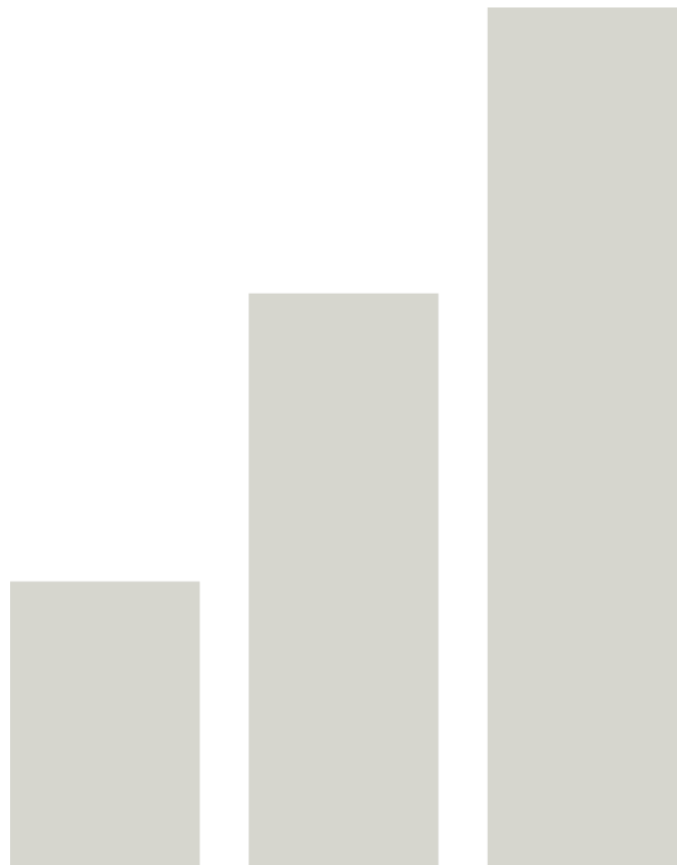


Using Qualitative Research to Uncover the Mechanisms of One Summer Chicago: What Makes Summer Youth Employment Programs Meaningful for Youth

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Introduction

Research Motivation

Summer youth employment programs are spreading across the United States, growing rapidly and attracting the attention of policy-makers and researchers. These programs are run by municipalities, workforce investment boards (WIBs), and workforce intermediaries (Ross & Kazis, 2016) around the country. With this growth in programming comes growth in knowledge about the impact of these programs on youth outcomes.¹ However, there is little consensus about *how* these programs work and *what* program components make these programs beneficial to low-income youth. The One Summer Chicago (OSC) program, a summer youth employment program run through the city of Chicago, provides an opportunity to explore the mechanisms through which summer youth employment is working. OSC started in 2011 and by the summer of 2016 employed over 30,000 youth in a variety of summer employment program models. The University of Chicago Urban Labs (Urban Labs) completed a randomized-control study of one of these models during the summer of 2012. That study demonstrated a reduction in violent crime arrests for program participants in the 16 months following the program (Heller, 2014).² Emerson Collective, an organization “dedicated to removing barriers so people can live to their full potential”³ funded this qualitative study⁴ in order to further develop an understanding the components and processes that make OSC summer work experiences meaningful and impactful for youth. The goals of this study include contributing to the ongoing development of priorities, policies, and implementation strategies of summer youth employment programming for OSC as well as building knowledge about these types of programs that can be applied more broadly.

Summertime work is seen as an important normative developmental experience for adolescents—it provides opportunities to explore interests, develop and practice ways of being in a work setting, and earn money for themselves (Ross & Kazis, 2016). Exposure to professional work settings and practices is common among middle-class youth, whose parents aim to provide their children with additional exposure to ways of interacting that translate into success in work settings later in life (Bourdieu, 1986, Vincent & Ball, 2007). Middle-class youth are often connected to initial work experiences through existing social networks. They enter their first experience in the world of work with some existing knowledge of workplace culture and expected behaviors and they are scaffolded by social networks that help them make meaning of and grow from the work experience. On the other hand, young people who have grown up in resource-poor contexts do not have the same access to supportive summer work opportunities

¹ Such as reduced youth violence (Heller, 2014), reduced youth incarceration and mortality, and improved academic outcomes (Ross & Kazis, 2016).

² Urban Labs is continuing to study OSC program effects.

³ From the Emerson Collective website (<http://www.emersoncollective.com/about-us>), accessed on June 20, 2017.

⁴ Emerson Collective also contributed to funding an expansion of OSC programming in 2016.

or the same knowledge of the social field of work. In addition, they may lack the social supports to help them make the work experience developmentally meaningful. This disparity in access to and leveraging of summertime work experiences further deepens the divide in young people's preparation for emerging adulthood and success in occupational settings. The fact that young people raised in poverty feel a greater urgency to hasten the pace to financial independence (DeLuca, Clampet-Lundquist, & Edin, 2016) only heightens the need for opportunities to earn money, make connections, and develop the skills that will foster their ability to successfully launch into adulthood. If the goal of summer employment programs is to help prepare youth for success later in life, summer youth employment programming must provide access to work experiences that support opportunities for development.

We ground our qualitative analyses in the theoretical perspectives of capital accumulation and identity development in order to explore how OSC is working to support youth in achieving positive outcomes. We first provide a brief review of the relevant literature in these perspectives. Next, we provide a brief overview of OSC's history and program models. Then, we describe our data and methods. In our findings section, we first describe youth characteristics and program components and then the mechanisms by which OSC seems to be working for its participants. We wrap up with a discussion of the implications of our findings for OSC and other youth-serving programs more broadly.

Literature

Since the recession of 2007–09, the interest in and funding for summer youth employment programs have risen, driven in part by concerns over high youth unemployment rates (Ross & Kazis, 2016). Summer jobs programs provide youth with an employment experience, a paycheck, a new social and professional network, a new set of skills, and constructive activities to fill the days of their summer. Many summer employment programs focus on providing young people with access to the types of capital that could positively influence adult trajectories: financial capital, human capital, social capital, and cultural capital. In Chicago, summer youth employment has been framed as a potential solution in the narrative about youth-involved violence in the city, but the theory of change—or why summer employment is an effective violence prevention strategy—is not well articulated. The idea that keeping youth “off the streets” in “safe spaces” for a few hours a day for a few weeks out of the year does not feel like an adequate explanation.⁵ There are, however, other possible explanations. A financial capital-focused theory is that the money earned through the summer work experience is enough to offset the potential money earned through illegal activities. A human capital-focused theory is that the summer work experience provides the experience and related skills that can later be leveraged on the labor market. A social capital-focused theory is that it is the new connections to individuals in the work world that help young people enter and navigate the world of work. Finally, a cultural capital-focused theory is that the engagement with different people in different social contexts provides young people with insider-knowledge about the behaviors and self-presentation skills that promote success in work settings.

In this section, we articulate each of the capitals and why they are worth considering in the context of summer youth employment programming. We also make explicit the link between cultural capital and soft skills. Finally, we consider why the meaning-making practice that is flourishing in adolescence and emerging adulthood adds a developmental layer to understanding why considering capital, alone, is not likely to yield important information about how to understand why summer youth employment programming can be effective at influencing outcomes important to adult trajectories.

⁵ Indeed, Heller’s finding (2014) that the reduction in violence for OSC participants lasted 16 months beyond the summer program contradicts this conceptualization of how the program works to reduce violence.

Financial Capital

Financial capital is the money earned by an individual. Paid summer employment programs opportunities certainly provide young people with access to this. If program participants show up and perform well enough on the job, they will receive a paycheck. If we think that individuals get involved in criminal activity because they don't have ways to earn money through the legitimate labor market, providing youth with the opportunity to do so will prevent, stop, or limit their involvement in illegal activities to earn money. Rational choice theory suggests that individuals make choices based upon calculations of risk and reward (Becker, 1976). If the financial reward gained through participation in summer employment programming outweighs the potential benefits and risks of obtaining money illegally, young people will choose to participate in summer employment programs.

Human Capital

Human capital speaks to the basic tenet of employment programs—that the skills an individual acquires through work and education lead to additional opportunities in the labor market. The theory of human capital emphasizes skills that are directly related to achieving educational and workplace success and make an individual more productive and more desirable on the labor market. While individuals accumulate human capital over the course of their lifetime (Becker, 1962; Comay, Melnik, & Pollatscheck, 1973; Weisbrod, 1962), youth from disadvantaged backgrounds face significant barriers to building human capital (Comay et al., 1973). Research suggests that at-risk youth need more than traditional classroom education to develop human capital that leads to this success (Adelman, 1998; Edelman, Holzer, & Offner, 2006; Heckman, 2000; Heckman & Lochner, 2000; Ivry & Doolittle, 2003; Kane & Rouse, 1999; Schneider, 2000; Scrivener et al., 2008; Settersten, 2005; U. S. Department of Labor, 1995). Employment experiences can bolster the accumulation of human capital.

Social Capital

Social capital involves supportive connections to individuals and institutions that help an individual navigate his or her social world (Putnam, 2000). As young adults, increased exposure to new social networks and new institutionalized social structures (such as a workplace) help youth develop and reach their own goals. Research has identified not only the value of social capital as youth transition to adulthood (Auspos, Brown, & Hirota, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Conchas, 2006; González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Johnson, Farrell, & Stoloff, 2000; Lin, 1999; Meier, 1999; Sandefur, Meier, & Hernandez, 1999; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997), but has also noted its accentuated importance for at-risk youth in this transition (Fernandes, 2007; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Ivry & Doolittle, 2003; Settersten, 2005). Summer employment programs can go a long way in connecting adolescents to resource-rich networks through social service providers, employers and supervisors, and both formal and informal new mentors.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital consists of an individual's knowledge of culturally appropriate norms, values, and behaviors. Developing cultural capital can impact an individual's life chances (Erickson, 1996). It provides opportunities to improve one's economic and health outcomes through social mobility by increasing an individual's ability to successfully navigate different social contexts. Cultural capital can be thought of as the "soft skills" that signal one's belonging in and capacity to be an active participant in the reproduction of a particular social field. In the case of the work setting, skillfully employing soft skills may be especially important to an individual's success. Research has shown that noncognitive "soft" skills may have a greater effect on the employment outcomes of recently hired welfare recipients than cognitive or technical skills (Holzer, Stoll, & Wissoker, 2004). In addition, soft skills have been found to predict employment and earnings as well as academic and technical skills do (Kautz, Heckman, Diris, Weekl, & B et al., 2014). However, youth with limited social connections beyond their immediate communities often develop cultural capital that is not conducive to success in the labor market or education (Bartee & Brown, 2007; Bourdieu, 1986; Farkas, 2003; Fordham, 1999; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly, & Haller, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). Research has shown that cultural capital is critical if at-risk youth are to succeed in school and in work (Bartee & Brown, 2007; Portes et al., 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2001),

Soft Skills as the Signals of Cultural Capital

One of the main objectives of summer youth employment programs is to foster new skills among the youth participants. The acquisition of skills enables adolescents to function better in their societies, fosters their social inclusion, and improves their economic and social mobility. As Kautz and colleagues put it, "Skills give agency to people to shape their lives, to create new skills and to flourish" (Kautz et al., 2014). Developing this sense of agency is a crucial developmental process for young people in general, and for young people growing up in under-resourced communities in particular.

As youth employment programs have developed and evolved over the years, there has been a movement towards incorporating skills that supplement the traditional job training and workplace skills. For children growing up in disadvantaged environments, there is a window of opportunity during adolescence to help young people expand their networks outside of their communities and develop future goals. Workplace-based youth programs that teach soft skills appear to be effective interventions for expanding adolescents' interpersonal skills and repertoire of interactions (Kautz et al., 2014). While a primary goal of youth employment programs may be to provide employment experience and a paycheck for youth, many programs implement some soft skill training as a supplement to the technical skills and on the job training that youth gain.

An extensive review of existing literature concluded that there are a set of five key soft skills that are broadly applicable and are fundamental for all aspects of workforce success (Lippman,

Ryberg, Carney, & Moore, 2015). These skills are identified as being developmentally optimal for young adults and can be improved with youth employment programs:

- Social skills. These skills include respecting others, resolving conflict, using context-appropriate behavior, and helping people get along with others.
- Communication skills. These include oral, written, nonverbal, and listening skills that are often used in the workplace.
- Higher-order thinking skills. These skills relate to problem solving, critical thinking, and decision making. These include the ability to identify an issue, consider information from many sources, evaluate options, and then make an informed and rational decision or conclusion.
- Self-control. This involves the ability to control impulses, direct and focus attention, delay gratification, manage emotions, and regulate behaviors. Self-control is foundational to many other skills, such as decision making, communication, and conflict resolution.
- Positive self-concept. This includes possessing self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and a sense of well-being and pride.

In addition to these five critical soft skills, employers also highly value other soft skills: hard work and dependability, responsibility, self-motivation, and teamwork. There is growing evidence that these soft skills can be improved through youth employment programs (Lippman et al., 2015). Youth who are competent in these soft skills have a waterfall effect on employment-related outcomes: they are more effective in their job searches and interviews and thus more likely to be hired; they are more likely to be productive in their jobs, and thus retained and promoted; as a result, they earn more than their peers that are not as competent in these skills (Lippman, et al., 2015). It is not hard to imagine that these same skills can have similar cumulative effects on other youth trajectories such as educational outcomes and involvement in crime. These skills also allow individuals to signal their awareness of and agility with the “rules of the game” of a variety of social settings, thus expanding the cultural capital that they can draw upon to propel themselves towards achieving their goals. But the effective use of these skills requires meaning-making—determining what it means to be someone who “acts” this way and interacts this way in new places.

Making Meaning of the Experience

Skills, in and of themselves, are not useful unless the individual knows how and where to use them and has the confidence to try these new skills in new social situations. Adolescence is a time where individuals often find themselves in new social situations and must call on some degree of self-awareness and confidence in order to succeed. It’s a time of self-exploration (Erickson, 1968). Erickson’s adolescent identity theory suggests that young people who are unable to develop a strong sense of personal identity during this self-exploration process will not envision clear adult roles for their future. For young people exposed to chronic poverty and violence, providing opportunities to consider success outside of those circumstances can enable the development of an identity that is not merely reproducing the circumstances of their birth.

At the same time, confusion over the present self-concept is also correlated with both negative economic outcomes (Gushue, Scanlan, Pantzer, & Clarke, 2006; Hirschi & Lage, 2007; Holland, Johnston, & Asama, 1993) and negative well-being outcomes (Christiansen, 1999; Kroger, 2007; Raskin, 1985; Vondracek, 1995; Munson, 1992; Saunders, Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 2000). Without understanding one's self in the present, it's hard to imagine a future self and set the goals needed to reach that vision. Providing access to a potential new vision of one's future self needs to be bolstered by meaning-making and other supports to avoid the confusion that can be associated with straddling multiple social worlds simultaneously.

For adolescents, establishing a sense of belonging with a social group is key to positive identity development and self-concept (Oysterman & Destin, 2010; Browman & Destin, 2016). Adolescents from disadvantaged communities often face challenges to their sense of belonging when developing a strong self-concept: to foster a sense of belonging with a social network that supports a positive future identity—one of an adult that is a contributing member of society—can require adopting new behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs (Lansing & Rapoport, 2016). If adolescents can use their new skills in these new situations, such as a first-time job, then youth may begin to broaden their thoughts on who they might become and where they fit in the broader world. To embrace that social mobility may put strains on current social relationships as they try to integrate into new social worlds (Durkheim, 1951; Sorokin, 1927). This theoretical and empirical literature on identity highlights the importance of adolescence as a time ripe for interventions that can impact life trajectories for at-risk youth, as identity development is prominent and critical at this stage.

What Can Summer Employment Do About This?

Just as summer youth programs benefit youth differently, not all summer jobs programs are created equal, nor do they enjoy the same successes. Recent work by the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, which scanned summer jobs programs in about a dozen cities, identified a core set of practices that characterize high-performing youth summer employment programs. These practices tend to fall into two categories: program design and organizational capacity (Ross & Kazis, 2016). Among the critical components in the design of a program are recruiting and sustaining employers to maximize job opportunities, purposefully matching youth to appropriate jobs, training youth on work readiness and financial literacy skills, providing guidance to supervisors, and connecting the program to other educational, work, and youth development services (Ross & Kazis, 2016).

While planning for summer youth employment programs is often a year-round endeavor, the programs themselves have a short window of time in which they can impart skills training, mentoring, and work experiences for participating youth. Most programs typically run 5 to 7 weeks from start to finish (Ross & Kazis, 2016), and summer employment leadership often understands that a limited experience with paid employment in isolation is unlikely to have lasting effects on youth trajectories. A focus on supporting the development of soft skills and scaffolding meaning-making of the summer work experience might help boost longer term

effects during the short period of summer employment programming. In addition, aligning summer employment programs with other year-round programming that includes the same focus on the development of soft skills and how to make meaning of new experiences can reinforce the lessons of the summer employment experience. It also can possibly reduce the gap between middle class adolescents and their more disenfranchised peers as these young people transition into adulthood (Ross & Kazis, 2016).

At the same time, we want to highlight the tricky work of such interventions—creating a sense of “belonging” requires influencing both contextual factors and individual practices. Summer employment programs can influence the contextual factors at their disposal (the employers and agencies participating in the program) but need to also be mindful that the low-income youth who participate in summer employment programming may still live in challenging communities and struggle to navigate both worlds simultaneously. In addition, the realities of broader labor market inequalities, manifested through discriminatory hiring and earnings differentials, can present additional challenges for marginalized youth in both envisioning their future selves and in achieving future financial security. Without helping to develop the pathways through school and work and ensuring that young people remain connected with supports after summer employment programming ends, the intervention may lead to greater identity confusion and the loss of any hope built during the program.

