangers, a substance abuse professional, a youth case worker supervisor, a guidance counselor, a nurse, a health educator, a program director, volunteer managers, teachers, a community development staff person, and a youth. When asked if the youth projects helped them personally, four of those interviewed responded. One found the project helpful in writing grants, another benefited from the preventive aspect of youth involvement in supportive communities, and one person found teens that had discovered their "voice" more able to speak about important

issues, which was useful to her in her educational work.

When asked about benefits to other members of their communities, respondents again discussed enhanced public perception of teens and of the community. One person felt “pride” and added that “to hear something wonderful that these students are doing certainly felt good.” This person added that the “media is usually so negative.”

A community member who worked in social services said that the teen video “helps adults have a different opinion of teenagers. Teenagers get bad press. It helps the community perceive them as members of the community.” Another community member found it “great to see teens working so hard to project a positive image of their community.” One person said the youth project “proves to the community that so much can happen if we trust them.”

One of the park rangers commented on the multifaceted benefits of a project such as cleaning up the state park beach. He said, it’s a “bonding thing” to “be outside with community and natural resources.” He wished he had been able to participate in programs like this in high school, adding that he “barely ever got outside.” The ranger felt that physical labor is good for young people, “a good way for everybody to get along too.”

An observer of the fifth grade youth recipients of Community Site B’s project saw these children benefiting by connecting with their peers. He noted, “I asked a number of younger students why they were there and heard them talk about meeting new friends from the other elementary schools with whom they would be classmates in the fall. I also heard from the younger students about meeting and making friends with the high school students.”

For some elementary school students, interacting with high school students was a highlight: As their guidance counselor put it,

“Kids get really excited about having the high school kids come.” One teacher commented on how the OVOC program in their school “gives ninth graders an older student to connect with. Older students look out for ninth graders - say hi! They give special attention to special needs students.”

### **Outcome 3: Youth identify and strengthen their leadership skills through OVOC class activities and through their service work.**

Youth facilitators and participants reported increased leadership skills and developmental assets as a result of their involvement in OVOC. Graduate participants and those youth who facilitated the program for two years discussed the lasting effects of these gains. It became apparent that when given the opportunity, youth embrace a chance to become engaged in their schools and communities. At more than one school, the use of OVOC gave young people a voice in school governance. The program also proved effective with a middle school age group. Both youth facilitators and participants made shifts in their definitions of leadership, and in their perspectives of themselves as leaders.

#### ***Youth facilitators described increased leadership skills and developmental assets as a result of their involvement in OVOC.***

The story of Middle School Site M illustrates how OVOC empowered youth to transform their school environment and taught them leadership skills in the process. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade youth facilitators at Site M said the OVOC program gave them a way to lead their peers. “It was fun to be able to work with people instead of just telling them what to do and it was fun using activities from the OVOC binder,” said the 7<sup>th</sup> grader. They also gained experience in a leadership role which sometimes included difficulties. The 7<sup>th</sup> grader found it challenging “dealing with interesting situations when people weren’t happy about things.” Some of the skills she learned, she would pass along to others as this advice: “Go with the



flow. It's easy to get all uptight, trying to make everything go really smoothly." She added that when things don't go as planned, "be flexible." She might say to herself, "Oh well, that's how it works. Let's see what we can do to make it a little better." She finds it important to be aware of the audience. If some activity is not working with a group, she learned to say, "let's move on, or we'll take more time on this – or pull something out."

The 8<sup>th</sup> grade youth facilitator at Site M said, "I think it was a big test. It was hard – to make it so everyone was paying attention and quiet – and to answer questions when you don't know what the answers are. [Our adult facilitator] would help...It was good to do." She added that speaking in front of everyone "was really hard." However, she continued with "it pays off to be able to do that. I've gotten so much out of it. It's good to know – since I'm leaving – something's happened." By 'something's happened,' she meant the retreats and the committees, which she believes are good for the school. Her sense of empowerment is palpable in these comments – knowing she has contributed something useful to her school.

The 8<sup>th</sup> grader explained that facilitating two student retreats was helpful because the experience gained at the first one made the second one run smoother. The second was also a younger group. "They listened to me more which made me more confident. We knew what we were doing more. You could see some difference. A lot of kids cared more about it. They would be quiet, help, and participated a lot." She hopes youth participants will "understand what leadership is and if they ever want to do or lead something, then they'll be able to." This 8<sup>th</sup> grade youth facilitator talked about the lasting effects of her OVOC experience. "I'll definitely think about leadership and what we've learned in OVOC. If I ever have to do a training, I have the experience of doing it." Through her involvement in OVOC, she said her definition of leadership became "clearer and more official." She "got to experience" it.

When asked what was most meaningful about her OVOC experience, the 8<sup>th</sup> grader explained, "Mainly that we pulled it off and that we did it. At first I thought it was going to be all talk and we would never do it. It was just an idea before. I thought it would just be an idea and stay there. But we did it."

The adult facilitator at Site M said that the 8<sup>th</sup> grader's mother has come in several times and said OVOC is the "best thing" that has happened to her daughter this year. She attributes her daughters' positive changes to OVOC. Apparently, her daughter talks about it a lot. Her mother said it was important to her daughter's "attitude" and noticed that she "seems happier and more confident." The adult facilitator also noticed changes in this 8<sup>th</sup> grader. "I see her being nicer to everyone....she listens more to what other kids are saying and to take their ideas into consideration....[she] sees more clearly she has to step back from some of the peer group that are negative – in order to be a leader."

When asked what was most meaningful about her OVOC experience, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader explained, "Mainly that we pulled it off and that we did it. At first I thought it was going to be all talk and we would never do it. It was just an idea before. I thought it would just be an idea and stay there. But we did it. "

The 7<sup>th</sup> grade youth facilitator discussed the impact of her OVOC experience on her leadership skills. She sensed improvement in her ability to "get along with people" and to "be a leader in lots of situations." She could get a point across without hurting anybody's feelings and so that people would be happier in the end." She felt the key was to "be able to get what you want and be able to help other people get what they want." To her, communication skills helped her talk to people, get her thoughts heard, and handle disagreements in a civilized manner. She also learned how important it is to listen. "People

are more willing to do what you want if you're willing to listen to what they want – to help them get what they want.” She especially felt she had grown in the ability to “get other people interested or give other people an opportunity to say what they want to say and make change.”

The 7<sup>th</sup> grader described her observations of the youth participants' own leadership development through the retreats. “As we started,” she said, “they were like – what's happening?” At the end of the retreat, she said she heard them saying, “we know what you mean – leadership.” She said the students gained an idea of what everyone was thinking and were able to voice any thoughts they had.

The 7<sup>th</sup> grade youth facilitator emphasized the importance of youth voice and explained the need for this in her school. “Kids really didn't have a voice. [They] had no other way to get what they thought about this out.” She described an incident a few years earlier where the school administration forbid running on the playground. She said the students found this silly. “You are supposed to run on the playground and play tag.” The students started a petition which was not effective at changing the rule. Eventually, she explained, some kids destroyed school property. “Instead of being able to say we don't like this, we want to change this – they used a more violent way to get what they wanted.” Apparently though the rule still stands, there has been a gradual non-enforcement of the rule so that it no longer seems to exist. This 7<sup>th</sup> grade student was enthused about a forum for student voice and collaboration with adults that could avoid this kind of an incident in the future. She believes the discussions at the retreat about school climate and the resulting committees gave the students “an actual solid thing to work on instead of more abstract. Something they could be more involved in.”

***Youth facilitators made shifts in their definitions of leadership, and in their perspectives of themselves as leaders.***

Before her OVOC experience, the 8<sup>th</sup> grader at Site M thought of leadership as just “leading something.” After the OVOC project, she explained, “There's a lot more to it. It's hard work and you need a lot to do it. You need to be brave and confident. Otherwise the people you're in charge of will find your weaknesses. It's hard to be a leader – cause some people might agree with you or not, or they might go against what you do. You have to expect everything.” Her view of herself as a leader became “stronger because I've done more – more experience leading stuff.”

For this youth facilitator, the combination of the OVOC trainings, working with her adult facilitator, and implementing the retreats changed her view of herself as a leader. Referring to the retreats, she said, “I don't know if I could have done that a year ago.” She found the OVOC training helpful as well as the curriculum materials: “I learned a lot from it. She seemed surprised that the curriculum “was so useful – you could actually use it afterwards and not forget about it.”

The 7<sup>th</sup> grade youth facilitator, who had not done any facilitating before her OVOC experience, talked about how her view of herself as a leader was crossing over into other areas of her life. “You can look at things from a different dimension. It's a little more formal in that setting – you're seen as like the leader. As a leader – when you're thinking of self as a leader – how can I make this run more smoothly, how can I get people talking? Kind of makes you think of these things day to day – in class – in small groups.”

A 7<sup>th</sup> grader reflected on how she used to be considered quiet by her peers. “I'm probably more outspoken now. People don't say that anymore. I'm more apt to step up and say, this is what I think, what do you think?”

The 7<sup>th</sup> grade youth facilitator reflected on her perceptions of a leader. Instead of the person up front who is always leading the way – in charge – telling people what they’re supposed to be doing, she now sees a good leader as someone able to listen and talk some, able to help people get what they want, and able to make change for the better. She also reflected on the shared aspect of leadership: “Being a leader is just as much of a learning experience - instead of a leader as someone who knows everything. This is what I think – and being able to listen to what other people think. Instead of being above someone, being at the same level. Being more like a partnership instead of a hierarchy type deal.”

***When given the opportunity, youth embrace a chance to become engaged in their schools and communities.***

For the 7<sup>th</sup> grade youth facilitator at Site M, the most meaningful aspect of her OVOC leadership experience involved breaking through assumptions she had about peers. She explained that she expected that most of her peers would not think about or care about the topic of leadership. She found when given a chance, “they came up with something that I hadn’t even considered.... ground rules that they wanted – be inclusive – include everyone....really thoughtful rules that didn’t even pass through my brain.” She continued, “When these kids had a chance to say something they had meaningful things to say. People probably do care and do think about this.”

The adult facilitator at Site M commented on the leadership skills she observed in participants at the retreats. One activity brought out some controversy between the groups. The discussion that followed impressed several teachers who were watching. One exclaimed, “That was absolutely incredible, kids that I never hear speak in my class are speaking and they’re disagreeing with kids who are more powerful than them.”

The adult facilitator at Site M also shared her observations of student leadership at the school before OVOC was introduced. “They had a good idea of what leadership is but they were just expecting it from someone else – not looking at it as their own responsibility. They tend to not step up – they just apply it to someone else.” She explained that the youth-adult partnership’s OVOC project for this year was introducing a concept of leadership to all the kids – developing an inclusive system for leadership. She felt this goal was attained because they’ve signed up for the committees. She sees the youth wanting “to take an active role in making changes” at their school. She added, “It’s surprising that perhaps they just didn’t have the opportunity before – they didn’t have an avenue to do it.”

The adult facilitator at Site M was surprised by the response to the inclusive leadership structure OVOC helped her youth-adult partnership team implement at the school. “I wasn’t sure it was possible and now I know it is. I’ve changed in knowing there’s a potential for everyone if given the opportunity. I used to think maybe only eight kids will want to do it. I really did not expect that many kids to want to be part of it. These kids have been wonderful.”

***Youth participants reported increased developmental assets, namely positive identity, social competencies, empowerment, and positive values, as a result of their involvement in OVOC.***

Social competencies include interpersonal and friendship skills, such as comfort with people of different backgrounds. Social competencies also include the ability to plan and make choices, to resist negative peer pressure and dangerous influences, and to resolve conflicts peacefully. Two thirds of the comments in both years, by youth who answered the questions about what they learned and the most important ways in which they had grown through participation in OVOC, discussed increased social competencies. For example, one 15 year old female said she had grown by “being friends with different people

that I normally wouldn't be friends with." One youth wrote, "I've learned to give people a chance that I normally wouldn't." A 16 year old male commented on "being friendlier and more open to people." One youth grew "to have more respect for others around me." A 15 year old male wrote, "Learning differences between people is not always a bad thing." A 9<sup>th</sup> grade male reflected on "becoming a better friend and a more respectful person." A 15 year old felt she grew by "working with many unknown kids and adults and handling that well."

