



abriendo caminos a la comunidad:
summary of youth outcomes for the first year

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Introduction

Abriendo Caminos a la Comunidad, or “Caminos,” provides six tiers of service to suspended and expelled students. These tiers of service range from placing students in day-long drop-in community service placements to the provision of intensive six-week internships and support groups. These services aim to extend the “continuum of care” for at-risk youth by providing positive work internships; offering debriefing sessions that allow students to reflect on their community service experience; offering character development sessions that focus on building trustworthiness, caring, respect, responsibility, self-esteem, and pride in the community; and providing support services to help suspended and expelled transition back into their top-choice schools, avoid future suspensions and expulsions, and graduate from high school.

This research summary explores outcomes for youth participating in Caminos. We focus on character development, behavior at home, new lessons about the community, new lessons about other youth, and new lessons about work.

Research Design

To document outcomes for youth participating in Caminos, Ceres Policy Research combined the collection of surveys, administrative records, youth interviews, and program observation. We describe each of these methods in more detail below:

- We collected pre- and post- surveys from youth participants and their parents. These surveys measured changes in character development as well as satisfaction with the Caminos program.
- We collected administrative data from the County Offices of Education and intake forms in order to document variables such as the demographics of participants, youth suspension and expulsion histories, community service placements, and hours of community service completed.
- We conducted 25 interviews with youth participants. These interviews explored what youth learned about work, their peers, and the community, as well as satisfaction with the Caminos program.
- Finally, we observed reflection and debriefing activities as well as community service sites in each of the three participating counties.

Findings

Character Development

Youth gave themselves significantly higher character development scores at the end of the Caminos program. Youth began by rating themselves between “ok” and “good” on measures of trustworthiness, respect, caring, and responsibility. At the end of the Caminos cycle, youth rated themselves solidly “good.”

Parents also gave their children higher character development scores at the end of the Caminos program. Parents began by rating their children between “ok” and “good” on the different character development measures. At the end of the Caminos cycle, parents rated their children or solidly “good.”

Behavior at Home

Survey data indicate that a large number of parents perceive differences in their children’s behavior and, moreover, that these changes have helped the family at home. Eighteen of the eighteen parents who completed open ended questions on the survey described a range of positive changes. Examples of what parents said are listed below:

(My son) has been open about how he is feeling. He wants to try more in everything all around him. –parent survey

(My daughter) cares about taking responsibility. –parent survey

(My son) is beginning to help his little brothers and sisters. He helps his brother with his homework. –parent survey

(My daughter) tells me she loves me when she goes anywhere. –parent survey

New Lessons About The Community

According to the survey data, 60% of youth said that they learned something new about their community. Most commonly, they learned about organizations and their leaders located in their community.

I learned there are a lot of different things out there...It kind of made it seemlike the community was bigger. It’s bigger than I thought. I walk around and know about all kinds of places that have to do with youth and...can help out teenagers. –youth interview

New Lessons About Other Youth

According to the survey data, 53% of youth said they learned something new about other youth. Youth interviews give us some insight into what participants learned about their peers. Most commonly, participants learned that they are not the only one who has made mistakes.

When you get to know (the youth in Caminos), they're just like me, like, they didn't even know this could happen...They made mistakes, but they're not really like that, they're really cool. They just made mistakes. Everybody does. And you can become a better person. –youth interview

New Lessons About Work

According to the survey data, 83% of youth report learning something new about work. Most youth learned how to take on additional responsibility.

I learned that it is important to be on time and be responsible for myself. –youth survey

Additionally, six of the twenty five youth interviewed described developing new relationships with supervisors who became mentors. One young man describes how advice from his mentor effectively helped his relationship with his parents.

(My supervisor) told me, when I'm speaking to my parents, um, try not to lose my temper, because I have that a lot. She told me to calm down. I went up to them and I asked them if I could speak with them, they really didn't seem like they wanted to but after we started talking, um, I guess they got the idea I was sorry for what I did and I wasn't thinking of doing it again...So it worked. –youth interview

Conclusion

Overall, Ceres Policy Research finds a number of positive outcomes for youth participating in the Caminos program. The majority have experienced significant improvements in character development¹ and behavior at home. In addition, the majority of youth participants have learned new lessons about their community, their peers, and work.

As such, Caminos provides a promising program for youth at-risk of repeated suspensions and expulsions, gang involvement, and dropping out of school.

¹ We collected youth and parent perceptions of changes in trustworthiness, respect, caring, and taking responsibility to measure changes in character development.