Program Description

In this section, we provide an overview of OSC based on our review of Chicago Department of Family Support Services (DFSS) in program materials. We present this to orient the reader to the partnering structure and complexities of the program. We highlight aspects of partnerships and programming that are relevant to this study.

One Summer Chicago Background

The Mayor of Chicago, in partnership with Cook County, City departments and sister agencies, community groups, and nonprofits, created the One Summer Chicago (OSC) youth employment program in 2011.⁶ The citywide initiative serves Chicago youth and young adults between the ages of 14 and 24, and partners with agencies and employers across the city with the goal of providing youth meaningful work experiences over a 7-week summer term.

Emerson Collective Expansion

In the spring of 2016, the Emerson Collective, a foundation that focuses on enabling self-reliance, donated a significant amount of money to the OSC 2016 programming. Through their support, Emerson Collective funded thousands of additional summer jobs and opportunities through OSC with the goal of helping students become job ready and keeping kids safe by reducing violence in the city. The Emerson Collective believes that creating jobs and pathways to jobs is a way to bring hope and opportunity to particular neighborhoods facing higher rates of violence. They were particularly interested in providing opportunities for youth most at risk of violence, dropping out, and criminal activity. Emerson recognized that focusing on OSC was part of a preventative effort to support youth who may become more high risk.⁷ Emerson Collective funding provided additional employment opportunities for DFSS, After School Matters (ASM), Chicago Public Schools (CPS), and the Chicago Park District (Parks). Emerson asked the agencies that their funding for OSC be used for neighborhoods where there was high crime and Emerson identified those communities for the agencies. In addition to employment opportunities, Emerson Collective funded enhancements such as college tours, emergency resources to

⁶ Office of the Mayor, City of Chicago, Mayor's Press Office. "Mayor Emanuel Announces 25,000 Summer Youth Job Opportunities Available through 2016 One Summer Chicago Programs". March 14, 2016. <https://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/mayor/Press%20Room/Press%20Releases/2016/March/3.14.16OneSummerChicago.pdf>. Accessed June 20, 2017.

⁷ Interview with Emerson Collective representative (October 26, 2016)

support youths' engagement in employment or school, and Summer Peace Mini Grants⁸ for "opportunity youth," a select group of young people who were disengaged from school and work.

One Summer Chicago Partners and Participants

One Summer Chicago lists 16 different agency partners in its 2016 Agency Handbook⁹ (City of Chicago, 2016a), although in this review we only describe partners that are included in our study. One factor influencing inclusion in the study is the enhancements and expansions during the 2016 summer session because of an influx of funding by the Emerson Collective. DFSS, ASM, Parks, and CPS all committed to expanding their One Summer Chicago employment programming as a result of the Emerson Collective's funding. While we would have liked to include all expansion partners in this study, we were unable to include CPS because we had insufficient time to obtain parental consents and Research Review Board (RRB) approval from CPS.

DFSS Delegate Agency Engagement

DFSS recruits community-based organizations to serve as delegate agencies to carry out the OSC program "on the ground." DFSS releases an RFP requesting agencies apply to administer one or more of the DFSS OSC program models (more on models below). Historically, DFSS had been involved in research exploring the impact of OSC, which involved randomly assigning youth who had applied to the program to get programming or not. Because of this, youth were largely assigned to delegate agencies by DFSS. In 2016, delegate agencies could choose 100% of the youth to serve through their own agency. As such, the youth included in our study are those who heard about the program, were motivated and able to complete the OSC application, met the eligibility requirements, and provided the program documents necessary for work. Youth also were more likely to have had prior contact with the delegate agency than during previous years when participants had been randomly assigned to agencies.

According to the 2016 One Summer Chicago Agency Handbook (City of Chicago, 2016a), delegate agencies are responsible for:

⁸ Peace Mini Grants, funded from Emerson Collective and ranging from \$5,000–\$25,000, supported initiatives that promoted peace to youth ages 6–24. Grants were available in one of three categories (enhancements, apprenticeships, or internships) and targeted 15 high-risk neighborhoods.

⁹ Many city agencies are listed as OSC partners. City agencies and entities include Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, Chicago Department of Family & Support Services (DFSS), Chicago Department of Finance, Chicago Department of Streets & Sanitation (DSS), Chicago Department of Transportation, Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), Chicago Park District, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Chicago Public Library, City Colleges of Chicago, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, and the Office of the Treasurer. Other OSC agency partners around the city for 2016 include After School Matters (ASM), Brookfield Zoo, the Forest Preserves of Cook County, and the Lincoln Park Zoo.

- Direct outreach and recruitment of employers to host youth over the summer, including identifying and engaging city agencies, corporations, and not-for-profit organizations and for-profit companies in their communities to serve as employment sites.
- Recruiting youth to complete the OSC application.
- Informing the youth of their acceptance into OSC.¹⁰
- Providing orientation for the program to youth and employers.
- Managing youth placement in jobs, their payroll, and all administrative paperwork for their youth and employers in the program.
- Delegate agencies were responsible for a wide range of OSC programmatic activities. ASM and Parks, as OSC partners and providers, while also responsible for the activities required of delegate agencies also served as direct employers to OSC youth.

One Summer Chicago Youth Application

While One Summer Chicago maintains an online application, several of the city partners have a separate application that youth must complete should they choose to apply for a position with one of these partners. Youth begin the OSC application by submitting contact and education information, including answering a required question about being a resident of public housing with the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA). Youth are then directed to a page asking them to indicate their interests and up to three types of jobs and experiences of interest to them. They are then asked about their banking practices, social media accounts, other employment, and interest in other programming opportunities. Youth are finally asked to select whether they are interested in working for various OSC partners such as ASM or CHA, depending on their eligibility (determined by how they answered other questions earlier in the application). Upon submitting the OSC application, youth who select ASM or CHA are redirected to a separate application these two partners maintain for OSC employment. Parks maintains its own job postings on its website for summer youth employment, and typically posts their job announcements before the OSC application is available online. However, they also link their jobs through the OSC online application, so youth can access these job offers through either the OSC application or the Park District website.

One Summer Chicago Program Models

Through its different partners, OSC operates a variety of different program models,¹¹ each with its own eligibility requirements and program components. Below, we briefly sketch each model.

¹⁰ According to Urban Labs research manager reports, delegate agencies also conduct significant follow up between the notification of acceptance into OSC and the start of employment in order to ensure that selected youth actually engage in the program. This was supported in our interview data.

¹¹ Four additional models were involved in One Summer Chicago 2016 but not included in this evaluation: (1) *DFSS Greencorps Chicago Youth Program* offers opportunities for youth labeled “at-risk” for school dropout, operates out of Chicago Public Schools, and consists of a horticulture module and a bikes module; (2) Chicago Housing Authority

After School Matters (ASM)

ASM offers internships and apprenticeships in arts, communications, technology, science and sports. The OSC youth in the ASM program must be age 14 through 21 and currently enrolled in a Chicago public high school. ASM operates four models and youth have the ability to move from lower models to higher models as they get older and gain experience. The ASM OSC models, in order of increased responsibility, are: (1) pre-apprenticeships, (2) apprenticeship (largest model), (3) advanced apprenticeships, and (4) internships. Apprenticeship models pay youth a stipend for the summer whereas internships pay youth an hourly wage and resemble the DFSS OSC job placements.

Chicago Park District (Parks)

The Chicago Park District offers OSC youth seasonal summer positions to help with Parks' summer programming. These positions include seasonal recreational leaders (camp counselor), attendants (cleaning and maintenance duties), junior laborers, lifeguards, and junior counselors. The youth in OSC are primarily hired to be either camp counselors or seasonal attendants. Camp counselors have often first been junior counselors with Parks. With the exception of the junior counselors, who received a stipend in 2016, Parks positions are union jobs that pay an hourly wage. There are no school requirements for the Parks placements. Many youth in Parks summer OSC positions are former or current participants in Parks programs. Youth older than 17 who apply are subjected to a background check and drug test before they are officially hired. Additionally, Parks maintains that employees cannot have any outstanding city tickets or bills, though they acknowledge this requirement is difficult to enforce for seasonal employees.

DFSS

Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)

SYEP is the traditional youth employment program under DFSS. SYEP offers a paid work and enrichment experience for 20 hours a week over 7 weeks during the summer. In addition to paid employment, SYEP offers financial literacy workshops, job skills development, and onsite mentoring. SYEP also offers youth four weeks of CTA transit cards and other resources and supplies as needed. OSC youth in SYEP must be age 16 through 24 and there is no school requirement. The Summer Youth Employment Program is the only OSC option within DFSS for young adults after 21 years of age.

offers opportunities for youth aged 13 through 24 who are public housing residents; and (3) Chicago Public Schools offers opportunities for OSC youth to work as teachers aids and assistants. CPS also offered the Auditorium Transformation Project and the Summer Safe Passage Program for OSC youth, who must be current CPS students aged 16 through 21; and 4) Forest Preserve of Cook County offers opportunities for youth to learn about environmental science and conservation and was the only OSC programming available to youth in Cook County outside of the city of Chicago.

DFSS: One Summer Chicago PLUS (OSC+)

OSC+ was designed in 2012 as a supplement to the traditional summer youth employment program (SYEP), with a primary goal of reducing violent crime by targeting youth in certain Chicago neighborhoods. OSC+ offers youth group activities (field trips and other outings), mentorship, four weeks of CTA transit cards, and other resources as needed. OSC+ youth must be recruited from one of 80+ targeted Chicago Public Schools and fall between ages 16 and 21.¹²

OSC+ Infrastructure

DFSS partnered with the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Department of Streets and Sanitation (DSS) to create the OSC+ Mayor's Infrastructure Team ("Infrastructure") model. Infrastructure educates youth about the structural working of the city, supports neighborhood restoration efforts, and provides on-site mentoring and supervision as well as peer mentoring through a delegate agency. Youth work in teams on one of three focus areas in the city: restoration, beautification, and mural design. Infrastructure is delivered through 15 community-based summer employment providers (City of Chicago, 2016), all of which served as delegate agencies administering the OSC+ program model.

Program Components in 2016

OSC+ Mentors

According to the One Summer Chicago Agency Handbook (City of Chicago, 2016), OSC+ mentors are expected to provide programmatic support to OSC while serving as a coach or advisor to a group of youth throughout the summer. OSC+ mentors have a cohort of 20 youth they are responsible for throughout the summer, and are expected to interact with youth in a number of ways:

- Offer advice and support
- Help youth manage expectations
- Help develop leadership, workforce, and life skills
- Offer insight and guidance around work and school issues
- Share resources
- Make connections to people and institutions

Mentors engage with employers to defuse difficult situations that may arise onsite. Importantly, mentors also handle the payroll process on behalf of the delegate agency, from collecting

¹² According to Urban Labs research managers, this wasn't strictly true in 2016. In order to expand participation, delegate agencies were directed to recruit from all Chicago Public Schools with the exception of selective enrollment schools.

timesheets from the employer to performing timesheet data entry (City of Chicago, 2016).¹³ In addition, mentors lead group activities, guided by the Civic Leadership Curriculum or a different curriculum of the delegate agency's choice, and support youth in completing other OSC requirements.

Peer Mentors

Older youth (ages 21–24) who have previously participated in OSC were eligible to be peer mentors to youth in 2016. The peer mentors underwent special training to become a peer mentor and were placed in paid mentor positions at delegate agencies (City of Chicago, 2016).

LRNG Curriculum

LRNG is a curriculum intended to impart 21st century skills via a technology platform. Youth can access LRNG from smartphones, tablets, or computers, and the platforms for learning include things like Job Readiness and Financial Literacy. In 2016, LRNG piloted LRNG: CHI – BOSS UP within One Summer Chicago so that all youth who applied to OSC were provided access to LRNG's platform and content. OSC applicants had the opportunity to complete playlists that provide learning experiences and help youth develop skills to prepare for employment. Youth who complete playlists earn digital badges that can be shared on applications and youth's resumes to demonstrate learning achievements and motivation (City of Chicago, 2016b). Part of OSC's financial literacy component was delivered through this platform.

¹³ Interview data also highlight that mentors sometimes handled employer recruitment, youth recruitment, and collecting and processing youth employment documentation.

Method

Study Design

This qualitative study was designed to uncover the effective key program components and underlying mechanisms through which OSC is influencing the lives of its participants. In service of this, we incorporate the perspectives of various OSC stakeholders:

- Key stakeholders at the city level
- Partner agency leadership
- Delegate agency representatives, including those in the formal role of mentor
- Employers:
 - Employer contacts responsible for coordinating with the delegate agency
 - Direct supervisors of OSC youth
- Youth OSC participants age 18 and older

This range in perspectives allows us to document the initiative as intended and as implemented, illustrate alignment and variation across programs, and highlight the ways in which OSC program components and processes are impacting the participants to whom we spoke. This qualitative approach focused on processes rather than outcomes. The “impacts” we discuss are self-reported by respondents and are not generalizable to the whole population of OSC participants or similar populations of youth more broadly. However, our comparative design and purposefully selected sample allows us to generalize about the processes through which OSC is working and provides insights into the program components that influence these processes. The qualitative study received IRB approval from the University of Chicago before outreach to study participants.

Sample Selection, Recruitment, and Outreach

This study’s sample involved a set of selected DFSS delegate and partner agencies and their associated youth placement sites, which will be referred to as “worksites”.¹⁴

The research design called for a purposeful sampling strategy that sought to maximize variation across the following key dimensions of DFSS delegate agencies:

¹⁴ “Youth worksites” refers to all youth placements, although ASM’s apprenticeship program and the Parks’ Junior Counselors program are stipended and typically not considered to be the same type of wage-earning worksite job experience offered through ASM internships, Parks employment, and DFSS delegate agencies.

- Delegate agency type¹⁵
- Target youth enrollment
- Change in target youth enrollment from 2015 to 2016
- Delegate agency neighborhood

Table 1 lists the agency dimensions for the 6 delegate agencies in the sample.

Table 1. Agency Dimensions across Sample DFSS Delegate Agencies

Delegate Agency Type	OSC Program Size in 2016¹⁶	Change in Target Enrollment from 2015 to 2016	Delegate Agency Neighborhood
Workforce Development	Large	+96%	South
Family & Community Services	Medium	+54%	Downtown
Family & Community Services	Large	+92%	South
Family & Community Services	Small	+4%	Southwest
Youth Development	Small	+28%	North and Southeast
Youth Development	Medium	+525%	Southwest

¹⁵ Delegate agencies were categorized as primarily focusing on either youth development, workforce development, or family and community services. They were categorized by Urban Labs research managers who had extensive experience with the delegate agencies since the prior summer (2015).

¹⁶ In order to protect the confidentiality of the participating delegate agencies, exact target numbers of youth have been replaced by three size designations based on the number of youth targeted for OSC in 2016: Small = under 200 youth, Medium = 201–500 youth, and Large = over 500 youth.

The delegate agencies in our sample represent all three categories of agency type and include one large workforce development agency, three family & community service agencies, and two youth development agencies. They also included a range in OSC program size, targeting between 100 and 700 youth. The sample also includes variation in the change in the number of target youth placements from summer 2015 to summer 2016, with the smallest growth rate at 4% and the largest at 525%. In addition, the neighborhood of the delegate agency headquarters for the program was taken into consideration in order to select a sample of agencies from throughout the city. Since delegate agencies were able to recruit their own youth in 2016, we assume that they might serve larger proportions of youth from their own neighborhoods.

Once delegate agencies were selected using this sampling strategy, researchers sought consent to participate from program contacts at each delegate agency, as well as from Parks and ASM. If the program contact consented to participate, they then provided contact information for mentors associated with their delegate agency and select employer contacts serving as worksites in 2016.¹⁷ Delegate agency contacts, mentors were then invited to participate in an interview. Delegate agency contacts and mentors¹⁸ were interviewed at a time and location convenient to them. Employer contacts, direct supervisors of OSC participants, and OSC participants from each consented employment site were then recruited to participate in interviews and unobtrusive observations of the worksite during hours when OSC youth were present. During July and early August, interviews with employers, mentors, and youth were prioritized in order to ensure access to these respondents before the summer jobs ended in mid-August. Interviews with delegate agency contacts and key stakeholders were scheduled into the fall. Observations of DFSS program debrief events¹⁹ and a recognition event for OSC partners took place in the fall.

¹⁷ In order to select the ASM sites to be included in the sample, ASM provided a list of sites that served youth who were at least 18 years of age, along with their associated dimensions, including city region, program model, target enrollment, content area, and provider status (independent or organization) in order to allow selection for variation. The final two sites that were selected differed from each other in each of these dimensions, with the exception of city region, with both sites located in the South/Southwest region. Parks provided a short list of sites from which two were selected for observations and interviews. For DFSS, delegate agencies provided researchers with connections to worksites and employers where (1) they knew that an observation would be feasible (e.g., the youth would be there and they had youth over the age of 18) and (2) they were able to contact the employers directly to let them know about the study within the short timeframe of outreach. Several agencies made available a list of options to the Urban Labs research managers who tried to pick a diverse group of worksites that was roughly representative of the DFSS programs as a whole.

¹⁸ At one delegate agency, two mentor focus groups were conducted instead of the planned interviews due to the agency's preference and mentors' desire to have their voices included in the study. Because all respondents were in the same role, researchers used the interview protocol to conduct two focus groups with between 6 and 8 mentors in each at this delegate agency.