Gains in the ability to cooperate in a group or team came across in this question about important personal growth through the OVOC program. While one 9<sup>th</sup> grader said, "I have become more comfortable in groups," another youth said, "we can get things done when we work together." For example, a 14 year old male wrote, "I can be more a part of a group and I felt more welcome and appreciated in the group." A 15 year old male commented on his "ability to work in a team, as a leader, and a role model." One 14 year old said he found it helpful "knowing that a lot of people have the same goals" while another 9<sup>th</sup> grader simply wrote, "My help out and teamwork skill went up."

For a 14 year old female, teamwork and group skills meant "following directions and working with a group" and for a 14 year old male this meant "working with a team toward a goal." Another youth discussed a greater appreciation for "what a team can do if it works together well." A 16 year old put several of these gains together in her discussion of "working as a team, taking leadership and knowing when to back down and let others take the leadership position."

Others also discussed social competencies such as teamwork, cooperation and collaboration. A 14 year old female said "Teamwork is really hard to get used to but it really helps." Some students learned to be part of a group and how to manage groups of younger youth and children. One 9<sup>th</sup> grader

learned, "how to help people get along and work together" while a 16 year old male gained "a sense of how is most effective way of working with little kids."

"Teamwork is really hard to get used to but it really helps."  
(14 year old female participant)

Other comments mentioned specific social competency skills gained such as listening, problem solving, facilitation, and organization. For example, one 9<sup>th</sup> grader learned about "listening to others and working as a group." A 15 year old male wrote, "I know how to solve things without hurting people." Another said she became "more patient."

In addition to acceptance of others, students commented on learning to make good choices for themselves and to resist peer pressure. For example, a 15 year old female wrote, "don't be influenced by peer pressure. Do what you want to do." A 16 year old female said it in another way: "Don't worry about what other people think of you, and make your own choices." A 9<sup>th</sup> grader came to understand "that there are a lot of ways to have fun besides getting into trouble." Several commented on learning "to be myself" along with how to relax and have fun. Some knowledge applied specifically to substance use, such as "don't be stupid with drugs" or "Don't get in cars with drunk kids."

Further examples include a comment by a 15 year old who learned, "It's not always right to do what others think is right." Another youth came to understand how "to make great choices." Several youth participants mentioned the importance of learning to "be yourself" while a 9<sup>th</sup> grade male said, "Don't lose your head." One student gained a sense that "I count."

Youth participants in the focus groups also discussed enhanced connections with others. This included getting to know people and how they

think, meeting people from other areas of the state at the OVOC training, developing trust, teambuilding, and bonding. In some cases it required getting involved in the first place. For example, one 17 year old female liked the way the OVOC community program brings teens together who don't see or talk to each other in school. Youth in one participant focus group valued their weekend trips for team building. According to one 16 year old girl, going away together facilitated trust and interdependence. There's "no one else to run to...you can go to a person with a problem because you've been with them for so long."

"I know how to solve things without hurting people."  
(15 year old male participant)

Empowerment involves youth serving useful roles in their schools and communities, and feeling safe and valued in those settings. Eleven percent of the answers to the open-ended questions about what students learned and how they had grown, mentioned empowerment. For one female student, this meant "I can trust people better now. Before I didn't even trust my Mom!" Several students discussed greater comfort and awareness in school and with students in the grades above them. For one 15 year old female this meant "feeling better at school" and for a 15 year old male meant "making friends with upperclassmen." One 15 year old female wrote that she learned "to relax about high school - it's not the living hell that you think" and another wrote, "high school is not as bad as a lot of people say." Youth participants said they made connections with peers and teachers and gained a sense of trust. One 15 year old female wrote, "Talking to other peers, teachers, parents, adults, or friends about how you're feeling can help."

Other young people commented on serving their communities. One 14 year old who worked with the maple sugaring project enjoyed the interaction with younger children who visited. She found it important to realize "that just doing

a little bit can help tremendously. These kids loved coming here and we really made a difference at least in their day." A 12 year old female found it important to learn "that you can change something and make a difference."

"You can change something and make a difference."  
(12 year old female participant)

The positive identity asset includes a sense of purpose and control over what happens, optimism about the future and self esteem. Ten percent of the comments in 2006 and 15% in 2005 focused on this asset. When asked how they had grown, one girl commented on a "better feeling about the future" and a 12 year old said she "learned to stay more optimistic." One 15 year old female wrote about "realizing that not all people are as lucky as I am and that I should keep a great attitude under all circumstances." A 15 year old male from Site C wrote about "learning not to bite off more than I can chew and not take any support of another human resource I have for granted." An 18 year old said she became "more self approving." Another young person wrote, "I feel more confident, like I can do more things. I'm closer to many people now." One 14 year old developed confidence and an 18 year old said she grew to respect herself more.

Another asset that emerged in the data is positive values, which involves placing value on caring and helping others, promoting equality, standing up for beliefs, telling the truth, behaving responsibly and exercising restraint. Twenty-five percent of the comments in 2006 and 17% in 2005, about personal growth and learning through OVOC, discussed positive values. A 14 year old male learned that "caring and responsibility is important in the outside world."

A 14 year old said she grew by "wanting to participate in more community service projects and standing up for myself." A 9<sup>th</sup> grader wrote about wanting to be a leader to help people

like his leaders did. A 14 year old female wrote, "I've become a little more outgoing and I share my ideas more than I used to." One youth said she had grown by "not being shy and participating in activities." while another said, "I have learned to stand up for what I believe in and for myself." A 15 year old male simply said "I speak up."

A 16 year old female in a focus group described her OVOC program as "a good opportunity for those in it to learn how to speak up and take charge." In another focus group, a 16 year old female described how "In other situations – family, school, and friends – It's helped me speak up more with other people. Before, I would just go along with an idea. It taught me that one person can make a difference and to speak up and say your idea."

One 15 year old female discussed the two way process of voice: "This group helps you voice your opinion more and take the lead with stuff you're good at. People will care what you're thinking. They'll take it into consideration and incorporate it into their thoughts, too." Another young person said "Working with this has empowered me to have a voice."

The development of positive values were evident when a 15 year old male said he learned "to be a helpful leader, not a... 'follow me or you won't be my friend' bully, you know?" Another youth felt it important "to take a little time to become a leader and help our school." A 14 year old female said "I am more apt to help and I am not as bossy."

"Caring and responsibility is important in the outside world."

(14 year old male participant)

Youth often spoke about several assets at once. A 15 year old female reflected, "I've met more people and I feel that I can speak up when I have a question and I feel comfortable in this school because of the transition [OVOC] helped me make." Two comments reflected the

link between self acceptance and acceptance of others: One 15 year old female wrote, "I can do anything I put my heart into. I can trust people." Another 15 year old female learned, "to be honest and true to myself and respect people no matter how different they are." These showed development of both social competencies and empowerment. One 15 year old female summed up her learning with the statement "that it is a great thing to help other people, helping the community is a good thing, families come in many ways, it is okay to be different."

"In other situations – family, school, and friends – It's helped me speak up more with other people. Before, I would just go along with an idea. It taught me that one person can make a difference and to speak up and say your idea."

(16 year old female participant)

#### **Youth participants made statistically significant positive change in asset development.**

The survey of OVOC participants included 22 statements about what they do, know, think, or feel which they rated on a Likert Scale of frequency. For example, *Connect with at least one caring adult*, would be a statement. The statements also served as an indicator or measure of developmental assets and leadership development. The frequency choices included "hardly ever", "sometimes", "often", and "mostly." In the statistical analysis, "hardly ever" was assigned a value of one and "mostly" was assigned a four. As a retrospective instrument, the survey first asked participants to rate themselves before participation in OVOC, and then after participation. (See Appendix I.)

The results comparing 2005 with 2006 are charted in Appendixes J, K, L and M. Appendix J highlights differences in response from before to after, including negative, positive, and zero differences (ties). Appendix K outlines the median and mode of the responses to each question. Appendix L records the frequencies of

responses in numbers and Appendix M shows the frequencies in percentages.

Statistically significant improvement was shown for every statement in both 2005 and 2006. In general, the percentages of youth who experienced positive change on indicators of developmental assets are comparable between 2005 and 2006, ranging near 20% to 25% on most items. In both years, youth showed the most improvement on the following two indicators: Over a third (35%) of the respondents to the survey in 2006 and 28% in 2005 had a positive difference on the empowerment measure: *Take on a useful role in my school or community*. Nearly one third (31%) in 2006 and 29% in 2005 noted a positive difference on an indicator of positive identity: *Set personal goals to accomplish something I want to do*. In 2006, 31% also improved on another measure of empowerment: *Serve my school or community for one or more hours per week*. (See Appendix J.)

In 2005, more females than males experienced positive change on two statements: *Resolve conflicts without anybody getting hurt*, a social competency; and *Feel good about myself*, an indicator of positive identity. There were no correlations with age, hours in the program, or hours spent on project work. In 2006, more females than males showed changes toward the positive on the following statements: *Make choices that are important to me*, a social competency measure; and *Feel valued by adults* and *Serve my school or community for one or more hours per week*, both empowerment measures. (See Appendix J.) However, these 2006 results may not be valid since 10.4% of the participants did not indicate their gender on their surveys.

In 2005, the median, or mid-point between all the responses, rose from three (often) to four (mostly) for the following items: *Respect people who are different from me*, a social competency; *Feel my life has a purpose* and *Look forward to my future*, both aspects of positive identity; and *Feel safe with this group*, an empowerment measure. In other words, before participation in

OVOC, half the participants had a score of three or lower. After participation, enough scores had risen so that half had a score of four or lower. (See Appendix K.)

In 2005, the social competency indicator, *Be a good friend*, had a median score that remained high at four (mostly). Nevertheless, friendship skills were often cited in the open-ended comments as an area of growth. The statement, *Serve my school or community for one or more hours per week*, an empowerment measure, had a median score that remained low at two (sometimes). The mode, or most frequent response, for this statement was also remarkably low, remaining at one (hardly ever). This may be understood by the fact that the community service project for the majority of respondents in 2005 was planned as an end of program event, and that students were not engaging in ongoing community service activities on a regular basis. The results were different in 2006 when the mode rose from two (sometimes) to four (mostly) for the same empowerment measure. (See Appendix K.)

In 2005, the statistical mode, or most frequent response, rose from three to four for the statements: *Stand up for what I believe in*, a positive value; and *Make choices that are important to me*, a social competency. These responses support the focus group and open-ended response data already mentioned (See Appendix K.)

In 2006, the median rose from three (often) to four (mostly) for the positive value indicator: *Help other people*; the social competency measures: *Make choices that are important to me*, *Resist pressure to engage in harmful activities*, and *Resolve conflicts without anybody getting hurt*; and the positive identity measures: *Feel my life has a purpose* and *Feel good about myself*. The median rose from two (sometimes) to three (often) for the empowerment measure: *Serve my school or community for one or more hours per week*. (See Appendix K.)

In 2006, the statistical mode, or most frequent response, rose from three to four for the positive value statements: *Take responsibility for a task* and *Help other people*; the indicator of positive identity: *Set personal goals to accomplish something I want to do*; and the empowerment measures: *Feel valued by adults* and *Take on a useful role in my school or community*. As mentioned earlier, the mode rose from two (sometimes) to four (mostly) for the empowerment measure: *Serve my school or community for one or more hours per week*. (See Appendix K.)

***Youth participants made positive changes in their perspectives of their own leadership identity. These changes were statistically significant.***

The OVOC survey had two questions on a Likert scale that asked about perceptions of leadership. One addressed how often youth thought of themselves as leaders. Almost a third of the respondents in 2006 (30%) and over a quarter of those in 2005 (26%) reported a positive change on this item. An analysis of the responses for both years using a sign test showed statistically significant positive change (See Appendix J).