¹⁹ Separate debrief events were held with employers, partner agencies, and delegate agencies. These events included focused roundtable discussions of topics determined by DFSS.

The tight timeline from the development of the study design in June 2016 to data collection in the field during OSC programming²⁰ prevented obtaining IRB approval for children to participate in the research. Therefore, all youth who were invited to participate were 18 years of age or older. The youth who participated were identified by their employers and approached at their worksite to be invited to complete an interview in a private room at the worksite or at another time outside of work. The same youth were also asked if they consented to be shadowed while working for the worksite observations. The consent process was completed verbally to help ensure confidentiality by not tracking participants' names. Youth participants were provided with a \$20 gift card as an incentive.

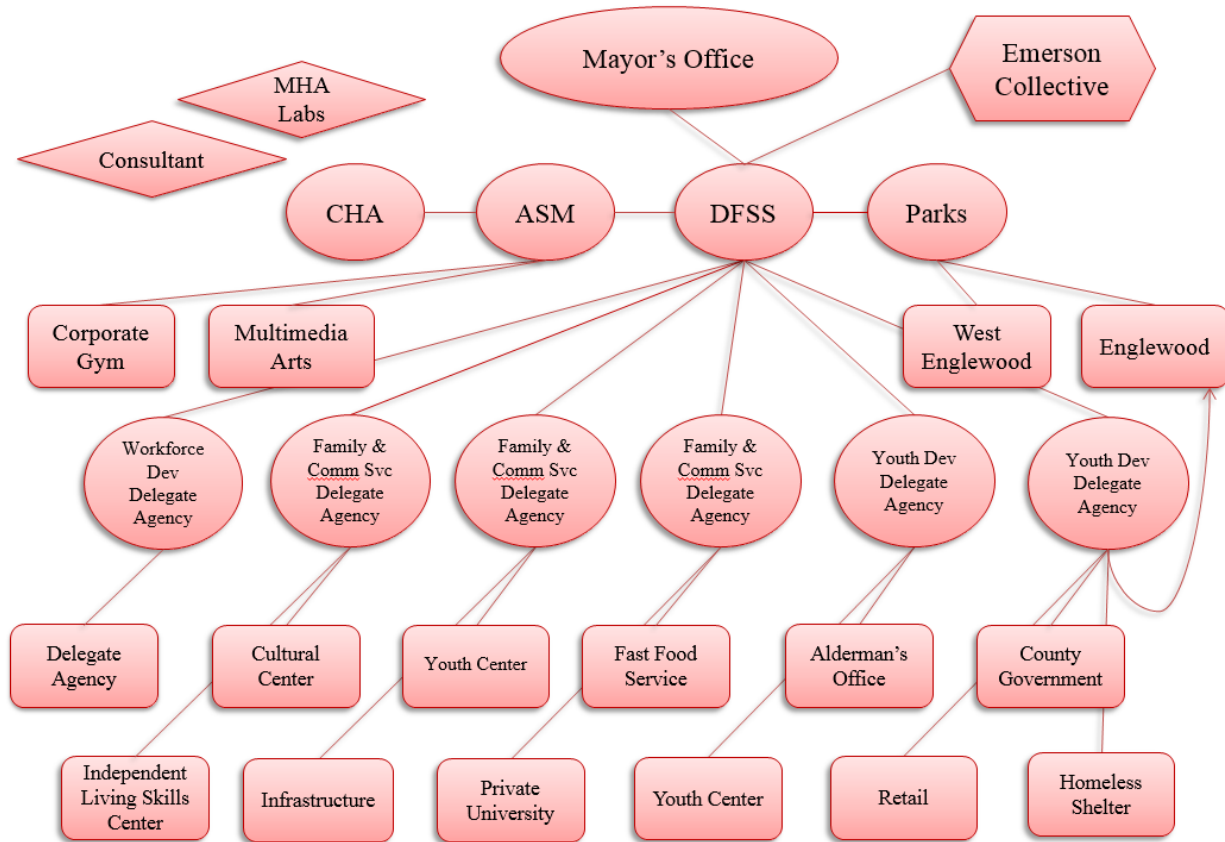
We also included a number of "key stakeholders" in our sample to provide the perspective of city and agency leadership. These key stakeholders were identified with guidance from Urban Labs research managers and included representatives from the Mayor's Office, Emerson Collective, MHA Labs, DFSS, Parks, and ASM. An agency leader with experience running OSC programming through the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and an independent consultant were also added to the sample following the recommendations from other key stakeholders.

The structure of the final sample is illustrated in Figure 1.²¹ As shown in this diagram, worksites were varied and included the OSC+ Infrastructure program, a cultural center, two youth centers, a university, two government offices, a retail store, a fast food restaurant, a homeless shelter, Chicago parks, and a delegate agency itself. In addition, the sample includes an ASM visual arts advanced apprenticeship site as well as an ASM sports site with both internship and apprenticeship programming.

²⁰ Data collection involving youth and employers needed to take place during 6 weeks from July to mid-August.

²¹ In most cases, multiple interviews and/or observations occurred at each of the delegate agencies and worksites.

Figure 1. Structure of OSC Sample^a



^a In the process of reviewing youth interviews, we discovered that the youth who were interviewed and observed at one of the Parks sites were actually placed there by a DFSS delegate agency, and were thus not technically Parks employees. This is indicated by an arrow pointing up from the delegate agency to the Parks site.

Data Collection and Management

Chapin Hall researchers designed semi-structured interview protocols for interviews with key stakeholders, delegate agency contacts, mentors, employers, and participating youth, in order to collect information about experiences with various components of OSC. Interview topics included mentorship, employer and youth outreach, matching youth with jobs, program orientation, training and curricula, and employment experiences. Protocols also included a series of questions intended to spark reflection on the meaning, goals, and impact of their experience of OSC over the summer. Protocols were informed by contextual information provided by Urban

Labs research managers who possessed deep program knowledge and familiarity.²² A form was also developed for field researchers to take detailed written field notes of open worksite observations, which were planned to last two hours. This form included reminders to capture concrete descriptions and verbatim quotes and to focus attention on social interactions in the workplace, the youth's involvement in job-related tasks and other activities, and descriptions of youth engagement. It also included a few guiding questions to focus observers on key aspects of the program and youth experience:

- How do youth and supervisors interact?
- How do youth and other employees interact?
- How do supervisors interact with other employees?
- How does youth act when s/he is alone and around other employees and around supervisor? (capture instances of job-related action as well as any other actions)
- What type of work is the youth doing?
- How do supervisors or other employees direct or support youth in their job-related tasks?

The research team trained 13 summer research assistants from Urban Labs in qualitative data collection methods. Researchers reviewed field notes and interviews as they were received, providing immediate feedback to the Urban Labs research managers in order to promote the collection of quality data. There was variation in the skill of the research assistants and every effort was made to ensure that those who conducted higher quality interviews and produced higher quality field notes were utilized as often as possible. However, the limited data collection timeframe presented demands on time and resources, meaning that sometimes less-skilled research assistants were used for interviews and observations. Chapin Hall researchers accompanied research assistants on several interviews and observations²³ to provide feedback in the field and promote data collection quality. Members of the Chapin Hall research team exclusively conducted observations of four DFSS-coordinated events.

Table 2 shows the breakdown of data collection activities by respondent type and agency type. Each respondent is only counted once, although certain respondents served multiple roles, as indicated by footnotes.

²² We came to learn during the study that the Urban Labs research managers worked very closely with DFSS, including assisting with program design and implementation. This is important to note as they influenced sample selection and outreach for the study.

²³ Members of the Chapin Hall research team conducted 18 interviews and five worksite observations.

Table 2. Interviews and Observations by Respondent Type

Agency	Key Stakeholder Interview	Delegate Agency Contact Interview	Mentor Interview or Focus Group	Employer Contact Interview	Employer Direct Supervisor Interview	Youth Interview	Work Site Observation	TOTAL
Mayor's Office	1							1
Emerson Collective	1							1
Consultants	2							2
DFSS	3							3
Workforce Development Delegate Agency (n = 1)		1 ^a				3	2	6
Family & Community Services Delegate Agency (n = 3)		3	6	4	3 ^b	12	12	40
Youth Development Delegate Agency (n = 2)		4	2	3	5	13	16	43
After School Matters	2							2
Sports Worksite (n = 1)				1	0	1	2	4
Arts Worksite (n = 1)				1	0	2	2	5
Parks District	2							2
Parks OSC Worksite (n = 1) ^c				0	0	1	2	3
Chicago Housing Authority	1							1
TOTAL	12	8	8	9	8	32	36	113

^a The program contact interviewed at this delegate agency was also an employer contact and a direct supervisor to youth working at the delegate agency.

^b Three of the six mentors who were interviewed were also direct supervisors for OSC+ Infrastructure teams, but are counted as mentors in this table instead of as supervisors.

^c An additional Park served as a work site for a Youth Development delegate agency and the "employer direct supervisor" is counted in their numbers even though a Parks employee served in this role. In addition, the two youth interviewed at this worksite and the observations completed there are also counted for the Youth Development agency instead of for Parks.

The final sample included a total of 75 interviews, including 12 with key stakeholders, 8 with DFSS delegate agency program contacts, 6 with DFSS delegate agency mentors, 9 with employer contacts, 8 with direct supervisors, and 32 with youth. In addition, two focus groups were facilitated at one delegate agency with 6 to 8 mentors each, due to the agency's preference and mentors' desire to have their voices included in the study. We learned during interviews that three of the interviewed mentors were also supervisors of OSC+ Infrastructure teams at three different delegate agencies, although only one of these Infrastructure teams was

a worksite in our sample. Another of the interviewed mentors was an individual who ran his own program in the community—the delegate agency recruited him and a cohort of youth from his own program into OSC. He was essentially running his own program as a satellite of the delegate agency and his approach to mentoring and curriculum was unique. Thirty-six open observations were completed at 16 worksites. In most instances, two observations were completed by two field researchers at the same worksite and time, with observers shadowing different youth. For two worksites, observers also returned for a second day of observations. Sets of field notes from observations that occurred on the same date in the same place were merged together for analysis, so that 36 worksite observations were compiled into 18 documents.

All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the interview subjects. Semi-structured interviews with youth lasted 30–45 minutes on average. Interviews with delegate agency contacts, mentors, and employers lasted between 45 minutes to one hour and interviews with key stakeholders lasted between 1 hour and 1.5 hours. Observations lasted between 45 minutes and three hours. Field notes and audio recordings from fieldwork conducted by Urban Labs research assistants were transferred to Chapin Hall through a secure file transfer account. After review for quality, Chapin Hall securely transferred interview audio to Rev.com for transcription. Interview transcripts and field notes were scrubbed of any personal identifiers before they were put into Atlas.ti software for qualitative data analysis.

We also observed four DFSS-coordinated events in the fall of 2016 and two field researchers took detailed field notes of each: debrief with delegate agencies, debrief with employers, debrief of partner agencies, and a mayor’s breakfast recognizing the efforts of OSC partners and participants. These eight event observation field notes were combined into four documents, one for each of the events.

After interviews at one employment site, we discovered that the “employment site” was a nonprofit center focused on teaching life skills and job-readiness skills to young people with disabilities in a classroom setting, with weekly field trips to an employment setting.²⁴ While this employer serves a very specific population, we include the interviews and observations in our analysis because many of the developmental processes and life skills specifically focused on at this site are similar to those provided at other sites. We also found that many employment sites served youth from a number of different agencies and who were in a number of different types of OSC programming. Furthermore, in the process of reviewing youth interviews, we discovered that the youth who were interviewed and observed at one of the Parks sites were actually placed there by a DFSS delegate agency and were thus not technically part of the Parks District’s OSC programming. These unanticipated discoveries highlight the complexities of the structure and the range of employment sites and youth characteristics in OSC in 2016.

²⁴ We filed an incident report with our IRB to note that we inadvertently interviewed individuals with disabilities, something that was not part of our plan. There were no adverse incidents that arose for the individuals interviewed.

In addition to completing interviews and observations to gather data, we also gathered information from a review of delegate and partner agency websites, the OSC application itself, and program materials.

Analytic Approach

The research team took an iterative, modified grounded theory approach (Ragin, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that identifies main themes and program experiences from the perspective of various stakeholders. Once coding was complete, we conducted descriptive analysis of the program to document the initiative as intended and implemented, to illustrate alignment and variation across programs, and to highlight implementation successes and challenges. Before exploring mechanisms related to how OSC was working, we reviewed preliminary findings related to implementation with key stakeholders as a check on the accuracy of researchers' interpretation of data. Then, we used constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006) within and across themes and types of respondents to explore patterns related to program mechanisms.

The research team first developed a coding scheme based off of initial review of the interview and focus group data, priorities identified by DFSS, and the researchers' own existing knowledge of summer employment program components and developmental processes. An initial transcript was coded by three researchers, who then met together to discuss coding and adjust codes and code definitions accordingly. Next, two transcripts were coded by two coders each and reviewed by the research team to further refine codes. Weekly meetings allowed for continuing discussion of emerging themes, codebook adjustments, and review for coder interpretation and application of codes. A total of 77 interview and focus group transcripts were coded and included in preliminary analyses focused on implementation. These preliminary analyses were presented to DFSS in order to check researchers' interpretation of data and help DFSS with planning and funding for 2018 OSC programming.

After preliminary analyses of OSC implementation were complete and discussed with key stakeholders, researchers began coding observation field notes. An initial coding and discussion of the first set of observation field notes by four coders led to the addition of a few new codes to the codebook. Again, researchers periodically checked for intercoder reliability by having different researchers code the same field notes. As before, coded field notes were checked for consistency; in cases where there was a discrepancy in coding, researchers met to discuss the differences, come to consensus, and further refine codes. Previously coded interview and focus group transcripts were reviewed to add any additional codes that emerged through the coding of observations.

Due to the complex structure of OSC and the variation in agencies and worksites, the research team reviewed qualitative output by code, respondent type, and delegate or partner agency in order to assemble matrices that captured key program components and aims. From these, we developed a series of analytic summaries that provided enough context and structure to compare agencies to each other and examine alignment and variation in key program components and aims. We also compared these summaries to outward-facing materials, such as

the information on agencies' websites and in program manuals. Finally, in order to identify and compare key youth processes, the research team conducted comparative analyses of the codes for program goals, reasons for participating, and perceived impact across agency type, respondent type, and worksite. Researchers identified key mechanisms by exploring where respondents explicitly made associations and where researchers inferred associations based on the patterns of respondents' goals and perceived impacts. Through each step of analysis, researchers reviewed and discussed each other's progress, coming to agreement on key processes that emerged from the data, and which processes could be considered a mechanism by which OSC was influencing youth trajectories. Researchers then compared alignment and variation in these processes by program components in order to explore how these processes related to different aspects of OSC. Key stakeholder interviews were analyzed separately in order to examine stakeholder perspectives about the purpose of the program and the ways they envision it functioning.

Descriptions of Youth and Program Components

Overview of Youth Characteristics

Other than verifying that youth we interviewed were over 18 years of age, we did not seek demographic information on the youth we interviewed. However, respondents provided rich contextual detail about the circumstances and characteristics of youth participating in OSC. Many of the worksites reported employing youth from a wide variety of backgrounds. In our overall sample, youth varied on a number of characteristics, including age, economic background, education level and aspirations, and preparation for work. As one employer put it, “We had a mix, it wasn’t just one specific type of student and they were varied ages. . . varied backgrounds.” Even though all youth at their site were from “at-risk” schools, another program coordinator noted, “We have some kids who are top-notch, college-bound, really great, no really [sic] issues. We have some kids who have come from tougher backgrounds who really do struggle at home who have some issues and some trauma, so it’s a variety of kids.”

Youth at the sites often came from a range of different home environments and parental influence. Interviewees at some worksites commented on the fact that some youth had very involved parents—who would drop their kids off at work or engage with the staff—while other youth came from disengaged homes or were unstably housed. One supervisor often witnessed youth engage with their parents, noting “I see an eagerness in all of them and I see a respect that comes from home, bringing up, respectable mom and a respectable father. I see that there are a couple that, their parents drop off and there’s one, one particular guy, his father, they come a half an hour early or 45 minutes early and they interact with each other.” Conversely, we heard reports that there are many youth in OSC who do not have positive parental engagement. Both a mentor and a program coordinator at one worksite noted that some parents of the youth were taking paychecks from their children. We suggest delegate agencies could tap into existing programming to support the whole family or provide additional supports through mentoring or curriculum. One delegate agency contact noted, “One Summer Chicago is a program that really helps the entire family. It goes through the child, but it helps the entire family.”

Employers and mentors also noted that the work experience of youth varied widely. For some, this was their very first work experience. On the other hand, some employers also had youth who had held three or more jobs, plus an additional job during the summer. While first-timers needed supervisors to actively coach them on learning job responsibilities and the culture of the workplace, youth with more experience needed a different type of training and supervision. Additionally, the education level of the youth sometimes varied greatly within a worksite. One

employer estimated that 20 to 30 percent of his youth were educationally impoverished and lacking basic reading comprehension, while other youth he employed were already in college.

Finally, most youth faced barriers to work of some sort, though the intensity of these barriers varied widely. One mentor said that nearly all of her female youth participants had a child, and most were from single parent homes themselves. One key stakeholder indicated that their youth have been exposed to, and often are victims of, trauma. We heard that many youth were currently involved in multiple social services systems (e.g., food stamps, probation, or the foster care or child welfare systems). Several delegate agency staff and employers referenced homelessness among some of their youth as well. Delegate agencies may be in the best position to be knowledgeable about youth needs, connect youth to needed services, and communicate special circumstances or situations to employers.