In both years, 79% of these youth with a positive change increased by one notch (e.g. hardly ever to sometimes, or sometimes to often, or often to mostly). About a fifth (20% in 2006 and 18% in 2005) increased by two notches (e.g. hardly to often, or sometimes to mostly). A few (1% in 2006 and 3% in 2005) changed by three notches (hardly to mostly). A small number (1% in 2006, 6% in 2005) reported a negative change.

An additional measure of positive change was the statistical mode. In 2006, the mode, or most frequent response, rose from 2 (sometimes) to 4 (mostly) for the statement: *Think of myself as a leader*. In 2005, this rose from two (sometimes) to three (often). The positive change in mode indicates that youth began thinking of themselves as a leader on a more frequent

basis after their participation in OVOC. (See Appendix K.)

***Youth participants increased their sense that they can learn leadership skills. These increases were statistically significant.***

The last question on the survey asked how often youth thought they could learn leadership skills. In 2005 and 2006, the statistical mode rose from three to four for this question (See Appendix K). In 2005, 28% of the youth respondents reported a positive change. Seventy percent of these responses increased by one notch (e.g. hardly ever to sometimes, or sometimes to often, or often to mostly), 25% increased by two notches (e.g. hardly to often, or sometimes to mostly), and 5% increased by three notches (hardly to mostly). Five percent reported a negative change.

In 2006, 30% of the youth respondents reported a positive change in the frequency with which they thought they could learn leadership skills. Of these, 88% increased by one notch, 9% increased by two notches, and 3% increased by three notches. Analysis of the responses using a sign test for both years showed that this positive change was statistically significant. Also in 2006, more females than males showed changes toward the positive on this statement. (See Appendix J).

***Over half of the youth participants made shifts in their definitions of leadership. They added specific qualities and skills such as caring and listening.***

The survey asked two open-ended questions about leadership. The first asked youth to reflect on how they defined a leader before participating in OVOC and the other asked how they defined a leader after participation. Almost all of the students (94% in 2006 and 96% in 2005) answered the first question, reflecting back on how they viewed a leader before the program. Over half of the youth, 55% in 2006 and 54% in 2005, answered the second question, describing changes in their



definition of leadership since participating in the program.

Some who answered the former question (15% in 2006 and 19% in 2005) originally saw a leader as bossy or controlling. For example, one 14 year old female student wrote that a leader “was a boss - something they did was to lead just to feel in control - almost like a bully.” The majority of the youth who originally saw a leader as controlling changed their view to include group skills such as connecting and working with others, helping a group reach its goal, and including the ideas of group members. For example, a 14 year old student later described a leader as one who “helps a group complete the tasks the whole group has decided on.”

Others who originally saw a leader as controlling added qualities of a leader to their definitions, such as caring, friendliness, fun, and being a positive role model. For example, one student came to describe a leader as “encouraging to others and their development” instead of just using “control and coercion.” An 18 year old female wrote that a leader “takes control of a situation without being mean” and another student changed the definition of a leader from someone who “always would boss people around” to someone who is “caring and nice.” In 2005, only 3% still had some aspect of being bossy or controlling in their definition after participating in the program, and in 2006, no one did.

One student came to describe a leader as “encouraging to others and their development” instead of just using “control and coercion.”

Twenty-three percent of the 2006 respondents mentioned group leadership skills in their original definitions. Of these, 47% later added other qualities and skills to this definition, such as caring, fun, respect and optimism as well as teaching and directing, listening well, taking charge, and including and

helping others. For example, one male who originally said a leader “helped people reach a common goal” later reframed this as “helps people discover things about themselves.” A 14 year old female first said a leader “leads people in activities such as keeping people on task and taking control of situations to better the group.” Later she said, a leader “cares about the people they lead. They have good intentions and look out for the entire group.” In 2005, this trend was not as prominent, but it was still evident. Twelve percent of the respondents included group skills in their definition of leadership before participating in the program and of these, 12% added a variety of leadership qualities and skills after participation.

In general, students often added qualities of a leader to their definitions after participating in OVOC (62% in 2006 and 38% in 2005). For example, a 14 year old covered several qualities and skills in his description of a leader as “outgoing, open-minded, listens to other’s ideas.” He said a leader “allows participation from everyone” and is “known as a role model.” A 15 year old who originally said a leader “helped others” and “took control” modified her definition to “someone who knows when to listen.” She defined a leader as “being a friend” and “not having an attitude.”

Sixteen percent of the comments in 2006 and 20% in 2005 defined leaders as respected and helpful in their early definitions. These leaders bring out the best in others, watch out for others’ safety, make good choices for the group, handle difficult situations, and are looked up to by others. Of the 16% in 2006, over half (56%) modified their definitions after the program, delineating a variety of specific qualities and skills of a leader, such as being nice, optimistic, respectful and caring, as well as listening, mentoring and being a role model for others. In addition, they mentioned motivations such as making a difference and helping others. In 2005 about a quarter (27%) of the respondents modified their definitions in this way. Examples of this include one 13 year old

who said a leader “was looked up to by others and is respected.” She later became more specific about skills and said, a leader “can be a mentor and a leader for others.” A 14 year old described a leader as one who “takes charge, [is] respected and well-liked” and after participation in the program, she added, “same plus listens to opinions.”

In 2006, 40% of the youth and in 2005, 31% of those who defined changes mentioned particular leadership skills such as voice, listening, being knowledgeable and directive, and teaching or mentoring. For example, a 12 year old male who originally described a leader as “smart, brave, strong” later said a leader “can be those things but they don’t have to be. They just have to be willing to help and teach people and give their opinion.” Several students thought it was important that a leader “had strong opinions and believed in themselves” as well as “stands up for what they believe.” A 12<sup>th</sup> grade focus group participant said, a leader is “someone who takes charge....not just accepting other people’s ways of doing stuff.”

A 12 year old male who originally described a leader as “smart, brave, strong” later said a leader “can be those things but they don’t have to be. They just have to be willing to help and teach people and give their opinion.”

Another perception unique to the original definitions was shared by about 3% of respondents in 2006 and 2% in 2005. They held the notion that leaders were “older” in age. This perception shifted after participation in the program to focus more on qualities of a leader such as setting a good example for others, being nice, and being ‘cool.’ Skills were also mentioned such as self knowledge, teaching, and respect. For example, one 13 year old who first wrote that a leader “was oftentimes older” changed his definition after participation in the program to one who “can be a peer, and just someone who sets a good

example.” Another youth originally said a leader “stood up, gave speeches and got people to agree with their point of view” and after participation in the program modified her definition to “teaches others, inspires others and makes a positive difference in someone’s life.” A 16 year old who originally wrote that a leader “was older and smarter” changed his definition to mention voice and inclusiveness, saying a leader “speaks their mind and considers everyone’s opinion.”

***Youth added helping and inclusiveness to their definitions of leadership.***

In 2006, 31% of the respondents grew to see leadership as helping others and 29% came to see it as inclusiveness and connection in helping a group reach its goals. Among the 2005 sample, 13% saw helping as central to their revised definitions of leadership and 19% linked leadership to being able to bring out the ideas and capabilities of a group. A 15 year old female at first wrote that a leader “is respectful, caring, and understands that they are in control” and then modified this to a more inclusive style, saying a leader “is respectful, caring, and notices that as leader others can help with decisions.” A 12<sup>th</sup> grader described a leader as “a democrat” who “can make decisions but listens to everyone else’s opinion first.” He added that this type of leader “will make a decision that will please most people or everybody.” One youth said, “All leaders are good followers.”

A 15 year old female at first wrote that a leader “is respectful, caring, and understands that they are in control” and then modified this to a more inclusive style, saying a leader “is respectful, caring, and notices that as leader others can help with decisions.”

Four percent of the respondents in 2006 and 9% of those in 2005 originally described leaders as always in charge, fully competent, making all decisions. Such a leader “always

knows what to do” and “was responsible for everything.” These views broadened to an understanding of the ability for a leader to include the ideas of the group and to help the group come to good decisions. This involved listening and being seen as an equal to other students.

For example, one 14 year old female student originally said a leader “was good at everything and knew exactly what was going on” and later changed this definition to one who “participates with the group and works even though they may not know what's going on.” A 14 year old formerly described a leader as one who “took care of everything, organized the group, everyone looks up to” and then changed his definition to one who “helps facilitate and organize, delegates, encourages others, doesn't have to do everything themselves.” After participating in OVOC, only 1% of the 2005 sample and none of the 2006 sample still had a notion of a leader as one who “takes care of every little detail.”

***Youth participants experienced shared leadership, and came to see themselves and their peers as leaders.***

In a focus group, a 15 year old shared how her definition of leadership had changed: “Now I define a leader as a group with our own ideas. We're all leaders in our own special ways. Everyone has their own strengths. You work together and form a leadership group which is what we are.” Another 15 year old female added to this idea: “Before I thought of a leader as one person that leads a whole bunch of people. Now in the group we're leaders of our projects. You can put everyone's skills together. You can use certain people's strengths to help the group.” A peer concurred: “Usually when you hear leadership you think of one person, but in our groups we are all working together.” One youth added, “It's not bossing around. A good leader would remember everyone's equal. Leading is a group activity instead of one person.” Another youth said, “I've learned that it doesn't take just one

person to lead everything. It can be a whole group.”

“Now I define a leader as a group with our own ideas. We're all leaders in our own special ways. Everyone has their own strengths. You work together and form a leadership group which is what we are. “  
(15 year old female youth participant)

For some youth, their view of a leader began to include a wider range of people, including themselves. A 14 year old female wrote, “everybody is a leader or can be one.” A similar comment came from a peer, who said, “everyone can be a leader, no matter who they are.” A 15 year old male echoed, “everyone can be leaders, not just one person.” A 17 year old male said, “Before I thought of a leader as someone important like Martin Luther King, but a leader can be anybody. A 16 year old female had a similar comment: “Before I thought a leader was someone really important....But it can be a small thing – people guiding and helping people out. It doesn't have to be huge, monumental change.”

Further examples include a 15 year old who first “thought of a leader as a dictator – rule with an iron fist.” He added that this program helped him “rethink.” Now, he said, “A leader is just a person who can understand and help everyone.” A 15 year old female put it this way: “Before there were some people I honestly didn't think were leaders at all. Doing this, I saw that everyone is a leader in a different way and you can develop those qualities.” A 14 year old female commented, “I have learned to accept leadership roles because I know that I can learn from it - I have become more open to opportunities and seek out new and innovative challenges.” A ninth grader stated confidently, “I can be a leader and help other people more.” A 16 year old male commented, “we are the future of the community.”

When asked at a focus group whether they would consider becoming OVOC co-facilitators, several youth participants expressed interest. One 17 year old female said, "I would do it to have people talk about topics I want to talk about and hearing other people's opinions." A 15 year old female said, "I think it would be a good experience to be a leader of a group of your peers especially. If you're a leader – it forces you to think more." Some expressed enjoyment of leading groups and others were interested in the challenge.

***Youth participants developed their leadership styles and skills.***

One male student commented, "I definitely think being here has helped me develop as a leader. I've learned to be a role model. Sometimes people look up to me and I need to do things that are respectable so people will look up to me."

Youth in the participant focus groups also discussed the development of their leadership style and skills. For some this meant being a more inclusive leader if their style had been to dominate. For others, this meant taking more initiative if they tended to be a follower. For some it meant thinking before acting and generally being more tactful. Others saw themselves as role models and developed greater self discipline. Many learned self awareness and others mentioned stress management.

For example, one 15 year old female explained, "I'm the type of person who takes charge. I learned to sit back and not be rushed. Others have opinions too." A 16 year old said she learned "not to push people as much – not to pressure them." One 17 year old who found "democracy frustrating" said she was "usually dominant" and is "learning to sit back" and "learning other ways of being a leader." A 17 year old described his shift to a shared leadership style. He said OVOC made him "more aware" and helped him allow others to

make decisions as well as himself. A 16 year old male said, "I learned that other people have ideas, too." A 15 year old said her view of others changed. Whereas before she did not talk to or listen to other people, she is now "learning others have good ideas. It's not a bad thing to go out and ask for other people's opinions." Another participant said, "I listen to people's opinions in the group more when I'm a leader."

"Usually in the groups I'm in at school I'm the leader. I take charge from the second it happened. In this group I stepped back a little bit and others contributed their ideas. I saw people as leaders that I wouldn't have if I hadn't said I'm not going to be a 'gung ho' leader. I've appreciated other people's skills and experience. I also realized maybe I'm not so perfect."

(15 year old female participant)

Another survey question elicited comments about leadership as well. When asked how they had grown through participation in OVOC, 29% of the 2006 respondents and 36% in 2005 discussed greater motivation to lead, enhanced self confidence and self knowledge, as well as experience in leadership roles. One 15 year old female wrote, "I am confident now in leading and not following and I have learned how to cooperate better." A 13 year old male wrote, "I have learned a lot about leading a group and being nice to people." One 12 year old girl wrote, "I have developed further leadership skills that allow me to really take charge of situations that are in need of change." A peer her age wrote, "I have understood what it means to be a leader and how important it is to stick with something you want to achieve."

In a focus group, one 18 year old student said she came to understand voice as an important element in leadership: "The leadership thing – I won't stand back and just take what someone says if I don't agree. I'll say what I feel." She also said, "I've learned to

Speak up if you want to get something done. If you want to get your opinion heard you have to step forward." This youth described herself as someone who had been "used to standing back and letting someone else figure things out." Another 17 year old also took more initiative after participating in OVOC. She said, "If people are indecisive, I take the lead more."

"I think one of the most important things I learned was how to be a leader and give back to my community."  
(10<sup>th</sup> grade female participant)

Students also discussed leadership skills in their answers to another survey question that asked them to reflect on what they learned in OVOC. A portion of the respondents (12% in 2006 and 9% in 2005) said they acquired skills, let go of leadership stereotypes, gained self knowledge as a leader and realized that leadership is challenging. One 10<sup>th</sup> grade female wrote, "I think one of the most important things I learned was how to be a leader and give back to my community." While one middle school youth gained knowledge of "how to plan things", a male peer learned, "how to take control of important situations and knowing which to sit out on." A 15 year old said he learned "leadership skills, working with other people, facilitating, note taking." One youth expressed a broader understanding of leadership styles and effectiveness: "You can lead by being quiet, you don't need to be big and loud and impressive." A 14 year old male said, "being a leader is not always easy to do."

"You can lead by being quiet, you don't need to be big and loud and impressive."  
(youth participant)

Respondents mentioned a number of other skills that they learned through their participation in OVOC. These included teamwork, cooperation, conflict resolution and settling differences. They learned democratic and inclusive decisionmaking skills, and how to listen and value others' ideas. Some learned

about setting goals while others acquired planning and organizing skills. As one 18 year old female put it: "Listen to everybody. Ideas may work in the future. Wait quietly - good ideas come up." A 17 year old male added, "I'll probably step back and listen to other people more than before, before I made a decision."

The OVOC program apparently has an impact on students' awareness of stereotypes and shifting toward more inclusive behaviors. One 17 year old male in a focus group said the OVOC program "opened my eyes up and not judge people - stereotypes. When you actually think about it, appearances can be deceiving." A 17 year old female said, "Kids in [our town] have a lot to say. It would be nice to hear their opinions about what to do and how to change."

One youth commented on how the OVOC course influenced his self discipline. "One really big noticeable way is to make sure I remember to do things - like to get here each week." He added, "This experience will help me rethink how I will be a leader in other places - I'll try to understand more what they're doing, what their problems and needs are." One of his male peers commented, "I definitely think being here has helped me develop as a leader. I've learned to be a role model. Sometimes people look up to me and I need to do things that are respectable so people will look up to me." A 9<sup>th</sup> grader felt she developed "stronger leadership qualities in taking initiative with tasks." A 15 year old said her OVOC group "has pinpointed what specific qualities you need to have as a leader."

The projects were also found useful to leadership development. One 15 year old girl said, "Just working [on the project] brought in your perspective on different things - what needs to be worked on or what needs help. Helps you know more about what's going on." Another youth shared, "Having to call people and having to organize things like that has made me feel more like a leader. I never had to do something like this before - meeting with

other people and having to work around their schedules.”

One group learned from a project that did not come to fruition. They had intended to visit a children’s hospital. A 15 year old explained her interest in the project. Referring to a children’s hospital, she said: “I went in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, three years ago, had a miserable time – and I only stayed one night. It’s where fun goes to die. There were a lot of kids and it was dark.” Describing her group’s intent to visit, she concluded, “If we came, the kids and the people working there would have something fun to do.” A member of her project group added, “We were trying to make a difference. We were trying to think of things to make it more lively and enjoyable.” However, the youth found out they would need special training to visit the hospital. At the time of the focus group they were uncertain of whether they would pursue that project within the time they had remaining in the program.

“I’ll probably step back and listen to other people more than before, before I made a decision.”

(17 year old male participant)

A 16 year old valued how the group members figured out how to work together and overcome challenges. She learned from “just working with other people” that were “not friends.” One participant discussed how “groups were chosen randomly – we didn’t get to choose. We were working with people we didn’t know so well. It’s good to learn how to work with people and to settle your differences and things like that.” Another 15 year old described what she learned about the benefits of working as a group: “I try not to be the leader because I don’t want to take on a lot of responsibilities I won’t be able to fulfill. In a group – it’s easier to spread things out more. One person’s traits can really help out in a group.”

A 16 year old female enjoyed the goalsetting aspect of the project work: “I like when we had to come up with our ideas. When we found the right idea – it was really cool to make up our own goal.” Another student also valued the group goal setting: “I’ve been in a lot of groups before - when one person comes up with an idea and all go along with it. In this everyone came up with their own idea. We got to put all of our ideas together to create our project.” A peer added, “if you can choose it, it’s also more meaningful.” Another 16 year old shared what she learned about goals and planning: “It showed me how much it takes...We reworked our goals to make it suitable for everyone.”

“Groups were chosen randomly – we didn’t get to choose. We were working with people we didn’t know so well. It’s good to learn how to work with people and to settle your differences and things like that.”

(15 year old female participant)

A 15 year old female said the project “helped my communication and organizational skills.” Another described the planning skills she learned: “It helped everyone have a greater appreciation of how much planning needs to be done for everything. With this you have to think of what supplies you need, what you’re going to do when you get to the site. Now when I do other projects – I plan them more than I did months ago. I plan it in an order so it comes out the way I want.”

A 15 year old described the leadership skills she gained: “As a leader I’ve learned to adapt...I’ve gotten more comfortable leading people who are older than I am. You can do it no matter what age you are with all age groups.” A 15 year old male added “I’m definitely going to communicate more with people – especially if I’m not going to be able to see them often - to get work done.” A peer discussed the benefits of OVOC: “I would recommend it to people who want to take a leadership role in the future – manage people.

It teaches you a lot of working with other people, planning, etc.”

A few students acknowledged learning to respect peers as leaders. One 15 year old female said, “we are learning to respect leaders who are our age, too.” A 17 year old female said “Being in a leadership position makes me realize how someone...would feel if we’re off topic. If not in a leadership position you should be attentive.”

“In other situations – family, school, and friends – It’s helped me speak up more with other people. Before, I would just go along with an idea. It taught me that one person can make a difference and to speak up and say your idea.”

(16 year old female participant)

***Youth who were involved with OVOC for their second year as facilitators continued to enhance their leadership skills and developmental assets, and to gain valuable experience.***

The focus groups at Site D yielded information about the impact of the OVOC program over time. One focus group gathered data on the progress of youth facilitators after two years of involvement with the program. Further asset and leadership development are apparent. For one youth facilitator who was in his second year, this meant he was able ‘to be himself’ with his group. They “know me as me – who I am. Before, I was someone who goes along with activities and doesn’t say much.”

Social competency and empowerment were apparent when another 2<sup>nd</sup> year facilitator commented on the positive connections he has with students who were participants in his group the previous year. He described what happens when he sees them in the hallways: “It’s cool because we always say ‘Hi,’ and it’s not awkward.” He reflected on how ‘they have upper classmen to talk to, a connection with someone else in the school, especially early on in the year.”

Youth facilitators acquired a variety of leadership skills, including how to engage diverse participants in a group. One student found that he “can’t lead a group the same way with everyone...last year helped me learn that.” He added that it is “less frustrating, knowing everyone is different.” Another youth facilitator concurred, having realized “You need to communicate differently with different people.” She said she has applied this skill in other arenas of her life as well, such as sports teams. A peer youth facilitator added that the leadership skills she has acquired in OVOC “helps a lot with team dynamics and stuff, just seeing how a group works.” She described how she is “able to see how the team is working together and if you’re having any problems, address that – lead your meetings to get the most out of them.” Another 2<sup>nd</sup> year youth facilitator who had been active in other leadership groups such as student council remarked on how his OVOC experience gave him skills for leading a different kind of group than he was accustomed to.

One youth facilitator described his ability to be more patient with younger peers, especially when they do not seem to have a “desire to succeed” or a “competitive edge.” Another 2<sup>nd</sup> year facilitator showed greater self-awareness as he shared, “I look at kids that bother me and see how much alike I am. I know how many people I annoyed and bothered when I was a freshman.” Another talked about his improved self-confidence. “I am more assertive – once in a week for two years I have led 15 freshmen.” He added, “I used to get nervous talking before people, but now I’m fine.” Another 2<sup>nd</sup> year youth facilitator gave an example of his improved self-confidence. He said he used to worry about someday having a roommate he did not get along with in college. After managing a challenging relationship with his co-facilitator the previous year, he no longer worries about how he will handle a difficult roommate. “I dealt with it. Now I know I’ll be fine...I can make it work.” He added, it “mellowed me out.”

**Youth facilitators strived to create equal partnerships with their younger peers and to engage them in leadership roles.**

Youth facilitators fostered leadership skills in the OVOC participants. One 2<sup>nd</sup> year facilitator described a memorable incident the year before, when his YAP team asked a disruptive participant to take a leadership role in the group. He found this very effective at diminishing the disruptive behavior. Another 2<sup>nd</sup> year youth facilitator team shared how they would give participants ownership by letting them suggest and lead activities. They saw this as important to participant leadership development.

One 2<sup>nd</sup> year facilitator emphasized the importance of treating participants as equal peers, even though they are younger. He stated that it leads to “more involvement” and then “they take you seriously.” Another student added, “I never realized how hard it would be to lead a group of people.” She added that when participants are given an opportunity to lead, “they have a respect for what we do if they take a role.”

Youth facilitators appreciated when participants would take a leadership role. In some cases this meant leading an activity, or coming together as a group during the community service activity. It also evolved over time in some groups as participants grew more comfortable with each other and would take the initiative to discourage disruptive behavior in their peers. One 2<sup>nd</sup> year youth facilitator told how everyone in her group “stepped up” at least once. The term, ‘stepped up,’ defines a willingness to put oneself forward in some leadership capacity. The youth facilitator enjoyed “when someone you don’t expect shows the ability to lead well.” He continued, “Those who are quiet, the first time they speak shows they’re ready to take a leadership role.” He added with pride, “it spoke for us and how we taught it.”

Sharing power with their younger peers had its pros and cons. When asked about their observations of the long term effects of the OVOC program on youth who were participants the previous year, one 2<sup>nd</sup> year facilitator said he noticed a self-confidence and ease that was “definitely a change.” He said they “walk around like they own the school.” He continued, “Personally, self confidence is a really important characteristic to have because everything else goes into place. If you’re self confident, you’re in charge of your life, your future. It spills into so many different areas. Kids are not sheepishly walking around school. The kids who taunted the seniors at the pep rally, it was sophomores.” This comment led to a brief discussion about respect and ‘knowing one’s place’ in the school hierarchy. The faculty director of the OVOC program concluded, “dismantling the hierarchy is threatening.”