Despite the wide variety of backgrounds, ages, home life and preparation for work, we found some similarities. Mentors almost uniformly discussed their youth's desire to continue education in the fall. Of those that discussed education goals with their youth, nearly all said their youth wanted to go to college at some point. Many employers also mentioned that the OSC youth at their worksite had college goals. The majority of youth we interviewed reported plans to attend college.

Finally, whether it was the youth's first job or their fifth, most of the mentors and employers we interviewed commented on the youth's motivation. Most youth reported that they had perfect attendance (corroborated by the interviews with their employers) and relied on public transportation to get to work. Employers and mentors emphasized that youth were motivated to learn, gain work experience, and develop a skill set they could use later in life. As one employer noted, "Each of the youth are different. Some come from very, I think, a better established home life than others, but they are all very, very, very eager to be here."

Program Components

One Summer Chicago encompasses a handful of program components that contribute to how the delegate agency, employer and youth experience the program. While broadly defined by the program, these components are in fact implemented with degrees of variation across agencies, which may influence the reality of how their employers and youth receive services and how meaningful their experiences are with OSC. In this section, highlight each component and how their implementation varied across the OSC partners and DFSS delegate agencies.

Matching Youth to Jobs

Matching youth to jobs that are of interest to them and their career goals, and that inspire them to engage in their work and work environment, influences the experience a youth has with an employment program. In OSC, agencies were given autonomy with how they chose to match their youth to employers; unsurprisingly, there was wide variation in how agencies chose to handle this task.

ASM instructors interviewed their youth prior to placement. They received the list of all applicants and decided who they would like to interview for open slots. Some interviews occurred over the phone but many took place at the worksite. Thus, in addition to instructors talking with the youth face-to-face, youth could see the worksite and what their commute would be like to help ensure the match would be mutually beneficial.

Four of the six DFSS delegate agencies in the sample actively requested information from youth about their interests in order to help guide matching decisions. This happened in different ways: a job developer at the agency administering an intake screening, an agency staff member asking youth to identify their interests in a meeting, the agency administering an interest form for youth. A fifth agency held an open house for accepted youth and their families, which employers were welcome to attend, hold informal interviews with youth, and select youth for open positions. This agency also noted that many of their employers had youth already working for them that they wanted to continue to work with, or that local aldermen “sent” already matched employers and youth to them. The sixth agency described a less organized approach to matching youth with employers, one that was done mostly by mentors. The mentors were not armed with a lot of information to guide their decisions and faced time constraints and supply challenges that made the process more difficult.

Mentors: Program and Peer

The caseload mentors carried ranged from 10 youth per mentor up to nearly 50 youth per mentor. Mentors at all DFSS delegate agencies were responsible for a wide variety of roles, including providing support and guidance to youth, engaging youth in activities, and training them on skills needed in the workplace outside of traditional technical skills to perform their job. All mentors across the agencies also had the responsibility to work with payroll and make sure youth got paid. In addition, mentors acted as liaisons between the employer and the youth, addressing any issues that arose at the workplace. Despite the similarity in scope of responsibilities, the intensity and depth of the roles mentors played with youth varied across the agencies. In two agencies, mentors typically did not conduct activities with the youth outside of work time and had less contact with youth throughout the program. In one of these agencies, this appears to be because mentors had too much administrative work to complete; in the other, it appears the agency instructed mentors not to go to employers frequently and to limit their contact with youth outside of work time. This could be due to the tremendous growth in the program from 2015 to 2016, and the resulting higher mentor caseloads.

The other four agencies, however, had mentors who described their role as being very engaged with youth—holding outings and field trips, evening curriculum, group and one-on-one sessions with youth, and other efforts to make a difference in the youths’ work experiences. Often it was up to the mentor to develop the job prep skills, resume building, and other skills training and information they wanted to deliver to youth. To this end, one agency had a mentor that followed a deliberate schedule of training: meeting for one hour every morning and following a different module each week (financial literacy, job prep skills, etc). Some mentors tried to have a continual and consistent presence in their youth’s lives to prevent any barriers or excuses for not

working and make sure youth stayed on top of their work and plans for after the summer. These four delegate agencies also encouraged their mentors to maintain contact with the youth, both outside of work hours and beyond program completion.

Four delegate agencies also talked about utilizing peer mentors to support OSC youth. Two agencies described a benefit of the peer mentor as having someone close in age to help the youth in different situations. One of these agencies noted they didn't receive much guidance on the role of the peer mentor, so they created a job description and ended up dividing their four peer mentors among the three OSC programs they delivered. Peer mentors here participated in daily activities at the worksites. The other agency noted the peer mentor was a big benefit for them—that they placed the peer mentor at sites where they had a large number of youth so they could be a physical presence at the site and help support a large number of youth. A third delegate agency noted they had a peer mentor “kind of thing” but we did not get any information about whether it was formalized or how it was structured. Finally, the fourth agency noted that they selected their peer mentors by reviewing their agency database, identifying youth who had completed college already, and assigning a few of them to be their agency's peer mentors. A mentor from a fourth delegate agency expressed concern that peer mentors who may have been going through issues in their homes or difficult circumstances themselves sometimes got overlooked since the OSC mentors focused their attention on the younger youth.

Outreach and Recruitment of Employers

One OSC partner (ASM) mentioned having a thorough process to get the right supervisors into their program, starting with an information session for organizations to host youth over the summer before the RFP for OSC was released. ASM has well-established relationships with supervisors and a strong presence in their communities. Because of this, ASM has little trouble finding supervisors to host the OSC youth they accept. This agency also has a program specialist and research and evaluation team to identify program gaps in the communities where youth have interests and investigate how to get more of those types of programs into those communities to host OSC youth.

DFSS delegate agencies vary widely in how much time and effort they reported needing and putting into their recruitment of employers. Several delegate agencies have well-established relationships with employers in and around their communities and call on these existing relationships to build their employer base for OSC. One delegate agency mentioned that aldermen and DFSS connected them to additional employers beyond their own repertoire, illustrating OSC's connecting function for delegate agencies and communities. Another delegate agency discussed the importance of relationships in the communities that OSC serves. The agency's informal connections and relationships with employers in these communities are critical to successful partnerships with employers. This agency also discussed that they consider the safety of jobs themselves and the location of jobs when lining up OSC employers.

Most DFSS delegate agencies in the sample mentioned holding orientations for employers. However, these orientation sessions varied in depth and format. One delegate agency holds a

breakfast meeting for employers and delivers a presentation where employers share best practices with others. However, another delegate agency goes out to employers to deliver an orientation individually, and sometimes orientation is folded into employer recruitment activities. All agencies mentioned the worksite agreement employers complete, as mandated by DFSS. A couple of delegate agencies mentioned they had become more intentional about recruiting a variety of employers to represent youth's varied interests, while a third delegate agency noted that they needed to improve their employer recruitment processes.

Finally, half of the delegate agencies specifically mentioned the importance of ensuring employers are invested in the program and the youth and that they buy into the mission of the program. Knowing that employers understand the strengths, needs, and goals of the youth they will receive, and the mission of the program, seems critical to youth having a meaningful experience with their employer.

Payroll Processes

The payroll processes across the partners and agencies have both similarities and differences. Mentors or instructors were responsible for verifying timesheets, gathering and entering participants' information needed for payroll, distributing checks, and making sure youth get paychecks. However, mentors and instructors reported having different approaches to these responsibilities, highlighting variation in the amount of effort dedicated to these tasks. Much of the variation involved timesheet collection and paycheck distribution processes. Some mentors visited each employment site to pick up timesheets and distribute paychecks, while some delegate agencies had youth pick up their paychecks at the delegate agency location. Mentors at some agencies manually entered youth timesheet data into the payroll system, whereas other agencies had a centralized process for data entry, a function sometimes fulfilled by OSC youth. One DFSS delegate agency mentor said that most of their work over the summer was on payroll. In addition, some agencies operate under the centralized payroll system, while others noted they have their own payroll system they use. DFSS left it up to the delegate agency to use the payroll system that created the least burden for them.

All of the partners and agencies provided the opportunity for youth to set up bank accounts and have their checks delivered via direct deposit. The degree of success with direct deposit varied widely. One agency said only one youth signed up. Another noted the difference in take-up, with older youth more likely to select direct deposit than younger youth (who may have had more difficulty setting up bank accounts). A few delegate agencies noted many of their youth chose direct deposit. One of these agencies suggested that a reason direct deposit may have been popular was for safety reasons—youth did not want to walk around with a lot of cash in their pockets. One agency handed out pay cards before youth received their first check. All of the pay was then either distributed via direct deposit or loaded onto youths' pay cards. While payroll can be a burden for delegate agencies, we believe that payroll processes could be redesigned to improve system efficiency.

Financial Literacy Training

Financial literacy training is supposed to be a core component of the One Summer Chicago program. Enhancements have been made to support this focus. For the most part, OSC partners and delegate agencies incorporated financial literacy into their programming, but with varying degrees of success. For three agencies, financial literacy is a focus of the agency and therefore was underscored to youth as a being a key part of their training. Nearly all partners and agencies discussed partnering with banks to present information to their youth, but again this had varying degrees of success. Two agencies said the banks did not do a good job “talking to youth” and explaining the importance of budgeting and banking practices, while another said their banking institution “were awesome partners.” Yet another said that their banking partner backed out at the last minute and they did all of the financial literacy and training on their own.

LRNG, the curriculum intended to impart 21st century skills via a technology platform that includes teaching financial literacy, was an application provided to all OSC youth in 2016.²⁵ However, several DFSS delegate agencies remarked that the platform did not work very well with their youth because it was “not user friendly.” One agency explained that their youth didn’t have the basic reading and comprehension skills needed to complete it and were embarrassed to ask for help. At this agency, someone came to train the mentors on LRNG, which helped them understand what youth were asked to do and enabled them to better support youth in doing it. Finally, one delegate agency contact reported that mentors handled the LRNG piece and discussions around budgeting and taxes, although the mentors from this agency never mentioned this themselves.

Finally, one OSC partner mentioned two partnerships that helped their financial literacy efforts. First, they partnered with an outside organization in 2016 to work with youth on financial literacy. This organization provided training as well as incentives to teens for good banking practices. Youth received \$10 for setting up a checking account, \$20 for opening a savings account, and \$30 for opening both. Secondly, they partnered with a bank that offered to cash youth’s checks for only \$1 per check, so youth could avoid the typically high check cashing fees.

Implementation by DFSS Delegate Agency Type

Although there is much variation in implementation across agencies, comparisons across the three types of DFSS delegate agencies in our sample (workforce development, youth development, and family and community services) did not reveal any substantial differences in the delegate agencies’ implementation of program components at this level. It could be that delegate agency types do not represent meaningful differences in the way the program is implemented or that our classifications of delegate agency type are inaccurate. Interview data confirms the lack of meaning within these designations, as delegate agency staff discuss not

²⁵ According to Urban Labs research managers, this is available to all OSC youth but was a primary focus for DFSS youth.

allowing themselves to be limited by the focus of their agencies. For example, staff from the workforce development delegate agency spoke about broadening the word “sufficiency” from the mission of the agency, which is often viewed only through the lens of employment. This delegate agency wants the youth they serve to realize that sufficiency is not only about having a job, but about “striving to be balanced in all areas of my life . . . I’m striving to emotionally, physically, spiritually, all those components which make me me, which make me function and function well.” At the same time, staff from a family and community services delegate agency, as well as from a youth development delegate agency, also talked about other year-round workforce development programming they have and how they leveraged the employer connections and staff they had from this programming for OSC. The variation in implementation as discussed by delegate agency staff seemed to have more to do with variation in resources, including experienced leadership and mentor staff who possess enough familiarity with the processes of OSC to develop efficient systems within a limited timeframe.

Findings

“It meant that I’m finally an adult. It means that I’m ready to take the next step in my journey in education. . . . First job out of the way.” (youth interview)

Our analyses show that OSC does, indeed, provide access to employment opportunities where others may not have existed. A few of the young people we talked with noted that they had tried to find other employment but were unsuccessful, often because they lacked work experience employers sought. OSC provided opportunity for youth to work that would have been unavailable otherwise. One youth told us, “It’s hard to get a real job, because before I did this I applied to a lot of jobs, and I haven’t heard back from them or I’m too young, or I’m fixing to go onto college so I can’t do it.” OSC is definitely filling a gap by connecting young people to their first work experience. These early work experiences are normative experiences that also provide income and skill development during the months when youth are out of school.

Importantly, we found that access to financial capital was not the key driver of how youth interpreted the quality of their work experience or the meaning that youth attributed to the work experience. In its ideal form, OSC can be thought of as a type of experiential learning, where access to the world of work and the practice of its behavioral expectations is scaffolded by supportive adults who provide explicit skill development and reflection opportunities. We found that it is through this type of scaffolding that OSC can broaden youth’s perspectives about themselves, help them envision adult trajectories that go beyond what they have previously known, and arm them with the knowledge that the skills they are developing can help them achieve their goals.

The Big Picture: How Key Stakeholders Envision OSC Working

In this section, we illustrate the hopes for OSC based on our analysis of interviews with city and partner agency leadership, as well as observations of a debriefing among partner agencies and an appreciation event featuring Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel. Where relevant to the key themes that emerged in the stakeholder interviews, we include perspectives of delegate agency staff, mentors, and employers.

Our findings show that stakeholders had high hopes for OSC to influence not only individual youth but also the city of Chicago. This was evident at the OSC appreciation event where a key stakeholder reported that OSC youth contributed “over 2,929,588 hours to Chicago’s social and economic progress.” Figure 2 illustrates the four ways in which these key stakeholders envision OSC making an impact on Chicago.

Figure 2. OSC Leadership’s Broad Goals for OSC



Change Public Perception of Chicago’s Youth

Many key stakeholders noted that the visibility of OSC youth working in communities and the new interactions that employers have with OSC youth are effective ways to shift public perception of Chicago’s youth. They suggest that the narrative around youth violence in Chicago can be countered with increasing opportunities for youth to be seen “doing positive things” and contributing to Chicago’s “economic engine.” Some work opportunities, especially the Infrastructure program, provide broad visibility as youth work outside, in view of the public, to beautify specific communities. One former OSC participant who spoke at the mayor’s OSC appreciation event highlighted the fact that youth could be seen “growing veggies, beautifying the city, cleaning and painting” and reported that “327 viaducts were painted” during OSC’s summer of 2016. A number of other speakers at this event used quantitative metrics to illustrate the visible ways in which youth participating in the Infrastructure program were seen making a difference in communities around Chicago, including the number of gardens planted, murals painted, and bags of garbage picked up. Other work opportunities, such as Parks and camps, give younger children and youth in Chicago neighborhoods the opportunity to work with positive role models. This can both change perceptions of what it means to be a young person in certain Chicago neighborhoods and influence how a younger person sees the possibilities for themselves in the future.

Yet not all work opportunities provide this kind of visibility. In many cases, OSC youth are not identified at the workplace as being from OSC. Someone from the public may not know that an OSC participant is serving them at a retail store or other service position. In these cases, the

integration of OSC youth at any worksite provides the employer and their employees an opportunity to be exposed to Chicago youth, sometimes from very different communities than most of the employees, and to be enriched and inspired by what the youth brings to the worksite. This site-by-site exposure can also change perceptions of Chicago's youth. At the OSC appreciation event, the mayor highlighted this as he made the case to potential employers to become engaged in OSC as worksites:

It is not babysitting. Yes, you expose kids to the workplace but you are also exposed to the kids. You'll discover kids from Englewood, Roseland, it will change you. There is a benefit to companies and employees. . . you will see kids discover things right in front of you. They will defy the stereotypes. You will expose your employees to the youth of Chicago.

Reduce violence

The impact of OSC on youth violence and involvement in crime has been a central focus since its inception. One key stakeholder reported in an interview that "the ultimate goal is to make sure that [youth] are safe." The main ways in which key stakeholders described OSC's impact on youth violence involved "keeping youth engaged in safe activities" and providing youth with "safe" places to be. This framing suggests that if youth aren't involved in OSC, they don't have access to safe spaces and activities. However, the Infrastructure teams work outside in places that might actually expose them to violence and crime on the streets. The delegate agency mentors who serve as supervisors for Infrastructure teams are aware of and prepare for potential danger. In addition, some of the work that OSC youth were engaged in included potentially "unsafe" activities, like working with cleaning solvents in a janitorial capacity or doing light construction using power tools. Being in a safe space and doing safe activities, in and of themselves, are likely not driving reduction in violence and crime by OSC participants. As we will show in our analysis of the mechanisms by which OSC seems to be working, the workplace is one in which young people actually take risks, challenge themselves, and make (and ideally learn from) mistakes. The environment of the OSC workplace, and the support and supervision youth receive through OSC, differs drastically from other, less supervised or structured environments youth may potentially occupy during the summer. It is this changed environment, and the interaction with adults, that may contribute to keeping youth "safe." And in this safe environment, taking risks and making mistakes work to broaden a youth's perspective and sense of their own capacities. One key stakeholder touches on this by suggesting the link between violence reduction and OSC participation is about changing the "embedded behavior" of youth by "creating a culture. . . I get to explore. You're exposing me to something else."