***The OVOC program had a lasting impact on the leadership and asset development of previous year participants. Many now also wanted to become involved as youth facilitators.***

As the facilitator of the focus group with Site D participants one year after their OVOC experience, I noticed that this group of eleven 10<sup>th</sup> graders seemed strikingly comfortable and at ease answering questions and voicing their diverse views and opinions. Their answers offered further perspectives on the impact of the OVOC program over time. The most memorable experiences for participants varied and included their relationships with youth facilitators, their community service projects, and various OVOC activities.

The developmental asset of social competency was apparent as graduate participants spoke about the lasting connections they made with peers in their groups. One male commented, “I know more people, I have friends.” A female participant added, “I’m friends with everyone in my old [OVOC] group. Another male talked about how the activities brought his group closer. A female discussed how the activities made it easy to bond and



make friends. A male exchange student shared how he joined half way through the year. “After a few weeks I could make friends with lots of different people – backgrounds, interests, not just one type of student. Once talking – you realize they have things in common.”

Without the OVOC experience, one participant speculated that he “probably wouldn’t have known as many people. I would have looked at other people as just another person. [OVOC] helped me out a lot in high school. I met people I probably would not have met.” Another male commented that without OVOC, “some things would have been more stressful – like exams and choosing classes.” He added that knowing upperclassmen made a difference in his stress level.

The graduate participants discussed some of the ways that their OVOC experience has impacted their behavior. Here again we see the development of assets such as social competency, positive values, positive identity, and empowerment. One common theme was the tendency to be more outgoing in groups and more open to people outside of one’s own circle of friends. Voice was an important element in this discussion. One female said she was more willing to express her ideas and opinions in groups, and more willing to ‘speak up.’ Another said she is open to expressing ideas and speaking out more in class. It was interesting that when asked to share advice with incoming freshmen so they could get the most out of their OVOC experience, one female’s answer was, “Don’t be intimidated to speak out.”

Another graduate participant said she has come to feel it is “okay to be yourself in front of other people. Now I don’t care what other people think.” She added that the non-critical atmosphere in OVOC helped her express herself. Another youth participant who had an older sister who was also applying to be a youth facilitator said she now felt comfortable to take a different role than her sister, in other words, capitalizing on her own strengths and not trying to be like her sister.

***Community service projects made a lasting impression on graduate youth participants as well as their youth facilitators.***

Graduate participants spoke fondly of their community service activities the year before, echoing themes similar to those of the other participants, such as the satisfaction of helping and making a difference. One male gained satisfaction from his involvement in a gardening project at an elementary school. He commented, “Knowing that would be there for a while and might last was a good feeling.” Another reminisced about serving a meal at a homeless shelter: “One guy stuck out – he thanked us by reading poetry.” A female whose group put on a talent show at a retirement home shared a story about an elderly gentleman who “played his trumpet for us...he seemed really happy to see us.” Another youth commented on how her group’s service work helped them get along better as a team. One participant whose group worked with children reflected on how “we were helping the younger kids like our [OVOC] leaders were helping us.”

The projects gave these participants a lasting sense of making a difference in the lives of others. One male commented, “It can be a good thing to give back – makes you feel good about yourself.” Another participant said he got the sense his group made the lives of children in a foster group home easier. One male whose group visited an elementary school said, “You could tell all the kids were looking up to us – all the kids were trying to get you to go to where they were.” These comments show the impact of the community service projects on youth empowerment.

One 2<sup>nd</sup> year facilitator described how it was not until the community service day last year that his group showed improvement in their leadership skills, but that the change was remarkable. He said this year’s group started out with more leadership skills but the effect of the community service day was striking. He called it a “most gratifying thing” to witness.

**Previous year participants who now aspired to become youth facilitators described changes in their views of leadership and in their view of themselves as leaders.**

OVOC triggered lasting changes in views of leadership among previous year participants. One student said he “noticed that anyone can be a leader – depends on what kind of circumstances they are thrown into.” Another male gained a perspective of leadership that involves a greater sense of connection: “Leaders can sometimes be sort of looking down on other people, give orders, but I’m seeing these types of leaders be like a more personal leadership role, still the head and lead activities, but more friends than just leaders.”

“Anyone can be a leader – that’s what I got out of it.”

(Graduate male participant)

A couple of female participants commented on how their views changed from seeing a leader as one who ‘bosses people around’ to one who ‘gets to know everybody’ and ‘forms relationships.’ Another female talked about her new understanding that it is also possible to be a quiet leader, one that does not have to be bossy.

One student came to the realization that it is important for leaders to ‘step up,’ after experiencing a group building activity where no one took the initiative to lead. Another female participant said she saw how people could lead in diverse ways. She explained, “even though we had our leaders – we were all working together.... Everybody had a chance to be a leader – even if they did in their own way. She added, “even if they just give an idea and someone else gets it into action.” One male described the subtleties of shifting away from seeing a leader as someone who “tells you what to do.” He experienced how his leaders offered opinions and activities but allowed the participants to choose and try out the activities. Another male said he realized being a leader

can still be fun even though it comes with responsibility.

Graduate participants also experienced a shift in their view of themselves as leaders. One male said, “A leader can be anyone, can be quiet. I’m not that outgoing – I’m more quiet and stuff. I figured I could do what the [OVOC] leaders did for me, like be there, sort of as, like a person you can look to for advice, help them through the transition to high school and stuff.” Another female made a similar point. “I’m not the most outgoing. I saw [OVOC] leaders could lead by example. I’m better with small groups – relating to people and not just bossing.” Her peer added that she was quiet also and at the beginning of her year in OVOC would not ‘step up.’ However, she said that as time went on she realized, “I could be a good leader and step up. I would be good at it. “

Another female who had long thought of herself as a leader described her own shift to sharing leadership with others. She described “I’ve always been a more obvious leader who jumps in and takes control. Now it’s more – everyone’s a leader. In order to be a leader you have to take cues from other people. I used to think there was only one type of leader – me.” Several students were carrying their sense of self as a leader into other situations. One male said, “Now I’m trying to be a leader in any situation.” Another youth said, “Now I do that in my classes – say something, make things happen.” A graduate participant talked about how she became more comfortable expressing her ideas in the group and assisting others with solving problems.

Graduate participants applied to become youth facilitators of OVOC for several reasons. One was their own sense of ‘giving back’ to their school. After discussing how OVOC helped her develop friends from different grade levels, a female youth facilitator said, “I felt it would be nice to help new freshmen have the same experience.” Several commented on how they observed their youth facilitators having fun, and how they themselves wanted to be part of it.

One male described it this way, “It will give me a chance to become more outgoing. I saw what my leaders did - get to know more people - have fun while you did it.” One female said, “Our [OVOC] leaders influenced me. I like influencing people.” Several graduate participants had older siblings who were youth facilitators. One shared how OVOC was “one of the main things we talked about when I was a freshman.” This speaks to the important role that the OVOC program played in the lives of these high school youth.

**Outcome 4: Youth and adults design leadership networks to increase involvement of communities and schools in youth leadership work.**

*Youth and adults gained confidence and inspiration from the OVOC trainings. The curriculum gave them tools with which to implement change at their local sites.*

The feedback on the training conferences held by the Vermont Children’s Forum indicated that they were instrumental for helping youth-adult teams implement changes back at their site. The feedback also indicated that the trainings were inspiring and enjoyable. One youth at Site L talked about gaining confidence from the conference, by talking in front of others and getting familiar with the curriculum. Another said she got motivation and energy from the conference. She continued, “I wanted to learn more about how to be a leader. From the conference, I was excited – fired up – ready to go!”

For the students at Site L, what they experienced at the OVOC conference helped them make a key shift in thinking about leadership. As the adult facilitator put it, the youth realized that “you don’t have to change yourself to fit into being a leader. You can take who you are and be a leader.”

During the conference the youth-adult team from Site L met and started talking about how they would apply what they were learning back at their school. They were able to say to themselves, “We’re gonna be able to do it.” One 12<sup>th</sup> grade youth facilitator commented on how “OVOC has shown me it’s fun to be a facilitator because of all the activities that we did at the conference.” She added that the conference gave her co-facilitator team the confidence and the knowledge to implement a plan back at their school. She said, “The conference gave us – this is how we do these things – we can do this.” She added that it helped them be “more into it.”

A youth facilitator from Site L commented that the way the conference was led helped her feel, “We could lead something like that. We can have fun and still get something done and have it be meaningful.”

If there was one improvement to suggest it would be “more time to work on our own stuff, but it went well,” said one 12<sup>th</sup> grade youth facilitator from Site L. She added, however, that “they had to teach us skills before we could do that.” Others said they would have liked “more time” at the conference. Regarding the OVOC curriculum, facilitators find it helpful for ideas. Sometimes they adjust an activity to make it more engaging, but the participants as well take turns leading activities from the curriculum at the weekly meetings.

For the youth-adult team at Site M, the OVOC training affirmed their commitment to an inclusive leadership structure for their school. It also gave them the tools to make the changes they wanted to make. The adult facilitator explained, “We knew we wanted change but we didn’t know how to do it. We got the OVOC curriculum and just ran with it. Thank you very much, now we know what we want to do. It got us focused on how to open it up with everyone.” The 8<sup>th</sup> grade youth facilitator found the training helpful as well. She liked, “the way that we got to do a lot of different things and we

also got to lead a small activity and we got to see what it was like – the real thing. It was really fun....We all got a lot out of it....It was really cool.” Further assistance from the VCF staff consultants helped them design retreats for their students that engaged them in discussions about school climate and led to the design of the school committee structure.

“We knew we wanted change but we didn’t know how to do it. We got the OVOC curriculum and just ran with it.”  
(Adult Facilitator at Site M)

The 7<sup>th</sup> grade facilitator at Site M said the curriculum gave her a concrete foundation and structure from which to work. “This activity takes 45 minutes – this is what I need to know....easier than just getting up and saying – we’ll lead – what are we going to do?” She found the modules useful for seeking out activities that address certain leadership skills. “If you had a group with trouble solving problems – you can go to that module.” She found skits a helpful way to illustrate good leadership, making it “easier for people to see what they would like – puts it out there for them to see it.”

This 7<sup>th</sup> grader was finding her OVOC experience useful in other arenas as well. “Really what OVOC is – OVOC is a framework to do anything that you’re gonna do with other people.... communication skills, problem solving, decisionmaking, what leadership is, energizers, ice breakers – which are, I think, wonderful things....everyone gets laughing and you can talk about things.” She was applying OVOC as a framework for another youth club she was starting at her school, adding that it was “easier to get the club formed after OVOC.”

“Really what OVOC is – OVOC is a framework to do anything that you’re gonna do with other people....”  
(7<sup>th</sup> Grade Youth Facilitator)

The adult facilitator at Site M said she found the curriculum helpful with linking activities and discussion to their goals for an inclusive leadership structure at the school. She and the students found answers to their questions in the curriculum handbook. “What do we want in our school? We need to make a decision as a group on what we want leadership to look like, or on anything. Let’s go to the decisionmaking [module] so we can give kids info on how decisions are made.” She continued, “What is it to have a voice in your school? They can come up with reasons why they don’t have a voice – we know why. What do we need to get you one?” She was enthusiastic about results from the activities. She exclaimed, “That was great! . . . . Because of the way we were processing and respecting differences – kids were much more conscientious about how we’re communicating together.”

A 16 year old at Site O discussed her leadership development after participating in the statewide OVOC training in March 2006: “I learned that you always have to be yourself in a group. People have to be their own individual....I was recently thrown into leading a big group in Montpelier – it actually got really comfortable. People were acting like themselves.”

During the focus groups, participants commented on particular activities in the OVOC curriculum that they found useful. A few students found the OVOC “comfort zones” activity helpful to self awareness and for connecting and working with their peers. One 16 year old female explained it “made everyone branch out and admit things they might need work on - what they are good at and what they might need work on.” A 15 year old female commented on the benefits of the same activity: “You get to know people and it’s easier to work with people that you know better, I think.”

A 17 year old male commented that the “step by step process is really helpful. It doesn’t miss any details when we are doing our projects.” Another 15 year old female

concluded: "I really liked the step by step...it broke it down so everyone knew what they had to do so your project could be executed in a timely fashion...and I'm a specific kind of person."

A 16 year old male commented on the goal setting activity where participants "wrote things needed in the community on post it notes on the wall and selected what to do." One of the group leaders added that he had used that activity in three other places since. Another youth enjoyed the Full Value Contract activity. She said it helped her "see how different people think and how all the words tie into that characteristic." Her peer concurred, "You see how others think – you learn a lot about everyone."

One young person thought the curriculum "really brought focus to our group. We've gotten more out of our meeting time." Another student appreciated "the way the entire curriculum is broken down...into smaller activities." She added that the titles are broad topics, "but really important in everyone's life." A 17 year old male liked how "everyone contributed equally. The group process was really neat." A 15 year old female said the curriculum was "straightforward – you could see what you would get out of it." The adult facilitator had one request for improving the curriculum, suggesting an "OVOC lite." With a 90 minute meeting to plan for, he found it challenging to adapt an activity that could easily fill three hours. He worried about leaving out something important.

One young person thought the curriculum "really brought focus to our group. We've gotten more out of our meeting time."

**Outcome 5: Targeted at-risk youth involved in the OVOC pilots and young adults in the correctional system can demonstrate increased leadership skills and identify at least one caring adult/mentor in their lives.**

*Youth in an alternative high school increased their leadership skills and opportunities through involvement with OVOC.*

In 2006, the OVOC program reached at-risk youth in several settings including alternative schools, community teen centers and youth organizations. (Young adults in the correctional system were not represented in this evaluation.) The findings discussed previously under Outcomes 2 and 3 of this report include the responses of at-risk youth participants involved in each program. In addition, the following paragraphs highlight the findings from a focus group with youth facilitators at an alternative high school in 2005.

The adult facilitator at the high school alternative program (Site L) commented on the growth in leadership skills among the youth facilitators. She praised one 12<sup>th</sup> grade female for her "insight" in knowing how to pace activities with a group and in choosing ideas when planning with her YAP team. This youth facilitator said her development into a leader has surprised her. "I was the type to sit back and watch others. I'm standing up and talking in front of a group of 25 people." She added that she feels less selfish, and paradoxically both more relaxed and more stressed. She explained that the stress comes from wanting her leadership activities "to go right." This youth facilitator commented on the impact of her OVOC experience on her own choices. "Makes you think about choices – I don't want to give mentors a bad name – make it crumble, loss of respect. Now I see myself as a mentor, as more of a role model than before."

Another youth facilitator at Site L commented on the renaissance of her own leadership abilities. She explained that she went through a low point in her life where she

did not see herself as a leader. Before that, she had been drawn to leadership roles. Now she is “more patient” and “not so anxious – barreling in without a plan.” She adds, “I want to be able to do something.”

“I feel like we’re accomplishing something worthwhile, that will last, people will remember....Makes me look at how I am outside of school. I’m a mentor. What I do matters.”

(Youth facilitator, Site L)

Out of their own sense of empowerment, both youth leaders had advice for future youth facilitators. One advised to “not be afraid of having power” and to “not abuse the power.” She wants them to “know they can change the school. If they are not living the way they like to live, they can change their life.” Her peer facilitator added, “If you want to be something – now is the time.” She also offered her assistance to new youth facilitators: “give me a call.”

Given their success at running weekly OVOC meetings for their peers, these youth facilitators asked if they could “run the whole day.” This event was planned for their last week of school. The youth facilitators also discussed other ways they felt motivated by their OVOC experience. One 12<sup>th</sup> grade female said, “It’s just kind of empowering – gives you confidence. Before, there was nothing I wanted to do after high school. Now I have ideas.” Looking forward to her future is an indicator of positive identity development. She also demonstrated improved social competency and empowerment when she discussed her interactions with classmates: “In the past, if someone was not having a good day, I wouldn’t say anything. I was so secluded in myself. Now it’s not a problem. I might be a little nervous, but I’m not afraid to approach them.” She enjoys “actually making an impact that goes well” – “to see them happier and getting whatever they were going to do done.”

“It’s just kind of empowering – gives you confidence. Before, there was nothing I wanted to do after high school. Now I have ideas.”

(12<sup>th</sup> grade female youth facilitator)

Her peer youth facilitator discussed the experiences that made a difference in her growing sense of being a leader. She cited “working with kids as a mentor. Trying to talk to them, see what’s going on.” She said that being there for people was the most rewarding part. “They want your advice and your input – you can give it.” She found it very meaningful to be trusted by other students “enough to talk about personal life stuff they need help with.” She added, “It’s good to be the bridge between a student wanting to tell the teacher. That is rewarding, that makes it worth it.”

“I was the type to sit back and watch others. I’m standing up and talking in front of a group of 25 people.”

(Youth Facilitator at Site L)

According to the youth facilitators at Site L, OVOC activities have decreased the tension level in the school. One 12<sup>th</sup> grade female described “a more positive atmosphere – less tense, with less blow outs.” By ‘blow outs,’ she meant kids blowing up and walking out.” She continued, “Things were ‘darker.’ Now things are better, not as tense.” The adult facilitator echoed this point. “People get excited about coming to school.” They “want to be here more to give ideas and input.” The dropout problem has diminished. Her youth co-facilitator added that there is a strong core group of students again.

A peer student validated the improvement in school atmosphere with the comment, “now cliques are starting to go away again.” Apparently with increased tension in the recent past, students were forming polarized groups. A 10<sup>th</sup> grade male added that students enjoy coming to school for the youth led meetings. An

11<sup>th</sup> grade male stated simply that coming to school is “more fun.”

According to the youth facilitators at Site L, OVOC activities have decreased the tension level in the school. One 12<sup>th</sup> grade female described “a more positive atmosphere – less tense, with less blow outs.”

One of the challenges the youth-adult partnership team at Site L faced is the ambivalence of some of the at-risk youth about their leadership identity. The two seniors described a male student who was voted by his peers to be a youth facilitator based on leadership qualities. He was ambivalent about whether leaders were “cool” or “not cool.” The seniors described him as both excited and scared about becoming a leader. “After we voted for him – he tried to self sabotage – get in trouble so maybe he’d be unvoted. We talked with him. Try a week – help plan a meeting and be in a meeting. We gave him a week. He said, ok, I’ll do an activity and then he did it, this past week.”

Two other female students also struggled with their roles as youth leaders. This was apparent in my own interview with one of the youth who arrived late, at the end of the focus group. To one question she gave a thoughtful and useful answer. To another question, she backed off and said, “I am not a leader type. I only lead my own style.” Despite these challenges, the youth-adult partnership team at Site L expressed hope: “It’s exciting to think about where we can be in a year.”

***Youth indicated more frequent connections with at least one caring adult.***

Information on being able to identify at least one caring adult/mentor was gathered partially through a question on the survey instrument. Participants were asked to rate how often they connect with at least one caring adult. Twenty-four percent of youth survey respondents in 2005 and 22% in 2006

indicated more frequent connections with at least one caring adult. These results were considered statistically significant (See Appendix J).

Respondents on the open-ended questions and in the focus groups often cited the connections they were making with peers and adults through their OVOC coursework and projects. This may give some explanation for the increase in their sense of connection with a caring adult.

**CONCLUSION**

A significant number of youth who took part in this evaluation study found their OVOC experience useful and empowering. The training provided by VCF inspired youth in various school and community settings to see themselves as leaders and develop their leadership styles and skills. Working in partnership with adults, these youth found innovative ways to introduce the curriculum at their sites. In the process, they gave their peers a voice, a sense of connection, and an opportunity to serve their schools and communities.

The efforts of these youth-adult partnership teams have assisted in reversing a drop out trend in one school, and have started a peer leadership institution in another school, transforming its youth governance structure to include nearly three quarters of the student body as interested volunteers. Through the OVOC program, young people found ways to enhance the image of their community, to ease their peers’ transitions to high school, and to demonstrate their own increased knowledge and skills in experiential educational programs for younger youth.

In the process of transforming their schools and communities, youth have gained developmental assets such as empowerment, positive identity, social competencies, and positive values. Youth have broadened and expanded their definitions of leadership, often to include the assets they value. Significant

change was seen in a portion of youth who not only have increased their belief that they can learn leadership skills, but also have demonstrated and reported their leadership development. More than a quarter of the youth respondents think of themselves as a leader more often.

The voices of the youth quoted in this study demonstrate that feeling connected to and valued by the community is an outcome of the OVOC program, consistent across the locations studied. Community members confirmed this outcome, as those interviewed shared their positive impressions of the contributions youth had made to their schools and communities. Youth indicated that they have experienced meaningful relationships with peers and adults, giving them a sense that people care about them and want to encourage their positive development.

Quoted throughout the text are the words of youth who have gained greater self esteem, increased self acceptance, and accomplished something they found worthwhile. The ability of these youth to work in a group and as a team with diverse peers and adults indicates an improvement in their social competencies. The at-risk students who were involved with OVOC were finding ways to enhance their schools and communities not only for themselves, but also for their peers and their community members.

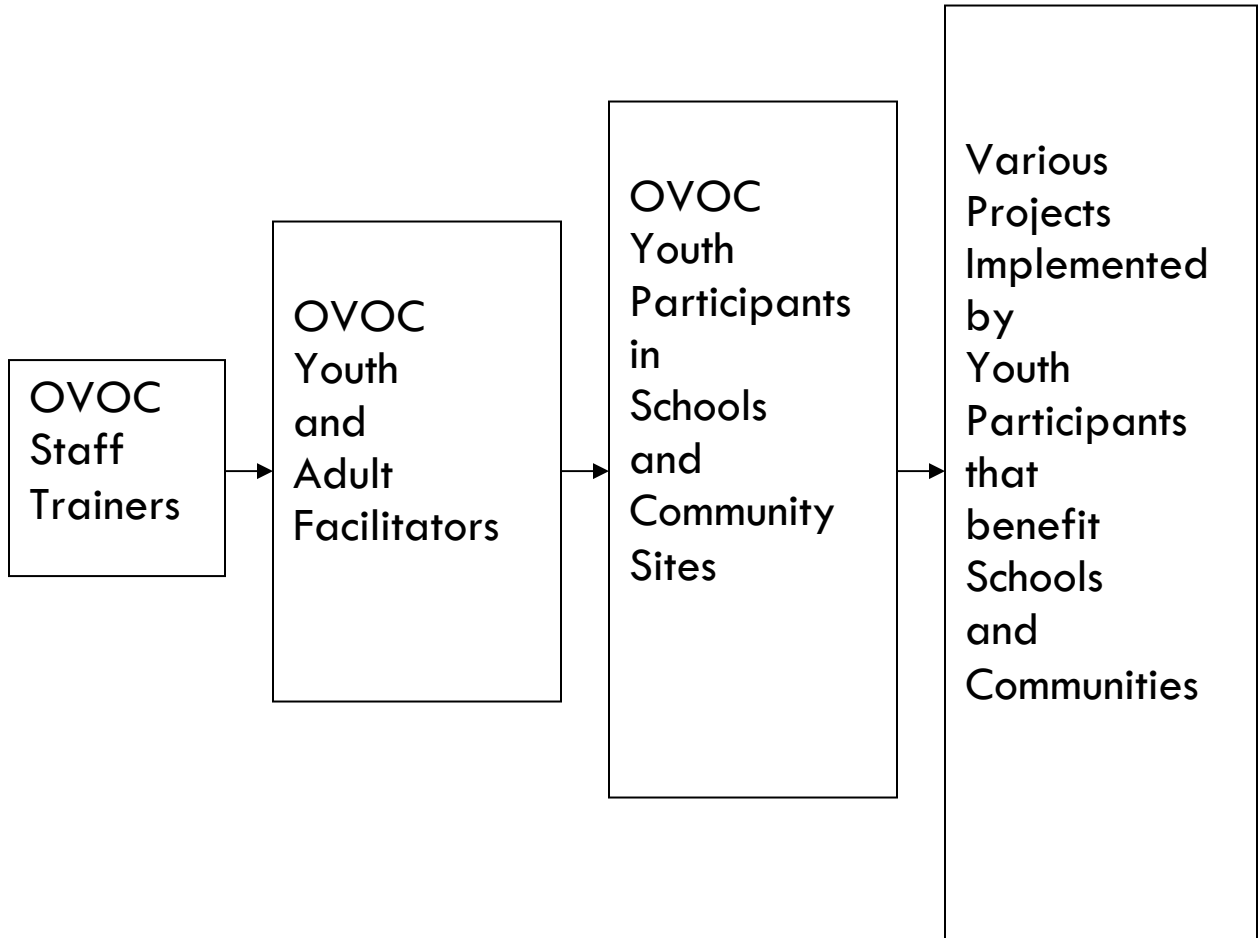
Within a short two-year time frame, twelve OVOC programs have impacted their youth participants and their surrounding communities in positive ways. Youth have felt empowered throughout the process, finding the courage to speak up and make a difference. As one 17 year old female concluded, "The title fits - Our Voices."