One OSC participant who spoke at the OSC appreciation event did state that being involved in work made her "too busy to get involved in violence." In addition, a partner agency stakeholder noted that when they ask their participants what they would be doing instead of their summer employment through OSC, "a lot of kids" in their programs tell them that they would "be in a gang" or "sell drugs." These anecdotes aside, our analytic work suggests a different narrative can be developed around the notion of "safe spaces" and "safe activities." Our findings suggest that

OSC reduces youth involvement in violence and crime by broadening their perspective about themselves and the opportunities available to them in the labor market.

Build communities

| [OSC can] elevate work and create communities around it. —Key stakeholder

Beyond community beautification, many key stakeholders reported that OSC has the potential to support the development of specific communities in Chicago. DFSS's structure in particular, with a community-based nonprofit serving as the delegate agency that administers the program in their own community, highlights the potential pathways through which linkages are being made and reinforced between nonprofits, employers, youth, and families within the community. As one key stakeholder put it, "It's community-based providers and it's employers and the faith community kind of creating this opportunity for young people with lots of people caring about them." In fact, community ownership over the plan is an intentional aspect of DFSS' delegate agency structure because delegate agencies know the needs and potential of youth and employers in their communities and are invested in working to build their communities. One key stakeholder explained, "[Delegate agencies] are generating the plan, the opportunity, the connections in those neighborhoods." Another key stakeholder highlighted the importance of community building to support the engagement and development of the community's young people:

I think it's like a community effort and initiative where everyone has been on the game. . . including young people. I mean, it's not like yours is just a service we're giving you. You're going to show up, you're going to show up on time. You're going to know "Johnny who runs the barbershop" and he is expecting you to show up. He may know you, he may not but he's going to know you now.

Mentors and delegate agency staff reported that OSC enabled them to engage OSC youth and the youths' families in additional supportive programming, either at their agency or in the community.²⁶ In their eyes, OSC was seen as helping to weave the fabric of communities by strengthening ties between agencies and other community supports and employers as well as weaving new people (youth and their families) into the fabric of this supportive community. These neighborhood connections promote the potential for young people to build relationships with a number of supportive adults and informal mentors that can continue after the summer ends.

The Park District provides a different sense of community because the parks are already anchors in the community. Incorporating OSC youth into their summer programs enables Parks to develop more programming and serve greater numbers of younger youth. A number of

²⁶ These respondents were from all three delegate agency types, not just those classified in our sample as focused on family & community services.

employers at the employer debrief event noted that without the youth working through OSC, they would not be able to run summer programs for younger children in the community.

Link to labor market and postsecondary education: A pipeline or patchwork?

A number of key stakeholders spoke of the goals of OSC to connect participants to work and college. Many stakeholders suggested that there “should be something to follow OSC” although there were differing opinions about what that should be and for whom. That “something” includes greater programming around postsecondary preparation, increased leadership and civic activities, opportunities for immediate access to ongoing work, and entryways into career pathways. Some key stakeholders saw connecting youth to programs that support connections to ongoing employment—such as the city’s 100K initiative or WIOA services—as a method for doing this as being important for older youth. Others saw OSC’s connection to employers as fertile ground in itself for linking youth to work. One key stakeholder noted, “I think the goal for employers is that they have access to this really bright and talented pipeline of young people who are their future workforce. So the goal is to be exposed to a population that they may not get to know otherwise, that they may not have hired otherwise.” These perspectives suggest that OSC can be positioned as a feeder into a workforce pipeline.

Other key stakeholders, and many delegate agency contacts, provided another perspective about linking youth to education and labor market opportunities. They see early experiences as exploratory and resist locking a youth into a single pipeline. In part, this thinking seems to be driven by the knowledge that many of the youth being served by OSC will likely cobble together a pathway into adulthood that involves jumping between work and school or doing both simultaneously. One of the youth we talked with had plans to return to college but had to put them off because he had to help with family responsibilities. He was hoping to work in the meantime, but was still holding onto hope that he would return to college. One key stakeholder said, “I think it can be an opportunity of a new work experience to test out and road test a job. . . . If it’s a pipeline, then I think you got to manage that job completely differently.” This can present some challenges for managing OSC components and processes, and for setting expectations with all stakeholders—partners, delegate agencies, employers, and youth and their families.

Making Summer Work “Meaningful” for Youth

| [The OSC experience] creates a good memory. —Key stakeholder

City and agency leadership often spoke passionately in both interviews and public forums about the importance of making the summer work experience “meaningful” for participants. Key stakeholders suggested three main ways in which OSC could be meaningful: (1) by providing young people with the opportunity to create a new vision for their future that takes them beyond what they have been exposed to previously; (2) providing youth with an experience of being connected to, supported by, and needed by others; and (3) youth feeling a sense of ownership in their work experience.

A number of key stakeholders focused on the ways that OSC could change youth trajectories by helping them develop a new vision for themselves as productive members of the labor force. One key stakeholder explained it this way, "Letting [youth] know they actually can do something different, that's a big thing. A lot of kids don't even realize they have the option." This key stakeholder went on to say that OSC is meaningful when youth "have a mindset of knowing that they can contribute and be a part of their community, that there are legal and positive ways for them to be a part of their community." Many delegate agency contacts and mentors, across all delegate agency types, echoed the notion that many OSC participants don't realize they have the option to do something different than what they've seen in their neighborhoods or families or that they didn't see any opportunities for their future.

Key stakeholders also emphasized the experience of being counted on by others as a meaningful aspect of OSC for youth. One key stakeholder said, "The goal is for [OSC youth] to understand what it's like when people depend on you every day. Even if your job is the camp counselor, there are little kids and people who are depending on you." Another key stakeholder explained it this way, "[Making sure youth see that] it matters. It matters if you don't show up." Some youth, especially those who worked as camp counselors with younger youth and children, echoed this sentiment. However, many delegate agency contacts, mentors, youth, and even employers noted that the OSC youth they work with already experience being depended upon by their families. OSC may not be as meaningful in this way for youth already carrying adult responsibilities at home.

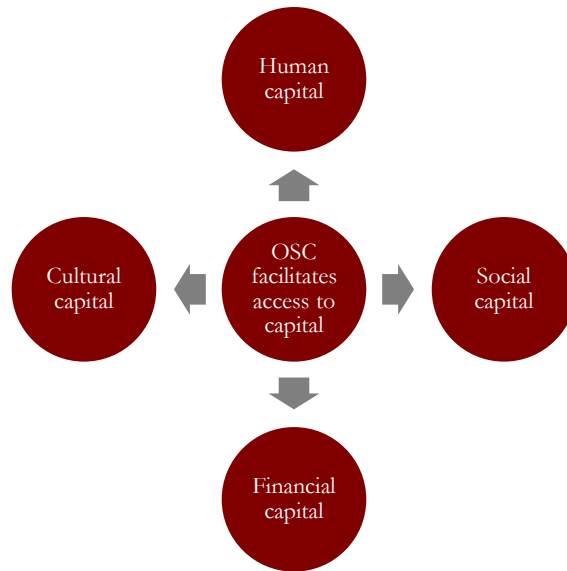
Providing youth with an opportunity to experience a sense of ownership over their work is another way that key stakeholders see OSC as meaningful for youth. One key stakeholder said, "Realizing it's about money for sure but it is also a lot about the sense of accomplishment and meaningfulness and then having time planned for you kind of thing like I got to go to work." Key stakeholders talked about the ways that young people can feel a sense of accomplishment for specific projects or just for having gotten up and gotten to work each day. For some, successful completion of the program is an accomplishment as well.

Mechanisms by Which OSC is Working

In the following section, we draw upon the perspectives of delegate agency contacts, mentors, and employers, as well as youth themselves, to provide insight into what makes OSC a meaningful experience for youth. It is important to reiterate that our sample involves only youth age 18 and older. However, some of the key mechanisms are likely relevant for younger participants, even if the goals and impacts may differ.

Aligned with the literature on access to capital, we found that OSC does, indeed, provide young people with access to income as well as other types of capital that some youth may not have had access to otherwise (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Access to Capital



Individuals can employ these capitals in the service of reaching their goals as they transition into adulthood in the following ways:

1. Financial capital: Young people were earning a paycheck for their participation in OSC.
2. Human capital: Young people were developing technical skills and gaining work experience that is valued on the labor market.
3. Social capital: Young people were building their social networks to include individuals they met through OSC who could serve as connectors, references, supports, and friends.
4. Cultural capital: Young people were building insider knowledge of the often-hidden behavioral expectations in a workplace and increasing their repertoire of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that foster success in the domain of work. Cultural capital can be thought of as akin to “soft skills,” with the addition of increased knowledge of how these behaviors and skills are valued and applied in the workforce.

Perhaps more importantly, our findings highlight processes through which OSC is helping youth broaden their perspective, such as making meaning of the exposure to new people, places, and experience that OSC provides. These developmental and relational processes that youth were exposed to through their OSC experience were central to the youth’s ability to *recognize and utilize* these capitals in their own future trajectories. Rather than simply providing access to capital, OSC is also helping some young people integrate the capital they accumulated through OSC into their developing identity—they are thinking about what it means to be the kind of person that has, and can use, these forms of capital. This development makes the accumulation of capital meaningful for OSC participants.

Figure 4. Integrating Capital



It is important to note that we are not suggesting that all OSC participants integrate capital in the way we've described. Not even all youth in our sample do that. However, we do suggest that this is one way in which OSC is a meaningful experience for youth—it moves youth from *access* to *integration* of new forms of capital, as they make meaning out of their exposure to new people, places, and experiences.

Broadening Perspective

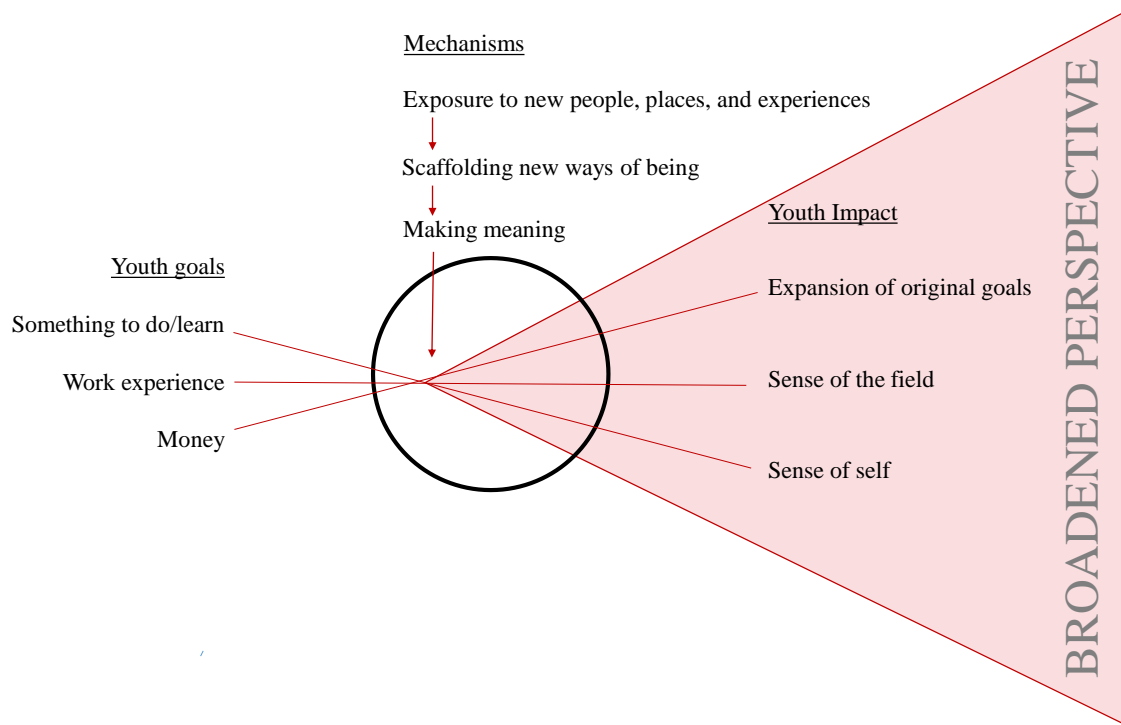
In this section, we present our findings on how youth were influenced by their OSC participation. First, we offer our conceptualization of the key developmental process influenced by the OSC experience: broadening perspective. Then, we show why young people in our sample chose to participate in OSC and what they hoped to get out of it, the ways that OSC impacted them, and the mechanisms and program components through which that influence was working. Finally, we present descriptive comparative findings that highlight the consistency and variation in program components across the sites in our sample.

We found that key stakeholders were not far off in their conceptualization of how OSC is a meaningful experience for youth. Youth in our sample described how OSC provided them with the opportunity to create a new vision for their future, gave them an experience of being connected to and needed by others, and fostered a sense of ownership in their work experience. Perhaps not surprisingly, we found it was usually not the responsibilities of the job itself that made the OSC experience meaningful. Rather, young people felt it was the context in which they were embedded and the support of employers or mentors that helped them make meaning of the experience. Many youth discussed the way feedback from their program mentors and employers helped them make meaning out of their exposure to new people, places, and experiences, as well as their exploration of new ways of being. The types of feedback that youth appreciated receiving from mentors and employers included providing encouragement, recognizing accomplishments, and challenging them to try new things or think in new ways.

Young people who worked in settings that had a strong mission of improving individual lives or building community talked about how their small contributions to these efforts were motivating and meaningful. Most of the young people who did not experience a worksite that was “meaningful” in and of itself talked about the ways that their mentor or employer helped them reflect on the skills they were learning and how those skills would be helpful in the future, making the OSC experience personally meaningful. The few young people who did not describe experiencing either of these components talked about learning that they did not want to ever do the kind of work they had done through OSC. For these youth, money was the only thing they described getting out of participating in OSC. Still, in all cases, youth described some broadening of their perspective on their own abilities and interests and the world of work.

Although all youth talked about OSC successfully meeting the original expectations they had for it, many also discussed the ways the program changed their perspective on those original goals. Through exposure to new people, places, and experiences, youth experienced themselves in new ways, and drew meaning out of the exposure, thus broadening their perspective of the world and their position in it. We found that for these youth, these mechanisms lead to an increasingly motivating confidence in their abilities and decisions as well as in their self-conceptualization. These impacts are in addition to, not in place of, the youth’s original stated goals. They are achieved through three specific mechanisms promoted by OSC programming: providing exposure to new people and places, providing opportunities to try out new ways of being, and scaffolding meaning-making of work experiences. We found that mentoring facilitated and supported these processes, whether the mentorship be provided by program mentors, employers, or both (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Broadening Perspective



In the following section, we support this conceptualization with our findings on youth’s goals and reasons for participating in OSC, the influences that youth feel their OSC experience had on them, and the mechanisms by which youth’s goals are translated into impact.

Youth Goals and Reasons for Participating: Concrete and Immediate Expectations

Interviews with youth revealed three main themes in their reasons for participating in OSC and their goals: (1) having something to do or learn, (2) gaining work experience to make them more attractive applicants for future employment, and (3) earning money. In our sample, youth who were placed in leadership positions at summer camps also talked about one of their primary motivations for participating in OSC as wanting to give back. One of the challenges of interviewing youth at a time when they are close to concluding their OSC experience is that the experience of participation may be influencing their retrospective re-interpretation of their initial goals and original reasons for participating. Still, in our interviews, most youth talked in concrete terms when it came to why they decided to participate in OSC in the first place.

Something to do or learn

Almost half of the youth we interviewed explained that they participated in OSC because they wanted something to do or wanted to learn something over the summer ($n = 15$). Many youth said participating in OSC “gets me out of the house and [gives me] something to do.” These

youth expressed a desire to make more productive use of their summer, something that may differentiate OSC participants from youth who did not apply to OSC. OSC participants they expressed motivation and initiative as a reason for participating in OSC. Of the youth who mentioned “learning,” some youth spoke of this in general terms, while others expressed a desire to learn specific skills, such as communication skills or persistence. The youth who said they participated in order to have something to do or learn over the summer came from all types of DFSS delegate agencies, as well as from ASM. The Parks youth did not provide this reason for participating. A comparison of the youth who expressed wanting to “do” something versus those who wanted to “learn” something reveals that youth from a workforce development agency wanted to learn while youth from a youth development agency wanted something to do.

It is possible that some youth might want something to do, not just to have a more productive summer, but also to stay safe—a priority mentioned by many key stakeholders. A couple of youth highlighted that the alternative to OSC could be unsafe. One youth said, “It keeps us busy. . . and it keeps us from referring back to the friends in our group. The boys could be outside doing wrong things but they’re here.” Another young person told us, “You see all the killing and stuff, I’m somewhere put up, helping and stuff instead of being outside.” However, the topic of safety and violence prevention was not as prevalent among the youth as it was among key stakeholders and delegate agency staff in our sample. The youth we spoke with might have been a particular subset of the overall OSC population that were less likely to personally get into trouble if they were not working or they could have been reluctant to share this information with interviewers. Nevertheless, most of the youth in our sample did not suggest that they would have been more likely to be exposed to or participating in violence in their communities if they were not in OSC.