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**Appendix A**  
*Our Voices: Our Community Model*



**Appendix B**  
**Participant Demographic Data Summary**  
*Our Voices: Our Community Program*

(This form is for facilitators to complete at the end of the program.)

Today's Date: Month\_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_ Year\_\_\_\_

Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitator Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Number of Youth Participants

\_\_\_\_\_ Male    \_\_\_\_\_ Female

Age of Youth Participants:

\_\_\_\_\_ 11            \_\_\_\_\_ 17  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 12            \_\_\_\_\_ 18  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 13            \_\_\_\_\_ 19  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 14            \_\_\_\_\_ 20  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 15            \_\_\_\_\_ 21  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 16            \_\_\_\_\_ other (please specify)  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Grade of Youth Participants:

\_\_\_\_\_ 6<sup>th</sup>            \_\_\_\_\_ 10<sup>th</sup>  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 7<sup>th</sup>            \_\_\_\_\_ 11<sup>th</sup>  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 8<sup>th</sup>            \_\_\_\_\_ 12<sup>th</sup>  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 9<sup>th</sup>

Number of Youth in:

\_\_\_\_\_ Vocational School  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Alternative School  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Correctional School  
 \_\_\_\_\_ GED Program  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Not in School

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Number who started OVOC

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Number who completed  
 OVOC

If youth(s) did not complete OVOC, why?

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated Number of Each Race/Ethnicity:

\_\_\_\_ American Indian or Alaska Native  
 \_\_\_\_ Asian  
 \_\_\_\_ African American  
 \_\_\_\_ Hispanic  
 \_\_\_\_ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific  
 Islander  
 \_\_\_\_ White/Caucasian  
 \_\_\_\_ Racially Mixed  
 \_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Disability:

\_\_\_\_ Number Participants with a Disability  
 (Physical, Emotional, Learning)

Diversity: Any other type(s) of diversity  
 represented (please specify):

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Number Hours OVOC Course was  
 Offered

\_\_\_\_ Number Participants completed Team  
 Project(s)

\_\_\_\_ Number Participants completed  
 Individual Project(s)

\_\_\_\_ Number of Community Members  
 served by Participant Project(s)

\_\_\_\_ Number of School Members served  
 by Participant Project(s)

Briefly describe project(s):

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C**  
**Youth Facilitator Demographic Data Summary**  
*Our Voices: Our Community Program*

(This form is for facilitators to complete at the end of the program.)

Today's Date: Month \_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_

Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Town Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitator Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Number of Youth Facilitators

\_\_\_\_\_ Male    \_\_\_\_\_ Female

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Number of Adult Facilitators

\_\_\_\_\_ Male    \_\_\_\_\_ Female

Age of Youth Facilitators:

\_\_\_\_\_ 11            \_\_\_\_\_ 17  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 12            \_\_\_\_\_ 18  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 13            \_\_\_\_\_ 19  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 14            \_\_\_\_\_ 20  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 15            \_\_\_\_\_ 21  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 16            \_\_\_\_\_ other (please specify)  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Grade of Youth Facilitators:

\_\_\_\_\_ 6<sup>th</sup>            \_\_\_\_\_ 10<sup>th</sup>  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 7<sup>th</sup>            \_\_\_\_\_ 11<sup>th</sup>  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 8<sup>th</sup>            \_\_\_\_\_ 12<sup>th</sup>  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 9<sup>th</sup>

Number of Youth Facilitators in:

\_\_\_\_\_ Vocational School  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Alternative School  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Correctional School  
 \_\_\_\_\_ GED Program  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Not in School

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Number Youth Facilitators who started OVOC

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Number Youth Facilitators who completed OVOC

If Youth Facilitator(s) did not complete OVOC, why?

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated Number of Each Race/Ethnicity:

\_\_\_ American Indian or Alaska Native  
 \_\_\_ Asian  
 \_\_\_ African American  
 \_\_\_ Hispanic  
 \_\_\_ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander  
 \_\_\_ White/Caucasian  
 \_\_\_ Racially Mixed  
 \_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Disability:

\_\_\_ Number with a Disability  
 (Physical, Emotional, Learning)

Diversity: Other type(s) of diversity represented (please specify):

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D**  
**Community Interview Questions**  
*Our Voices: Our Community Program*

OVOC Program Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Community Project Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Question 1: What kinds of community service activities did the youth do at your site?

Question 2: How many adults, youth and children at your site were served by the visiting teens?

Number adults: \_\_\_\_\_ Number youth: \_\_\_\_\_ Number children: \_\_\_\_\_

Question 3: How did this service activity benefit your community?

Question 4: What was your most memorable moment of the event?

Question 5: What kinds of connections did you notice the teens making with adults, children, and other youth at your site?

Question 6: Does this project help you personally? If so, how?

Question 7: Describe a beneficial impact that this service had on particular members of your community site.

**Appendix E**  
**Focus Group Questions: Youth Participants**  
*Our Voices: Our Community Program*

**Question 1: What course experiences were most memorable?**

**Question 2: What is one noticeable way this program has influenced you, if at all?**

*Follow-up questions as necessary:*

Describe how you have changed as a result of this program.

**Question 3a: Please share a 1-2 sentence description of your project. (Go around the room.)**

**Question 3b: What was most meaningful to you about doing the project?**

*Follow-up questions as necessary:*

What did you learn from doing the project?

**Question 4: Did your project work affect your sense of being able to take charge of your own life - and if so, how?**

*Follow-up questions as necessary:*

How did your project work help you set a goal?

How did your project work help you reach your goal?

**Question 5: Did your project work affect your sense of making a difference in the lives of others - and if so, how?**

**Question 6: Has your definition of leadership changed as a result of your participation in this program - and if so, how has your definition changed?**

*Follow-up questions as necessary:*

How did you define leadership before the program?

How do you define leadership now, after the program?

**Question 7: Has your view of yourself as a leader changed as a result of your participation in this program - and if so, how?**

*Follow-up questions as necessary:*

How did you see yourself related to leadership before the program?

How do you see yourself related to leadership after the program?

When did your view change?

Was there a particular experience that made a difference, and if so, what?

**Question 8: Do you think that the experiences you've had in this course will affect your actions or decisions in the future?**

*Follow-up questions as necessary:*

If so, what different choices do you think you'll make because of this experience?

What do you think you will do differently?

**Question 9: Would you recommend OVOC to a friend, and if so, what would your reasons be for suggesting he/she take the course or for why he/she should not consider taking the course?**

**Question 10: Would you consider becoming a co-facilitator for the next time this course is offered?**

*Follow-up questions as necessary:*

What are your reasons for wanting or not-wanting to be a co-facilitator?

**Question 11: What would you recommend be changed about the course?**

**Question 12: OVOC is different than many traditional school courses in a number of ways. It is facilitated by a youth-adult team, there is limited lecture time, there are lots of hands-on learning opportunities and dialogue between participants. How did these teaching methods influence your experience in this course?**

**Appendix F**  
**Focus Group Questions: Youth and Adult Facilitators**  
***Our Voices: Our Community Program***

Youth and Adult Facilitator experience of teaching the curriculum

1. *How was the program implemented at your site?*  
*As appropriate: modules covered, types of projects*
2. *What was it like to facilitate this curriculum?*
  - 2a. *What was your most memorable moment?*
  - 2b. *What was most difficult?*
  - 2c. *What part of the curriculum worked best?*
  - 2d. *What changes would you recommend?*
3. *How was the program facilitated at your site?*
  - 3a. *What was your relationship with adults and peers in this process?*
4. *How did the balance of co-facilitation work for you? Please describe its benefits and challenges.*
  - 4a. *What ways of co-facilitating did you find worked well?*
  - 4b. *How did you change as a result of partnering with an adult, peer, or youth?*
5. *How have your leadership skills been impacted by being a facilitator?*
6. *Do you think that the experiences you've had leading this program will affect your actions or decisions in the future?*
  - 6a. *If so, what different choices do you think you will make because of this experience?*
  - 6b. *What do you think you will do differently?*
7. *Has your work affected your sense of making a difference in the lives of others - and if so, how?*
8. *Has your definition of leadership changed as a result of your participation in this program - and if so, how has your definition changed?*
  - 8a. *How did you define leadership before the program?*
  - 8b. *How do you define leadership now, after the program?*
9. *Has your view of yourself as a leader changed as a result of your participation in this program - and if so, how?*
  - 9a. *How did you see yourself related to leadership before the program?*
  - 9b. *How do you see yourself related to leadership after the program?*
  - 9c. *When did your view change?*
  - 9d. *Was there a particular experience that made a difference, and if so, what?*
10. *What was most meaningful to you about this whole experience?*

*11. What recommendations do you have for future youth and adult facilitators?*

Facilitator observation of program impact on participants

*12. What changes have you observed in participants as a result of your efforts with this program?*

*13. Describe a critical incident you observed among the participants in your program that demonstrates the impact of this program on participants' leadership development.*

Facilitator Training

*14. To what degree did you feel confident in your ability to teach the curriculum after participation in the OVOC Training? Please explain.*

*14a. What was particularly helpful about the training?*

*14b. How would you improve the training?*



**Appendix G**  
**Focus Group Questions: Returning Youth Facilitators**  
***Our Voices: Our Community Program***

Youth Facilitator experience of teaching the curriculum

1. *How was the program implemented at your site? (modules covered, types of projects)*
2. *What was it like to facilitate this curriculum?*
  - 2a. *What was your most memorable moment?*
  - 2b. *What was most difficult?*
  - 2c. *What part of the curriculum worked best?*
  - 2d. *What changes would you recommend?*
3. *How was the program facilitated at your site?*
  - 3a. *What was the relationship between adults and youth in this process?*
4. *How did the balance of youth/adult co-facilitation work for you? Please describe its benefits and challenges.*
  - 4a. *What ways of co-facilitating did you find worked well?*
  - 4b. *How did you change as a result of partnering with an adult?*
5. *For those of you who have been co-facilitating for more than one year, how was this year's experience different from last year's?*
6. *How have your leadership skills been impacted by being a facilitator?*
7. *For those of you who have been facilitating for more than one year, how have you been effected by a longer period of involvement with the program?*

Facilitator observation of program impact on participants

8. *Describe a critical incident you observed among the participants in your program that demonstrates the impact of this program on participants' leadership development.*
9. *For those of you who have returned for your second year, what have you noticed about the long term effects of the program on participants who were involved last year?*