Work experience

Youth discussed another common reason for participating: the desire to gain work experience in order to make them more attractive applicants for future employment ($n = 12$). As one youth stated, “It’s all about having that work experience for potentially a real job.” This quote illustrates a sentiment expressed by many young people who seemed to conceptualize OSC as a stepping stone to future work rather than as an end in and of itself. A couple of youth elaborated that OSC helps fill this niche, as their previous attempts to gain employment had proven unsuccessful. One said, “I was doing job applications. They would be like, ‘Experience. Experience.’ I don’t really have experience. I was like, ‘Do this, and then I can get some experience.’ Then, apply somewhere else. Hopefully, get another job.” Some of the youth talked about this being their first work experience, while others had previous jobs. Most expressed hope in general terms that this experience would lead to longer-term work in the future. However, youth placed at two agencies focused more specifically on the goal of gaining

immediate employment.²⁷ One mentor from one of those agencies shared, “My goals, what I were seeking for my kids to get, employment after the seven-week program was over with.” Again, because our interviews were completed towards the end of the youth’s summer experience, this highlights the potential influence that the agency’s, and perhaps a specific mentor’s, focus can have on youth’s understanding of the purpose of the program. While youth who said they participated in order to gain work experience to help them get a job in the future came from all the three types of DFSS delegate agencies, none of these youth came from Parks and none were ASM apprentices or interns.

Money

Earning money was a central reason for participation in OSC for about one-third ($n = 11$) of the youth we talked with. Earning a regular paycheck provided a sense of possibility for many of the youth we interviewed, although what those possibilities were was different for each youth. Youth talked about wanting to earn money in order to help support their families, feel more independent, and save money for college. While one youth talked about participating “so I could support my daughter,” another shared, “I won’t have to ask for money from my parents all the time. I like to be independent.” As seen in these quotes, earning money can mean very different things to youth depending on their goals and life circumstances.

Youth from all three types of DFSS delegate agencies and ASM mentioned money as a reason for participating. Interestingly, more than half of these youth were from the same youth development delegate agency. This could be due to the way this delegate agency recruited youth or marketed the program. The two DFSS youth that were placed in a Parks setting also emphasized this reason for participating and were acutely aware that the youth who worked directly for the Parks earned more money for their work. Conversely, the youth who worked for the Parks did not mention money as a reason for participating, focusing instead on giving back as their motivation for participating in OSC.

Some employers also spoke about the goal of youth earning money through OSC, while mentors and delegate agency contacts focused more on other aims of the programming they provided, perhaps due to their involvement with youth being less transactional. Mentors from the “family and community services” types of delegate agencies remarked that the money that youth earned had the potential to make a difference for their families and communities. One mentor said, “Kids, they need the money and they can put the money back into the economy, buying things, being more self-reliant, and they could change the dynamics in their families, the negative dynamics to more positive things.”

²⁷ One agency was an independent living skills center worksite and one was a youth development delegate agency where staff emphasized the outcome of youth being retained by their summer employer after OSC ended.

Perceived Impacts of OSC: Broadening Youth Perspective

While youth described what they initially hoped to get out of the program in fairly proximal and concrete terms, their descriptions of how OSC has impacted them were more expansive. Not only did youth report that they generally achieved their original goals, they also expressed an expanded sense of what those goals meant or how they could use their OSC experience to continue on a trajectory that would help them fulfill those goals. Youths' descriptions included: (1) developing a sense of purpose through work rather than it being just "something to do", (2) building new knowledge of ways of getting connected to future work, and 3) applying new meaning to earning one's own paycheck. In addition to expanding existing goals, youth also reported developing a different sense of the field of work and responsibilities of adulthood as well as an expanded sense of self as a result of their participation in OSC. As one youth put it, "I really want to know the playing field of the working environment. What that means is I really just want to know the ropes of employment: how to keep your job, how to keep a friendly relationship between coworkers. I really want to internalize that so I can have it for future experiences." This highlights that OSC is working both in terms of providing access to capital and the developmental processes of integrating capital into one's identity.

In this section, we revisit the three main goals that youth reported initially wanting to get out of OSC and show that many OSC participants experienced a deeper sense of what these goals meant to them.

Expanding the "something to learn or do" goal

When talking about the impact of OSC, many young people expanded on the original goal of "having something to do" by expressing how what they were doing was meaningful to them. For example, working was no longer something to do but someone to be. As one youth put it, "I can say I'm working. That's just building my confidence right there." The ability to identify as an employed person in a community with high unemployment rates may serve as a foundation of confidence from which they can grow. Some youth explicitly noted that participating in OSC differentiated them from those in their community who they called "lazy" or "out in the streets." One youth shared, "I'd rather be working hard than just be chilling, doing nothing, because nothing gets you nowhere. I just hate people sitting on porches doing nothing, so I just got to do something." For other youth, working outside of their neighborhood added another layer of meaning to "something to do." One youth explained that dressing professionally made them feel as though they were becoming an important part of something larger, "I just felt super confident, coming downtown in formal attire, doing that every day, I felt a part of the workforce of Chicago. I wanted that feeling, being a part of the workforce of Chicago." Other youth found purpose in the work they were doing, framing it as improving the community or lives of others. As one youth put it, "This job has really been showing me that I can help somebody else with what they want to do and how to pursue it." This youth expressed feeling more committed to and confident in his original goals of becoming a teacher because of this experience. We found that the deepening and broadening of "the something to do" perspective, for some youth,

meant identifying as someone who is “working.” This not only serves to fulfill the goal of “something to do” but also links doing something to *being someone who does something worthwhile*.

Expanding the “work experience” goal

| “It’s good for connections and experience, so, yeah, it’ll help me.” —Youth interviewee

A Brookings Institution report on youth summer jobs programs notes that the stated goal of a Louisville summer jobs program is for youth to be “retainable, promotable, and referable” at program end (Ross & Kazis, 2016). Our analyses suggest that this is also an explicit goal for some delegate agencies with OSC who talked about translating youth work experience into a resume and providing references that can make them more competitive when seeking future work opportunities. Indeed, connections to work itself were a central focus of staff from two different delegate agencies who expressed pride in the number of youth who were hired by OSC employers at the end of the program, although neither provided an estimate of this number.²⁸ For youth, the focus on gaining work experience was broadened to include greater knowledge of how to use their summer work experience to build connections in the world of work through resume-building and references. They become more focused on and skilled at symbolic and social representations of themselves.

Resume

Several youth attributed their perceived increased competitiveness in the labor market to the fact that they could add OSC work experience to their resumes. Youth attributed this both to the ability to add to the quantity of work experience and the qualities of the work experience to their resume. In some cases, OSC provided a first job. As one youth explained, “You always need experience to get the foot in the door sometimes.” In other cases, youth added to their existing work experience and built a record of work experience that they believe makes them more attractive to employers. Beyond having the OSC work experience to add to a resume, youth also talked about how their delegate agency or employer helped them to think in terms of self-representation in their resume, cover letter, and interviews, thus – linking skill development to specific occupational fields or settings.

We heard youth from a range of delegate agency and work site types suggest that the quantity of work experience will help them in their future employment search. They said things like, “They always say it looks good on resumes, especially since this is my first job,” “I’m just trying to build my resume is all,” and, “I got what I wanted. . . to update my resume because it’s been a while since I had a job.” One youth suggested that a high quantity of work experiences on one’s resume signals a willingness to work that is attractive to employers. The youth said, “The more

²⁸ This was reported by a delegate agency contact from a family & community services delegate agency and a mentor from a youth development delegate agency.

you have on your resume, the more possibility you have of getting hired at a job. They know that like, 'Oh yeah, this person right here. I'm going to pick this person because I know he wants to work.'" For these youth, quantity counts.

Other youth recognized that the type of employment experiences on one's resume could help them secure work in similar fields. One youth who has participated in OSC over multiple summers talked about how the work experience gained in the program has been helpful in getting other jobs. The youth said, "Wendy's was my first job [through OSC], and then because I worked at Wendy's in the summertime, I got Panda and I got Wingstop, because I had that food experience. You know how kids, they always say, 'I don't have experience. All these jobs want experience.' . . . I went through that, but because I had that summer job. . . that helped me. That put me in the line." Another youth reported that their OSC work experience could help them secure a similar job when they go to college, "I definitely think I can use this experience that I got here to possibly work in the library when I get to college. . . I think I have that experience now to be able to get a job there if I need to. I can use the references from [supervisors] to catch a job in the library." Others remarked that their experience working in office settings would help them secure similar positions in the future, something that they had not considered before OSC. For these youth, having specific technical skills or the knowledge of how to behave in settings will provide entree to other similar work environments.

Many youth reported that they learned how to write their resume through help from their mentor or delegate agency. Mentors and employers talked about the importance of helping young people develop their resumes through special workshops, individual meetings, and as part of the curriculum of OSC+, although they provided little information about their approaches to resume writing. One youth reported that the help he had with developing a resume was largely structural:

I had a [sic] interview; it was a job fair. . . and I ended up getting help making my resume, and updating it, because my resume was so boring. They [delegate agency] updated it for me, and they helped me. . . . [Staff member at delegate agency] has a resume class, and freaking lasts hours, but when you finish, you've got the best resume ever. You have a cover sheet and everything.

One mentor noted the importance of symbolic representation of self by helping youth decide "how you are going to represent yourself through your resume and through your brand for life." At one ASM worksite, we observed an outside speaker do a workshop on self-presentation in job interviews. Beyond this, we have no evidence of how delegate agencies or employers approached resume development and interviewing as the narrative and self-presentation skill of distilling one's experiences and presenting oneself to different audiences of potential employers.

Despite not hearing from mentors or employers about ways in which they helped youth translate work experiences into skills that could be presented in a resume or interview, we did see variation in the degree to which young people made sense of what was significant in their work experience and how that would make them competitive on the labor market. Therefore, it

is likely that some young people received some type of guidance from delegate agencies or employers in this area. One young person told us, "I can tell them that I have hands-on experience with students, hands-on experience with creating lesson plans, for preparing breakfast, for preparing a lunch for them, and creating curriculum for them and creating a schedule. This will be . . . a good thing to use on a resume as well." Another youth reported that employers were responding to their updated resume, "I've actually been getting interviews and call backs. I might not actually get the job. What I like, they're actually showing interest." As in this example, a number of youth talked about having trouble gaining the attention of potential employers in the past but indicating their participation in OSC is giving them the experience and references that can help make them more attractive to employers.

References

While many of the employers, delegate agency contacts, and mentors in our sample talked about the importance of social connections gained from the program, none of them explicitly referred to the goal of providing youth with references to help them get future work. We observed a DFSS debrief event in the fall, and one supervisor who attended did express disappointment that the delegate agency providing youth to her work site "didn't talk about what youth should take from here. The youth weren't using me, I could have been a reference for them, but they weren't treating me right." Still, some youth reported that they learned about how making connections at work could lead to references for them when they sought future employment. At the same time, we heard from youth that their broadened social connections were another helpful outcome of their participation in the program that could lead to future work. Some youth specifically talked about how OSC employers could serve as references. One youth explained, "I didn't have many references before I came here. That definitely helped a lot." Youth from different employment sites, delegate agencies, ASM, and Parks mentioned that they now had references to help them get future work. As one youth put it, "I worked hard here for a reason. I'm getting more references,"

A number of youth from the workforce development delegate agency talked about learning the importance of "networking" through their OSC experience. As one youth put it, "That's something that I learned from being here: networking is everything." Another youth from the same agency explained:

I wanted to get out of it by having different networks. By having people that can vouch for me say, "Yes I'm a good worker or yes I'm persistent in any task that is necessary for me to be completed." . . . It's always good to be an example for . . . anybody who's watching because you never know that those people can be your future bosses or future employer that you work with that helps shape your future.

If youth were primed to think of their work experiences as opportunities to gain references from the get-go, they might be able to take better advantage of these opportunities. They can provide an added incentive to think beyond the immediate paycheck and strive to do well at work so that they gain the longer-term benefit of this connection. Youth and employers in OSC

might benefit from explicitly talking about a goal of obtaining references early on in the program, to both help incentivize youth work ethic, communication, and persistence in the job and to provide participating youth with valuable social capital that reaches beyond the end of the OSC experience.

Expanding the “money” goal

While just over one third ($n = 11$) of young people in our sample reported that they participated in OSC for money, less than half ($n = 5$) noted that money was a significant impact of OSC. Among those who discussed the impact of earning money through OSC, most related it to something broader, such as their role in their family or a sense of independence. One participant explained,

I just. . . started because it was money. Of course, I wanted to do something for my birthday. That’s it. Then, it was like. . . you feel independent when you’re working and making your own money. You don’t have [to] depend on nobody. It means a lot. Then, when people need money. Like my mom, when she needs money, I can give it to her. It makes me feel pretty responsible too.

In addition, youth who referenced money as both a reason for and impact of participating in OSC also included other impacts of OSC, suggesting that they got more out of the program than just their earnings, even when they didn’t initially expect to gain anything other than money. This stands in stark contrast to how young people responded to interviewer questions about what improvements they would recommend be made to the program. In this context, almost all youth said that the earnings should be raised.

Expanding youths’ sense of the field

Many young people in our sample noted that their OSC experience provided insights into work settings that they otherwise would not have had or thought they could gain access to, with 15 youth reporting impacts on their development of career goals and eight youth reporting their development of insider career knowledge. Some employers noted that fostering knowledge of their fields was one of their key goals for the program. Importantly, we see clear symmetry here—the young people working with these employers also reported this as an impact of the program. One ASM site explicitly provided youth with knowledge about the initial certification needed to work in their industry, and Parks provided young people with knowledge of the employment pathways at the Park District. One government office serving as an employment site for multiple DFSS delegate agencies strove to provide young people with knowledge about the variety of professional pathways within the agency. A contact person from this employer said:

I think they gain different career goals. They can see the different types of jobs that they may not even be familiar with. Things that we do, the different departments, from the IT department, to public information, to all of our attorneys, to becoming a judge. It allows

them to see that there's more than just being a rap star or a basketball player, that there are careers out there where people really have a passion for and that they make decent money. I think that is an eye-opener for the youth.

Some OSC participants at this site also reported learning about the education requirements for different positions within the office through coworkers and supervisors, and through orientation provided by the worksite.

Many youth highlighted the impact of OSC on exploring potential future career plans. Some talked about having learned through their summer job that they either were or were not interested in pursuing a career related to their worksite, while others highlighted the importance of OSC in providing an opportunity to explore different fields.

One youth, who had been employed by Parks for several years, explained that gaining the experience working with younger youth over the summers was a major influence in determining a career path:

That's what I wanted ever since I started working with kids, I either would say I'd be a police officer, or a parole officer. I talk to the officer who is up here sometimes. I tell him, "This is what I want to major in." He'll ask me, "Why? Why'd you pick that?" I told him I just want to be a mentor to the kids. That's why I said I'd go and major for Criminal Justice to be a parole officer, because I think that field is where I can do that. Me having one on ones with a client, being his parole officer, I'm giving him advice.

This same youth also excitedly reported that they now know the postsecondary pathway to making this goal a reality. The youth said, "You know how some people go to college and still be undecided? I'm going in Criminal Justice. I'm there, and I can say that because working with. . . the camp brought me to that fully." Young people with prior experience as counselors at their worksites, Parks and otherwise, talked about having a deeper sense of the pathways into a field working with children and youth in need. It is possible that the young people serving as camp counselors through OSC already went through the normative process of exploring interests and settings before settling into their stated career goals. Or it could be that these youth, while dedicated to their passion for working with younger children, are prematurely committed to a career field that they may abandon after exploration in the future.

Still others reported that they learned through their OSC experience what they know they *don't* want to do. The youth who said that their OSC experience winnowed down their potential career paths were largely working in manual labor positions as janitors, doing light construction, and youth on the infrastructure team. Our findings suggest that the isolation of the work position can be more influential than the employment setting in terms of youth experiences and development. For example, a youth doing janitorial work, largely alone, at Parks did not express interest in a career at Parks. He only expressed certainty that he didn't want to do this type of work again. It was almost as if the setting itself didn't matter. Other youth working light construction had more peer interaction and a large amount of employer support. They

expressed not wanting to work in manual labor positions but some noted that the values and mission of the employer were influential in thinking about potential future careers helping people.

Other youth saw value in trying out several different types of work before committing to a career path. One youth explained, “I have childcare experience. I have door-to-door experience. I have shoe store experience. I have store experience. I think next would be a restaurant job.” Other young people reported the benefit of exploring a range of potential career settings and practices before settling into a long-term plan. In many ways, this orientation is more aligned with the middle-class, developmental orientation to the benefit of summer employment. In most cases, both types of youth reported plans to continue with postsecondary education.

Expanding youths’ sense of self

| “I’m a better me, you know?”—Youth interview

Several youth discussed how their participation in OSC changed their sense of self, including how they envisioned their future position in the social field ($n = 7$), an increased confidence in their ability to participate in the workforce ($n = 13$), and seeing themselves as professionals ($n = 6$) or leaders ($n = 3$). These reflections came from youth across delegate agencies, ASM, and various types of work settings, suggesting this impact can be reached through different kinds of work experiences. Considering that we only interviewed participants age 18 and older, this may also be an impact that is especially salient for adolescents on the cusp of adulthood. These changes include increased confidence and motivation to participate as emerging adults in the worlds of college and work.

Youth working in camp counselor roles largely saw their successful experiences as an indication that they would be successful in some social work-type field. As one youth put it, “It made me feel more confident about going for my career in life. It really did. Working here really taught me a lot, but working with the kids pushed me to go forward with my career. . . I want to see kids just smiling. I want to bring that out of the kids. I know I’m good at it, and I know I can do it, and I know I will do it.” For this youth, and others who were in leadership roles at camps, the experience of working with children was rewarding and motivating. It is this successful experience that they point to as evidence that they are on the right path with their longer term goals. Rather than expanding their sense of potential career options, the OSC experience deepened their existing view.