General comments

10. *Do you think that the experiences you've had leading this program will affect your actions or decisions in the future?*
  - 10a. *If so, what different choices do you think you will make because of this experience?*
  - 10b. *What do you think you will do differently?*
11. *Has your work affected your sense of making a difference in the lives of others - and if so, how?*

12. *Has your definition of leadership changed as a result of your participation in this program - and if so, how has your definition changed?*  
12a. *How did you define leadership before the program?*  
12b. *How do you define leadership now, after the program?*
13. *Has your view of yourself as a leader changed as a result of your participation in this program - and if so, how?*  
13a. *How did you see yourself related to leadership before the program?*  
13b. *How do you see yourself related to leadership after the program?*  
13c. *When did your view change?*  
13d. *Was there a particular experience that made a difference, and if so, what?*

### Facilitator Training

14. *To what degree did you feel confident in your ability to teach the curriculum after participation in the Summer Training? Please explain.*  
14a. *What was particularly helpful about the retreat?*  
14b. *How would you improve the retreat?*
15. *To what degree did you feel confident in your ability to teach the curriculum as a result of your participation in the year long course? Please explain.*  
15a. *What was particularly helpful about the course?*  
15b. *How would you improve the course?*
16. *What kinds of support helped you improve your youth/adult partnership experience? (facilitator training at retreat, year long course, support during class facilitation, other)*
17. *What barriers, if any, inhibited your ability to utilize what you learned at the retreat and in the course?*
18. *What kinds of supports, if any, helped you utilize what you learned at the retreat and in the course?*

**Appendix H**  
**Focus Group Questions: Graduate Participants**  
*Our Voices: Our Community Program*

**Question 1: You participated in OVOC a year ago when you were freshmen. What do you remember most about your experience there?** (activities, course experiences, project)

**Question 2: What kind of a lasting effect has your experience in OVOC had on you, if any?**  
How has it affected your experience of being here at your high school?  
How has it affected your sense of connection with peers? With adults?  
What kinds of choices have you made differently?

**Question 3: At the end of the OVOC program last year, you participated in a community service project. What was most meaningful to you about doing the project?**  
Did your project work affect your sense of making a difference in the lives of others - and if so, how?  
What did you learn from doing the project?  
Did your project work help you set and reach a goal – and if so, how?

**Question 4: Looking back on your experience in OVOC, would you say your definition of leadership changed - and if so, how?**

**Question 5: Did your view of yourself as a leader change as a result of your participation in OVOC - and if so, how?**  
Was there a particular experience that made a difference, and if so, what?  
What have you learned about your own leadership style?  
What would you consider your strongest leadership skill at this point?

**Question 6: Do you think that the experiences you had in OVOC will affect your actions or decisions in the future?**  
If so, what do you think you will do differently?

**Question 7: Some of you have applied to become OVOC leaders for the next year and some of you have not. How did you come to that decision?**

**Question 8: What would be your advice to incoming freshmen so that they could get the most out of their experience in OVOC?**

**Question 9: What would you recommend be changed about OVOC?**

**Appendix I**  
**Retrospective Program Evaluation and Self Reflection for Participants**  
*Our Voices: Our Community Program*

We are studying the effectiveness of the *Our Voices: Our Community Program*. For each statement below, circle the letter in the box that describes you BEFORE participating in the *Our Voices: Our Community Program* and then circle the letter in the box that describes you AFTER participating in the program.

**BEFORE participating in OVOC      AFTER participating in OVOC**

<i>What I do, What I know, What I think, What I feel</i>	<i>Hardly Ever</i>	<i>Some- times</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Mostly</i>	<i>Hardly Ever</i>	<i>Some- times</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Mostly</i>
Stand up for what I believe in.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Tell my truth even when it is not easy.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Take responsibility for a task.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Help other people.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Respect people who are different from me.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Set personal goals to accomplish something I want to do.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Make choices that are important to me.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Be a good friend.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Connect with at least one caring adult	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Feel valued by adults	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Resist pressure to engage in harmful activities.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Care about my safety.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Resolve conflicts without anybody getting hurt.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Feel control over what happens to me.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Feel my life has a purpose.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Look forward to my future.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Feel good about myself.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Feel safe with this group.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Take on a useful role in my school or community.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Serve my school or community for one or more hours per week.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Think of myself as a leader.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>
Think I can learn leadership skills.	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>M</i>

BEFORE participating in OVOC, I thought of a leader as someone who: \_\_\_\_\_

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AFTER participating in OVOC, I think of a leader as someone who: \_\_\_\_\_

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The most important things I learned in the OVOC sessions are: \_\_\_\_\_

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For my project, I (briefly describe): \_\_\_\_\_

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The most meaningful part of doing the project was: \_\_\_\_\_

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The most important way I have grown from my participation in OVOC is: \_\_\_\_\_

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If there was one thing I could change about OVOC, it would be: \_\_\_\_\_

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Today's Date: Month \_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_

How many hours I spent in the OVOC Course \_\_\_\_\_

Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Date: Month \_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_

How many hours I spent working on my OVOC Project \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Male \_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_ Not in School: \_\_\_\_

**Appendix J**  
**Statistically Significant Differences in Response from 'Before' to 'After' Participation**  
**Our Voices: Our Community Participant Survey – 2005 and 2006 Comparisons**

Question	Neg Diff		% Neg Diff		Pos Diff		% Pos Diff		Ties		% Ties		Total	
	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
Stand up for what I believe in.	5	2	2%	1%	42	67	21%	26%	157	188	77%	73%	204	257
Tell my truth even when it is not easy.	4	5	2%	2%	44	64	22%	25%	154	190	76%	73%	202	259
Take responsibility for a task.	9	1	5%	0%	45	66	22%	26%	148	192	73%	74%	202	259
Help other people.	7	3	4%	1%	55	65	27%	25%	140	188	69%	74%	202	256
Respect people who are different from me.	5	6	2%	2%	37	48	19%	19%	154	200	79%	79%	196	254
Set personal goals to accomplish something I want to do.	8	2	4%	1%	59	80	29%	31%	136	176	67%	68%	203	258
Make choices that are important to me.*	6	2	3%	1%	49	52	24%	20%	146	203	73%	79%	201	257
Be a good friend.	9	1	5%	1%	29	31	14%	12%	163	220	81%	87%	201	252
Connect with at least one caring adult	5	5	2%	2%	46	57	24%	22%	143	194	74%	76%	194	256
Feel valued by adults.*	7	2	4%	1%	42	66	21%	26%	150	189	75%	73%	199	257
Resist pressure to engage in harmful activities.	7	3	3%	1%	43	41	22%	16%	150	208	75%	83%	200	252
Care about my safety.	6	6	3%	2%	31	30	15%	12%	165	219	82%	86%	202	255
Resolve conflicts without anybody getting hurt.**	6	3	3%	1%	44	45	22%	18%	150	209	75%	81%	200	257
Feel control over what happens to me.	8	3	4%	1%	40	40	20%	16%	154	214	76%	83%	202	257
Feel my life has a purpose.	9	3	5%	1%	35	43	17%	17%	158	212	78%	82%	202	258
Look forward to my future.	8	6	4%	2%	39	41	19%	16%	154	207	77%	82%	201	254
Feel good about myself.**	10	6	5%	2%	38	49	19%	19%	154	200	76%	79%	202	255
Feel safe with this group.	9	3	4%	1%	48	58	24%	23%	143	189	72%	76%	200	250
Take on a useful role in my school or community.	6	3	3%	1%	56	88	28%	35%	140	163	69%	64%	202	254
Serve my school or community for one or more hours per week.*	11	3	5%	1%	37	78	18%	31%	135	174	67%	68%	203	255
Think of myself as a leader.	13	2	6%	1%	53	76	26%	30%	137	177	68%	69%	203	255
Think I can learn leadership skills.*	11	3	6%	1%	57	64	28%	30%	134	150	66%	69%	202	217

p = .000 for each question. (Note: Total valid responses varied for each question.)  
 \*Mann Whitney U Test revealed significant gender differences for these questions in 2006, with females reporting more positive change  
 \*\*Mann Whitney U Test revealed significant gender differences for these questions in 2005, with females reporting more positive change

**Appendix K**  
**Differences in Median and Mode Response from 'Before' to 'After' Participation**  
**Our Voices: Our Community Program – 2005 and 2006 Comparisons**

Question	Median Before		Median After		Mode Before		Mode After	
	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
Stand up for what I believe in.	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4
Tell my truth even when it is not easy.	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Take responsibility for a task.	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4
Help other people.	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	4
Respect people who are different from me.	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Set personal goals to accomplish something I want to do.	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4
Make choices that are important to me.	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	4
Be a good friend.	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Connect with at least one caring adult	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4
Feel valued by adults	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4
Resist pressure to engage in harmful activities.	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4
Care about my safety.	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	4
Resolve conflicts without anybody getting hurt.	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4
Feel control over what happens to me.	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	4
Feel my life has a purpose.	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
Look forward to my future.	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Feel good about myself.	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4
Feel safe with this group.	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Take on a useful role in my school or community.	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4
Serve my school or community for one or more hours per week.	2	2	2	3	1	2	1	4
Think of myself as a leader.	3	2	3	3	2	2	3	4
Think I can learn leadership skills.	3	3	3	4	3	3	4	4

Note: Responses were each given a number:  
1 = Hardly Ever  
2 = Sometimes  
3 = Often  
4 = Mostly

**Appendix L**  
**Frequency of Response in Before and After Participation**  
**Our Voices: Our Community Program – 2005 and 2006 Comparisons**

Question	BEFORE PARTICIPATING IN OVOC						AFTER PARTICIPATING IN OVOC							
	Hardly		Some-times		Often		Hardly		Some-times		Often		Mostly	
	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
Stand up for what I believe in.	10	10	52	71	79	93	8	4	33	36	80	93	85	131
Tell my truth even when it is not easy.	17	14	70	92	80	105	12	8	51	69	92	100	51	89
Take responsibility for a task.	13	13	40	62	104	105	9	8	33	35	94	99	69	124
Help other people.	12	10	51	64	97	99	10	7	31	42	92	80	72	135
Respect people who are different from me.	8	9	19	26	75	78	7	6	15	11	55	67	123	177
Set personal goals to accomplish something I want to do.	33	37	62	78	73	95	24	22	41	51	90	93	51	99
Make choices that are important to me.	8	6	32	44	98	101	6	3	18	22	85	86	96	154
Be a good friend.	3	7	11	13	65	64	4	6	10	9	44	40	146	206
Connect with at least one caring adult	29	26	50	65	64	78	19	16	43	49	68	73	70	124
Feel valued by adults	25	24	48	81	87	100	19	12	33	56	98	97	52	99
Resist pressure to engage in harmful activities.	16	15	40	54	74	77	11	11	31	40	61	62	100	147
Care about my safety.	14	12	35	45	69	75	14	7	22	35	71	73	99	148
Resolve conflicts without anybody getting hurt.	13	12	39	51	74	94	9	8	24	31	76	77	94	148
Feel control over what happens to me.	13	17	45	57	81	87	10	9	28	45	90	80	77	130
Feel my life has a purpose.	12	22	37	57	62	57	13	16	25	43	62	58	104	150
Look forward to my future.	11	11	29	46	66	69	10	7	20	35	55	59	120	161
Feel good about myself.	12	22	29	52	82	80	9	10	23	46	71	72	102	136
Feel safe with this group.	12	16	27	39	78	67	10	6	14	16	64	55	116	182
Take on a useful role in my school or community.	30	38	62	82	77	89	22	21	48	62	77	85	58	95
Serve my school or community for one or more hours per week.	88	71	54	92	38	53	65	52	58	71	44	55	39	86
Think of myself as a leader.	29	46	68	93	65	66	20	23	56	74	72	71	58	96
Think I can learn leadership skills.	25	13	45	54	78	84	13	3	38	35	74	72	80	116

Note: Total Valid Responses vary for each question and are not shown on this chart.