A few youth who worked in leadership positions talked about building confidence in their abilities as leaders, something they didn’t experience prior to OSC participation. One explained, “I’m not used to being over somebody. Being over somebody, that’s a lot of responsibility. At first, I was kind of shaky. I didn’t want to say the wrong thing. Now I got the hang of my job, I know what to say, I know how to say it, I know what to do.” Even though the OSC program covers only a few summer months, many youth found it to be enough time to learn and practice

new skills and become more competent and confident in their abilities and being able to achieve their future goals.

A few youth reported becoming more confident in their own decision-making abilities and highlighted the independence and self-reliance associated with making their own decisions. For example, one youth shared how a mentor supported this development, “Then she made me think about it. It’s my life. It’s not they life. They can tell me, but it’s going to be my life at the end of the day. I’m going to have to suffer with the consequences of the choices I make. You know? She helped me realize that.” While these youth represented an assortment of delegate agencies and work settings, they all seemed to have in common highly supportive employer supervisors or mentors. Interestingly, these employers covered a range of employer types, from nonprofits to government agencies to for-profit and corporate employers. One employer explained their own sense of responsibility to influence youths’ trajectories this way, “I hope that we have made a—or will make a—big impact in their decision making where there’s, whatever it is, a positive impact on not taking left and going right. Then looking at everything starts and stems around your thinking, one’s thinking or one’s not thinking.” Some youth (from multiple delegate agencies and worksites) also talked about their mentors and supervisors encouraging them to persevere and stick with high school, college, or their job at vital moments when they were considering quitting. They credited the discussions with these supportive adults as impacting their decision making.

A number of youth identified an increase in motivation as an impact of OSC. In this vein, one youth reported that their work experience through OSC is “really getting rid of this procrastination that I have. I had to get rid of that. The laziness is gone. I don’t feel lazy anymore, I feel proactive. I can do other things that I set my mind to because of the job. It’s really helping me out with that.” This self-reflection suggests that this youth sees this motivation not as being tied to the specific summer job, but as a newly developed personal characteristic that they will continue into the future. We heard anecdotes indicating that this motivation was indeed carried beyond the summer. One mentor shared that a parent reported, “My child is different, since they have been in this summer program. I couldn’t get them to do anything, I couldn’t motivate them to do anything. Now they’re up at 7:30 getting ready, saying I cannot be late, I’ve got to get to class.” Other youth similarly describe how participating in OSC not only increased their motivation but also improved their sense of possibility for the future. An ASM youth said that the program “gives me hope that I can be and do anything that I want to do and set my mind to.”

For the young people who reported increased motivation, skills, and connections with others, many directly associated this with a positive shift in how they experience themselves. One youth put the impact of OSC on him this way:

I’m a better me, you know? I’m kind of like happier, you know? “How you all doing?” I’m happier with everybody. . . I was grouchy, but it made me, I’m kind of calm now. I’m excited. I’m enthusiastic to come to my job every day. Motivate me to get up early on time. I could

never, even going to school, I never got up. I'm enthusiastic. I got a lot of energy now. I get up, get ready, and go to work.

Mechanisms: OSC Components and Processes that Broaden Youth Perspectives

We found the overarching impacts of OSC to be broadening youth perspectives. In fact, most youth made comments related to a broadened perspective when reflecting on the impact of their participation in OSC. At the same time, a few youth in our sample did emphasize the importance of the OSC paycheck or the potential for OSC to provide an immediate connection to a full-time job. In some of these cases, the young people worked jobs that did not facilitate interactions with others or skill development (such as janitorial positions). In other cases, it may be that the pressing financial need and existing adult responsibilities kept their focus narrow. By comparing the experiences of those who reported broadening their perspective and those who did not, as well as those who reported the impact of broadened perspective and those who did not, we draw out the ways in which OSC achieved this impact.

Our analyses find three key processes associated with those youth who experienced a broadening of perspective through OSC: (1) exposure to new people, places, and experiences, (2) supportive opportunities to learn and practice new ways of being at work, and (3) support in making meaning of their work experience. Although not all three needed to be present for a youth to experience the impacts we have outlined, there is a natural progression through these experiences that can be leveraged by OSC and other summer youth employment programs.

We found that the actions of mentors, employers, and ASM instructors facilitated these processes. Some of these actions are associated with specific program components, such as taking youth on field trips to get acquainted with different parts of the city as well as college campuses. Others are supervision and mentoring practices that provide opportunities for feedback, support, and information sharing. Some mentors and employers discussed actively encouraging youth to test out new ways of being, new mindsets, and new ways of thinking about who they want to be in the future. These practices helped youth make meaning out of their summer experience, giving youth a clearer sense of the working world, where they currently fit within it, and where they are going. Supportive mentors, whether program mentors or the employers that the youth interact with daily, scaffolded normative youth development processes by developing trusting relationships from which to provide youth with constructive feedback that is simultaneously critical and supportive. Many youth who reported that OSC broadened their perspective in some way attributed perceived program impacts to their processing of the feedback they received from their mentors, employers, or instructors (including encouragement, recognition of accomplishment, and challenging). This was similar across partner and delegate agency types. Mentors from some delegate agencies reported having more time and support to perform this mentoring function than others, who reported spending the majority of their time on administrative tasks. However, this distinction was between individual delegate agencies with no patterns by delegate agency type. Employers also

varied in their mentoring skills and could likely benefit from more guidance and standardization regarding how to effectively mentor youth and provide them with constructive feedback.

Exposure

Sometimes you have to go outside of your community to do better. —Employer remark at DFSS employer debrief

OSC provided many youth with exposure to new people, new experiences, and new places, and this exposure helps broaden the perspective of OSC participants. For many youth, this type of exposure provided “insider knowledge” about the world of employment that they lacked before participating in OSC. This mechanism was fostered when youth were placed in unfamiliar settings that challenge stereotypes they might have held about the people in these types of environments. As one youth reported, “That’s what caught me off guard. I thought it was going to be boring because it’s in an office, but they’re really fun. They’re really easygoing people.” Other youth noted that it felt good to be surrounded by happy people at work, with one saying, “I don’t know, but just being around people that is in a good mood and friendly makes you feel a certain type of way, I guess.” Another youth put it this way, “Dress attire was a requirement. Attitude was a requirement. It wasn’t so much a paper-written requirement, ‘Hey, check your attitude.’ It was more so: if you see happy people, and you see people about their business, and see people wanting to change, and you’re helping better themselves, you don’t want to be that sour apple in the bag. It was a self-requirement: ‘Hey, I want to be like them.’” When OSC provided youth with exposure to new settings where coworkers were helpful and the work being done felt meaningful, young people felt a sense of calm that enabled them to feel positive about the work experience, even when the work they were doing did not feel particularly meaningful. This aspect of “safe space” enables young people to feel a part of something larger than themselves. It also provides space to envision different kinds of futures for themselves.

While only a few youth identified meeting new people as a reason for participating in or a goal of OSC, all types of respondents (including youth) noted that exposure to new people helped youth see themselves and others in new ways. Exposure to new people happened through both agencies and worksites and involved interactions with peers, supportive adults (supervisors and mentors), coworkers, and customers or clients. Youth reported that being exposed to new people helped them learn how to relate to different kinds of people as well as how to behave around different types of people. The experience of youth at one work site highlights the significance of interacting with new people, as one youth said, “I’m in the office with older people. I’m in the office with big head people, so that’s kind of showing me how to carry myself when you move on in life or when you move on into college. It’s showing me how to prepare myself.” Working alongside older professionals has served as a helpful model about how to act in both academic and work settings, broadening this youth’s understanding of what goes on behind the scenes in a work setting and how leaders within an organization conduct themselves at work. The youth did not know about these things prior to being exposed to them. However, once he learned about them, he felt he could successfully interact with these people in the future. The supervisor at this site also noted that youth were getting exposed not only to the

people they were working with directly, but also to all the people coming in and out of the office. The supervisor said, “[The OSC youth] are engaging with people in a wide range of backgrounds and ages. . . and seeing that growth has been pretty inspiring.” This supervisor ties youths’ skill development and growth directly to their experience of engaging with new types of people. In this case, as in others discussed here, the growth seen and recognized by supervisors is in behavioral and social skills, not only technical skills.

In addition, the individual connections made with other youth in OSC, fostered through interactions at work, provided opportunities for young people to move beyond the boundaries of their neighborhoods and expand their peer group. A few program contacts and supervisors discussed this opportunity. As a program contact from ASM put it, “You’re a kid that goes to Payton College Prep and you’re from Lincoln Park and you’re sitting next to a kid and your bestie in the class is from Englewood and goes to Team Englewood High School, which those schools would never meet on any kind of circumstances. They’re friends, they’re able to get something out of it. A lot of times they do recognize that and call it out.” A delegate agency contact told us, “Now I have youth from the west side actually hanging out on the south side and developing camaraderie.” When the interviewer asked, “You’ve seen that happen in four or five weeks?” the contact replied, “Yes, I have.” Some youth we spoke to did, indeed, confirm that their participation in OSC widened their peer group. As one put it, “I’ve definitely met some new people and become friends with people I thought I’d never meet before.” Some youth explicitly noted that the ability to get along with people they were not normally exposed to would help them in the future. An ASM youth who attended an all-male high school shared that his experience in a coed setting allowed him to learn how to work alongside young women respectfully. The youth said, “If we’re going to talk about the real world, not only you have to learn to work with one sex, you have to learn to work with another sex.” In this case, the youth felt that his OSC experience filled a specific gap in his social skill development. Others felt it helped their overall ability to interact with new people. As one said, “I don’t really have friends. I keep my circle small, there’s not many people in the circle. I look forward to seeing my classmates.” Structuring work in teams and providing physical space for informal interactions created opportunities for new peer relationships to develop. Bringing together young people for reflection on their work experience during OSC training sessions also contributed to the development of new peer relations.

Mentors, youth, and employers also spoke about the power of exposing youth to new places. Youth went on Chicago neighborhood tours with mentors or employers, toured local colleges through the delegate agency, and, as part of their work experience, traveled to downtown Chicago. An ASM youth shared, “It’s a good way to go down north and see a different perspective on the world.” One mentor talked about taking youth out on trips in order to experience new places and perspectives: “I took them on trips. Mostly every trip we been on, none of them had been. It was simple things though, going downtown. A lot of them haven’t been downtown.” Another youth noted that their employer took all the OSC participants to Chinatown for lunch as part of their orientation, “When I first started here. . . we had went out on a trip to Chinatown. I never been there and I saw things that I wouldn’t even thought that would be in Chinatown. I really liked that experience though. It showed me something.” One delegate

agency described in detail their efforts to bolster OSC participants' knowledge of college and career pathways. The agency provided college tours for those not yet planning to attend college and a career day event for those with college plans. However, none of the young people we spoke with mentioned the tours or career day event. It is possible that the youth in our sample were not part of this event or, for those who did attend, that this event was not as meaningful to them as the delegate agency had hoped it would be.

For some youth, exposure to a new place involved the worksite itself. As noted earlier, some youth embraced the experience of going downtown for work. They felt it provided them access to new places and a sense of being a part of something larger than their own neighborhood. One youth talked about learning about the structure of politics because of their experience at their work site. Others were exposed to human services work. As one employer noted, "It's like the women [at the shelter serving as a work site] have really taught [the OSC youth] about how not to mess your life up. . . . Some have been in prison and some have been on drugs and all of that. They got upfront knowledge, not just seeing it, but actually somebody telling them, 'This is some of the things that I did, and that's how I wound up here.'" Others were exposed to settings very different from their communities and were struck by differences in behaviors. One youth remarked that they were surprised that people just left their purses unattended in the workspace and that this led to an increased sense of trust in others at the workplace. The youth said, "I think I can trust the girls because I feel like they trust me earlier when they would work back here and I would be in the front. They would leave their purse in the front with me." Some youth reported initially feeling stretched to learn about how to fit into a new place. One youth remarked that even though they sometimes feel out of place when people start speaking Spanish at the worksite because "I'm an English person at heart," the exposure to the new language and culture enabled them to learn about the culture. The youth said, "It's a learning experience. I picked up a few words here and there, I learned about the food."

While many employers discussed helping youth internalize workplace expectations, only the more professional office settings framed this in terms of "exposure." One employer contact reported, "Our goal is to mentor, to give good work experience, get exposure for the youth to an office and a professional setting." It could be that these employers recognize that this type of professional environment is the biggest cultural stretch for many participating youth, especially those who may be the first in their families to work in such a setting or for whom this is a first job, and they see the experience as an opportunity to "expose" young people to new experiences. A youth at one of these sites explained, "It's teaching me how to accept the fact that every job is not going to be the same and it's teaching me how to work in a different environment." This youth's employer further integrated the young OSC workers by giving them the chance to practice interacting with adult coworkers outside of the office setting as well. The employer said, "We always invite the youth if they want to come to our parades or our picnics and things like that. I think even that goes a little bit further and teaches them how to get along with each other and how to be a support, the diversity in the office, the teamwork." Youth who were open to the exposure to new people, places, and experiences reported not only a broader sense of the playing field but also gained inside knowledge about the unspoken rules of interaction in different settings, promoting the acquisition of culture capital.

Opportunities for new ways of being

I think it made me more aware of how it is to actually work. . . . It changed me in a positive way. —DFSS youth interview

Gaining work experience was one of the goals clearly articulated by youth. Many tied this to a more concrete desire to get connected to future work, but a few described the work experience as a way to learn about and internalize the habits that lead to success in the workplace. In other words, they saw it as a way of using newly acquired cultural capital. While the work settings in which youth were placed varied widely, OSC mentors and employers helped youth understand some of the implicit norms of these different work environments. They did this by explicitly providing youth with clear expectations and coaching around what is needed to succeed in these environments, from appropriate dress and communication to work ethics and attitude. Some focused on the importance of creating an environment where it was okay for young people to fail as they tried out these new ways of being. This patience and scaffolding is important since some youth were initially uncomfortable receiving feedback from supervisors, seeking help, or were just feeling out of place in the work setting. As one mentor explained, “A lot of [youth] had issues where they felt somebody was looking at them a certain way, and judging them. . . . We kinda shaped them up to go back to work with a more brushed up personality, and just keeping your mind focused on your goals.” One youth described this new sense of being, saying, “It’s basically showing me how to carry myself, I would say that. Anywhere you go you’re going to have to carry yourself a certain type of way.”

None of the OSC participants were required to wear “professional” attire, and some were given t-shirts (such as in Parks and infrastructure jobs) or uniforms to wear to work. However, many youth talked about how they paid more attention to the clothes they wore to work because their participation in OSC made them more aware of the importance of self-presentation in the workplace. According to the youth in our sample, aspects of self-presentation included appropriate clothing, communication, and attitude. Many youth reported learning about these things explicitly from their employer. For example, one young person said their employer helped them learn

dress and grooming etiquette. How do you hold yourself up at an office or at a workplace. The first thing I remember them saying is, “Always have respect.” Basic things, you know. Respect your employers, respect your coworkers. Dress professionally. Basic things. Don’t be late, don’t be absent too long. I mean, don’t be absent for a long period of time without telling anybody why because the whole absentee thing, nobody wants to deal with that.

Respect for others, as well as for oneself, was a central tenet of another worksite. All the youth at this worksite said that they learned what behaviors signaled self-respect. The supervisor at this worksite also explained that they tried to emphasize respect for oneself for all the OSC youth. “It’s about respect and if you respect yourself as far as we don’t go with the short dresses and the mini shorts and the cleavage showing—it’s not necessary. If you come to work like that I’m not going to send you home but I’ll find something for you to cover up with. It’s about respect,

once one person wants to respect themselves everything else comes in place.” Here, we found alignment between the ways that all staff and all youth at the employment site talked about the importance of self-respect and the ways of representing this. Other youth told interviewers that they learned from their mentors or others at their delegate agency about how self-presentation was a sign of respect in the workplace. One youth said, “I also learned [from mentor] about why it’s important to keep good work etiquette, present yourself in a very good way, a respectful way.” These examples highlight that knowing *why* something matters makes it easier to internalize than just knowing that it matters and how employers and mentors can help make this explicit for youth.

A number of OSC participants described learning to “take my feedback,” become “more receptive,” and “to listen” as new ways of being for them. This stands in stark contrast to the fear and defensiveness that many young people brought to their OSC work experience and represents an opening up to new ways of interacting with others—ways of interacting that can translate into success in the workplace. One mentor described the transformation they saw in the youth they supported during the summer, “They became like a seed and blossomed. Looking beautiful and acting different. Some of them were very quiet when they came, and now they’re very outspoken. I really like what I saw. Mainly [they became] very open.” While giving researchers a tour of his worksite, one ASM youth revealed that the “biggest thing he’s learned is how to listen and take it in.” A youth working as a counselor at a camp run by a community-based organization said, “I’m more open now. I’m open now to just talk, get my feedback. I ain’t really shy to say nothing really as much.” Another OSC participant described becoming more receptive and letting go of “bossy” ways: “It’s teaching me how to not always be so bossy and more of listening. I always tend to be that person that always wants to tell somebody what to do, but I never wanted to listen. This job is teaching me more of how to listen and not talk as much, so that’s kind of neat.”

Youth reported that this newly developed openness to feedback from others and cues from the work environment enabled them to learn new ways of presenting themselves. Incorporating these new self-presentation strategies at work provided them with confidence and sense of possibility. As one youth expressed:

It’s like a new chapter in my life that makes me really think that working here is really not a bad idea as I think it was. Maybe working with a computer may not be so boring after all. Maybe getting to know your fellow employees is not as big of a deal. All those things come into mind when I think about this place. I guess I don’t need to worry anymore.

In fact, many youth reported that they learned how to “speak up,” “share ideas,” or “ask questions” in the workplace and that these new ways of interacting helped them feel more competent and confident. Learning that it was okay to ask for help or to disclose that they didn’t know something was challenging. Through the support of their employers, youth learned that this was an important strategy for being successful in the workplace rather than a sign of weakness. One youth said,

When I was finished with a job or something I learned to ask around and see if there was something else I could do. That's pretty much what I improved on. . . . He [my supervisor] was like, "You just going to sit there? You're not going to ask." I said, "Oh, I mean. . . ." He said, "Oh, okay, now you're going to ask." Yeah, that's what really made me like okay now I know what to do. He got on me for that, but now he's like I'm doing better with responsibility. He said I'm doing better with that now.

In this quote we see how prompts and feedback from a supervisor can lead to personal growth as well as supporting youths' ability to reflect on and assess work habits. A youth from another delegate agency also talked about how knowing to ask for help from others can be an important aspect of self-reliance. The youth said, "I've also learned that persistence is key, always asking questions. I've learned that. . . I need to ask questions if I want to get the answers. I have to ask my teammates, even though if I don't know them for the first time, but let me just introduce myself in a professional manner so I can say, 'Hey, I don't know how to do this, can you at least assist?'" The increase in confidence that youth experience is not only related to growing their technical skills but, for some, is also related to the new knowledge about when and how to ask for help in a work setting. Another young person explained how learning to ask for feedback, despite initial resistance to doing so, made him become more confident, "Yes [summer work experience built my confidence]. . . . Because I'm more comfortable with asking people if I did a job the right way. If I'd been scared of them saying no, you didn't. I feel more comfortable being around other people like working in groups and stuff like that." An ASM youth said that the structure of his OSC experience, which included presenting work to his peers, helped him overcome his fear of feedback, saying, "I'm not really a talkative person so it's helped me be able to talk in front of a crowd or something. Be comfortable sharing my ideas and stuff like that." For many youth, learning to embody the expectations of the workplace required clear expectations and consistent modeling. As one youth put it, "I've been told to actually get up and start working. On one of them slow days, I had to actually be told to get up and actually do something. . . she was just like, 'Just find something to do. Don't wait. Just find something.'"

Many mentors and employers emphasized coaching around not only communication skills, but also around the importance of punctuality and calling when running late. One employer talked about teaching youth how to behave professionally, saying, "I want them to know as far as regular professionalism, as far as getting here on time, you know, clocking in and out for your breaks, being on time for when you leave breaks and only taking the 30 minutes, not being on your cellphone, or using appropriate language on or around kids, dressing appropriately." The importance of showing up on time and calling in if running late was a prevalent theme among both mentors and youth. These tenets of professionalism are highly valued in all work settings and can foster success if utilized in the OSC experience and beyond. However, there were indications that these expectations were not uniformly applied. This led to some demoralization among youth who saw other youth come and go as they pleased and among employers who felt that they had no leverage to demand that expectations around professionalism be met. We also heard that at least one delegate agency was using incentives to motivate changes in youth behavior. One mentor explained the following scenario:

I had a young man that was having. . . issues about not showing up on time because he felt downtown is far, or working for a [government office], you have to be checked in before you go to work. When you're getting checked in, that doesn't count as you being at work; you might be late. Issues where they had been late, I'll just do my best to brush them up on how important that is. Cleaning your act up might get you somewhere. The young man improved a lot, and we had different incentives throughout the summer, where they might have an opportunity to get a CTA bus card for the week. I rewarded him once he showed that improvement.

However, our analyses on the impact of OSC suggest that the youth who were able to, or in a position to, establish relationships with employers and take responsibility for their own actions experienced a sense of accomplishment and confidence that they planned to carry into the future. Setting clear expectations about timeliness and clear instructions, perhaps including scripts and role plays, for how to communicate with employers when running late could help OSC participants to not only be successful in their OSC experience but also internalize skills related to professionalism that they can carry forward.

New ways of being also entailed developing new technical skills. Youth talk about developing these skills as tapping into new parts of their identities. Skills ranged from laying tiles, to using the Dewey Decimal System, to using fax machines, to completing inventory. One youth shared, "At first when I came here, I didn't know how to fax, file, none of that. I actually learned all of that so it could actually go into my resume that I got a little experience to say that." Adding new marketable skills to their repertoires not only allows young people to present themselves in new ways but it also makes them feel more accomplished. A supervisor noted how a youth expressed this sense of accomplishment this way: "One of them told me he feels so mature because he knows how to hang drywall now, and lay tile and all these different things." This supervisor went on to say that there was something deep going on for youth as they appreciated and took pride in their own work, "The excitement in their eyes as they put the kitchen together, it just. . . . It really touches my heart." At an observation of an infrastructure team, a young woman was observed taking pride in her new skills and saying, "Later, these same girls admire their work, with one commenting: 'I'm real proud of this wall, it looks good every time I step back.'" A few youth shared how the new skills they gained would help them present themselves more confidently in their search for long-term employment. For example, one youth said, "Oh yeah [I'm more confident], because now I know how to make a sandwich without somebody being over my back watching me. I have the confidence to go out and work at Subway now."

A few mentors from different delegate agencies and an ASM instructor were especially passionate about changing youth's mindsets and ways of thinking about themselves. One mentor shared, "That's how these kids feel now. When I ask them. . . 'How you feel about the racial ten-, how you feel about police shooting ki-?' 'Oh, that just happens.' 'How you feel about us killing each other?' Just basically they feel as if it's normal and supposed to happen, and I'm going to make sure they know, this is not normal." The youth we interviewed did not talk about this in the same way, although it is easy to make the connection between this mindset shift and the broadened perspective that many youth did express. Mentors who emphasized the goal of

changing mindsets tended to be male mentors²⁹ who reported feeling that they could relate to the experiences of some of their male youth having come from similar backgrounds. These mentors also tended to focus on the problem of community violence more than others. These mentors saw in OSC the potential to save lives and change life trajectories by working to change youth mindsets and broaden their perspective. In some cases, these mentors were intentionally connected with some of the higher risk young men, while in others the match was unintentional.

Matching and training for mentors, ASM instructors, and employer supervisors could be improved to take full advantage of the passion and expertise of these adults in working with the population where they feel they could have the most impact. This approach to the matching process could help ensure the program has the most impact. One delegate agency contact explains the role of the mentor as to “teach self-efficacy and problem-solving skills in the context of issues at employment, intervene when necessary but encourage youth to try to resolve and give skills to help.” We found that this definition of the mentoring function was being practiced by some employer supervisors and instructors, as well as official OSC mentors. All of the OSC mentors we spoke with expressed real desire to engage with young people and engage in training curriculum, but they also felt constrained by their administrative responsibilities. These responsibilities largely revolved around timesheet collection and paycheck distribution, things that could be built into the administrative functions of the delegate agency with the support of OSC youth. Removing these administrative responsibilities from mentors would enable them to engage in the work that they were trained for and felt passionate about—engaging with young people, delivering the training curriculum, and fostering positive relationships between youth and employers.

Meaning-making process

“If you’re thinking narrow, that’s what you’re going to get, narrow but you have to look at the whole and the bigger picture. —Employer contact interview

We find that it is the meaning-making and internalization of the OSC experience, something that is fostered by interaction with supportive adults in the form of mentors or work supervisors, which fosters the youth’s tendency to translate immediate and past experiences into the foundation for future possibilities. Mentors and supervisors supported this process by providing support and trust over time, providing space for processing and challenging, and helping youth tie their past and current experiences to their goals for the future. The mentoring function, performed by OSC mentors, employers, and ASM instructors, is the program component that appears to most strongly influence the broadening of participants’ original goals and the blossoming of OSC impacts on their development. Mentoring, in this conceptualization, is largely about helping youth to translate their experiences into personally relevant meaning. This

²⁹ We did not record gender of mentors but the ways that mentors discussed this indicated their gender.

leads to the development of goals as well as the confidence and competence to leverage the capitals they gained access to through OSC in achieving these goals.

Building mentoring relationships is time intensive; due to the brief nature of the program, there is no time to be wasted. At least with some youth it was possible to build trusting relationships over the summer, as evidenced by interviews with mentors, employer supervisors, and youth. One young person illustrates how the mentor's sharing of their own story was a powerful example of the importance of finding purpose through work:

Learning from my mentor, I learned why it's important to. . . . Where can I start? I learned why it's important to work hard. Why it's important to be passionate about what you do. My mentor told us a story about how he was working at Bali's and he was making so much money but he wasn't passionate about what he was doing because he wasn't helping people. He decided to take a pay cut to work at One Summer Chicago to be able to help youth, to help them grow to become young men and young women in the world.

However, there were also young people who did not seem to know their mentors very well or had their mentor switched multiple times during the summer. Also, not all OSC youth are assigned a formal mentor. Relying solely on a formal mentor is likely not an effective way to ensure that youth have support to reflect on their work experience and what it means in the context of their own lives.

Employers spend more time with youth over the summer than the formal OSC mentors and we found that they served powerful mentoring and coaching functions for youth. One young person described how their supportive supervisor helped them make meaning out of their work experience:

Me, before, I wasn't really motivated to do anything. I used to think that the stuff I was doing, really didn't matter. Then, I would come in here, with [my supervisors] telling you like, "Everything you do for us actually matters. It's helping." It made me feel like—it made me feel a lot better. It makes you think positive of yourself, as well. . . . to have something to do. When you're doing it, somebody's telling you, "You're doing a good job." No matter, the smallest little thing. They gave me confidence to try new things I normally wouldn't do.

Many youth tied the supportive feedback received from supervisors to their ability to see the bigger picture of how the work matters, internalize the lessons about broadening their perspective, and build confidence that they have the power to shape their own lives. For some youth, the meaning they got out of their OSC experience was also tied to the fact that they were giving back or helping others—a perspective that we found was fostered by mentors and supervisors. Other youth were moved and motivated by work settings where the organization was providing needed services to the community. One youth highlighted this influence this way, "She [supervisor] very motivational. She helps me out a lot. . . . I'd like to pass that on to the younger generation."

The key programmatic processes associated with a meaningful experience for youth involve the mentors and supervisors identifying and naming soft skills being used, why they matter in the workplace, and how the youth can put them to use in their lives. In fact, ASM noted that they trained instructors to use this approach of naming skills based on MHA Labs' 21st Century Skills framework.³⁰ Two conditions are required for this approach to be successful: (1) youth must feel the employment site is supportive and (2) youth must see the supervisor or mentor as a legitimate source of information. When this is the case, communication between supervisor and OSC participant can make the ambiguity of soft skills explicit, provide youth with opportunities to develop and practice these skills in interactions with others, and enable youth to reap the benefits of these skills by experiencing how others reacted to them. In turn, this makes it easier for youth to see their own progress in developing the skills.

Making meaning of the work experience, in a self-narrative sense, requires reflection on and exploration of how the experience relates to both an individual's past and imagined potential futures. We did not find many instances where this process was explicitly supported. Nevertheless, we did find that some young people were doing this intuitively or with the support of their parents. This is something that could be built into the OSC program in the format of small group discussions facilitated by mentors or supervisors at the beginning and end of the experience, individual journaling responses, or through individual conversations with mentors or supervisors.

³⁰ See "MHA Labs: Skill Building Blocks," available at <http://mhalabs.org/skill-building-blocks/>. Accessed July 18, 2017.
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Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion

Our findings suggest that money matters to the young people participating in OSC but it is not the only or most important thing that they get out of their OSC experience. We see that many of the youth in our study didn't even know what else they could get out of their participation until they experienced it and translated it into personally relevant meaning for their lives. Often, this translation process was supported by mentors or employers, and even family members, and helped the youth develop ways of thinking about themselves and their long-term goals. OSC is working because when the work experience is meaningful, young people see themselves and the world differently. However, our findings challenge the notion that providing young people with access to paying jobs will reduce their involvement in crime simply because it provides them with a legitimate avenue to earning money.

We also found that OSC participation enabled youth to accumulate different types of capital. OSC provided youth access to: (1) financial capital, by providing them with a paycheck and opportunities for banking that reduced reliance on check cashing services; (2) social capital, by connecting them to new networks of the delegate agency and employers; (3) human capital, by connecting youth to opportunities to learn marketable skills and gain work experience; and (4) cultural capital, by providing them with training and reinforcing the development of soft skills and behaviors that lead to success in the workplace. Importantly, we found that OSC also helped some young people learn how to leverage these capitals in order to advance their future goals. When this happened, we found that it was the integration of these capitals with participants' perception of "self" that made OSC a meaningful developmental experience for young people, ultimately broadening their perspective of their sense of the field and their sense of self.

The comparison of program components, aims, and perceived impact from interviews and observations did not reveal any substantial differences between the three DFSS delegate agency types in our sample (workforce development, youth development, and family and community services). In addition, the ways that delegate agency staff spoke about their programming suggested much overlap between these categories. This suggests that the way that each agency implements OSC has less to do with the mission or focus of the larger delegate agencies and likely has more to do with other distinctions, possibly including agency resources, ability to leverage resources, and familiarity of the leadership and mentor staff with the program from previous summers. This has implications for grouping and distinguishing delegate agencies in future research.

We see evidence of OSC reaching the goals of key stakeholders in the city and exceeding the goals of young people themselves—particularly those who did not set out with the goal of having a “meaningful” summer work experience. Through exposure to new people and places, opportunities to try and fail at (and try again) new ways of being in the workplace, and making their work personally relevant, many of the young people we spoke to recounted their OSC experience as meaningful.

Recommendations

Considering the short duration of summer youth employment programming, OSC should focus on near-term developmental impacts and the mechanisms to achieve them. OSC can provide a base of perspective-broadening experiences to engage young people through exposure to new people and places, opportunities for and support of trying new ways of being, and a focus on meaning-making through OSC activities and interactions. The programmatic practices related to this involved the supports that mentors (both formal OSC mentors and employers) provided:

- **Incorporating structured feedback tools.** We found that MHA Labs’ Skills Building Blocks framework was used by some agencies to link skill development to how skills can influence young people’s lives. The framework could be more widely adopted. Other tools that structure feedback and reflection could also be incorporated more widely.
- **Focus on the mentoring function with employers.** Screening employers for a willingness to commit time for coaching young people and providing supports that strengthen employer and supervisor mentoring skills could support the developmental processes that make OSC meaningful. OSC might consider developing a webinar series or program employer liaison whose responsibilities include follow up with supervisors about their interactions with participants.
- **Specifying the formal mentor role.** Training mentors and reducing their administrative responsibilities would likely benefit youth participating in OSC. Creating a more formal set of professional expectations around supporting youth and providing trainings could enable formal OSC mentors to commit to the key aspects of their role as mentors. Instituting continuous quality improvement processes could help OSC address and improve the consistency and quality of these efforts.
- **Highlighting the importance of social connections.** Focusing on increasing youth’s social capital from the beginning of the program, with a purposeful discussion around the potential influence of being able to use employers as references and other supportive adults as sources of information and support, can help sustain the impacts of OSC beyond the summer.
- **Provide information about a range of educational pathways.** It is important to note that not all youth in our sample had plans for college; a few of the youth we talked with felt a more pressing need to find immediate work. Of those that reported that they did plan to go to college, some also reported facing financial and family responsibilities that presented barriers to a smooth path. Many low-income young people cobble together their own path

to adulthood by combining college and work or switching between the two, although no respondents discussed this type of path through postsecondary education. When college was discussed, it was framed in terms of an alternative pathway to work. We also found that “college” meant different things to different youth in our sample: for some it was a 4-year degree, others planned to start at community college and then transfer to a 4-year college, and others were seeking certificates that they could earn in a short period of time and on which future credentials could be stacked. While an explicit focus on college may not be beneficial to all youth, incorporating information about different educational pathways for different types of work, including their cost and time commitments, would fill a large knowledge gap among OSC youth.

- **Tiering the OSC experience.** The variation we found in our small sample of OSC youth age 18 and older suggests there are many factors that need to be considered if OSC embarks on developing “tiered” experiences through OSC over multiple years. Age and experience should be part of the equation; younger and less experienced youth should receive more rudimentary versions of program components. These youth might be best served in community-based organizations where the exposure to new people and places does not cause a premature stretching to navigate new waters. At the same time, it is important that youth not feel as though they are tracked into certain types of work or not able to try new environments. This is an important aspect of the meaning-making support function that OSC delegate agency staff, mentors, and employers can serve. As youth age and progress in successful work experience, they could be provided with new work experiences that challenge them to adapt their soft skills to more professional settings that still provide youth with the sense of safety required to take these kinds of risks.
- **Leveraging the opportunity for career exploration.** While a short-term summer work experience doesn’t provide much opportunity for exploration of many different career interests, it does allow for exploration of pathways into and through a particular setting. Adding a component where young people interview their supervisors or others in the work setting is one activity that could foster the development of this knowledge. Having youth share this knowledge with other OSC participants from their delegate agency would provide a process for information sharing and bonding among youth.
- **Paying participants and financing OSC.** Tiering OSC programming presents possibilities for rethinking how and how much OSC youth are paid. The city could fully support stipends for younger and less experienced youth to engage in programming that is focused on skill and interest development and enrichment activities. For more experienced participants, employers could be asked to supplement OSC wages to bring OSC youth to the entry-level pay of similar employees. Employer contribution to wages also promotes employer investment in the program rather than seeing OSC as a source of free labor. Deeper investment of employers would likely lead to greater communication between employers and delegate agencies, fostering a sense of community within specific neighborhoods and across the city. Having skin in the game may incentivize employers to invest in the youth in new ways.

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