

Matters of Healing: A Community Based Organization that Works?  
An Ethnographic Case Study of Sunset Youth Services

By

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis, I draw on qualitative research collected at Sunset Youth Services (SYS), a community based (non-profit) youth organization (CBYO) in San Francisco, CA, to understand the experiences of the youth participants who consistently attend the Center (Strobel, Kirshner, & O'Donoghue, 2008). Inspired by the ethnographic method, I conducted participant observer, 13 semi-structured interviews, and numerous informal interviews in order to collect the incredible perspectives of the young people. My research findings demonstrated the necessity of a proliferation of organizations that house positive mentors and implement program models that not only attract youth, but also sustain their attention over time. Further, I contend that the power of a CBYO like Sunset Youth Services, and all it entails, to supply youth with a sense of agency to create, to develop their identities and to make life-changing decisions within a supportive community positive influenced the youth to remain invested in SYS.

*Keywords:* Community-Based Youth Organization (CBYO), urban youth, mentors, community-based educators, youth agency



## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
Project Background	2
<b>Theoretical Perspectives</b>	7
Community Based Youth Organizations	7
The youth	7
The youth-adult relationship/partnership	10
The exercise of agency in an adult run society	13
The CBYO as a landscape for change	14
Learning Frameworks	17
Interest and self-sustained learning	19
Apprenticeship learning, collegiality, and legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice	20
<b>Methodology and Positionality</b>	23
Research Design	23
Description of Participants	24
Description of the Settings	25
Participant observations at Sunset Youth Services	25
Interviews at Sunset Youth Services	26
Observations at BoothStar	26
Data Collection Procedures	27
Data Analysis	28
Positionality and Relationship with Participants	29
<b>Results</b>	31
Why do the Youth Come?	31
Music based interest	32
In-risk youth	32
Word of mouth	34
Why do the Youth Stay?	35
The SYS community	35
Relationship with adults	39
Lack of censorship and traditional structures of discipline	45
A sense of SYS being a safe place	47
Models of informal learning	49
Identity development through participation in social justice	55
Where Are the Youth Going?	61
Life-changing	61
Job-skills development	62
Investment in the future	63
Youth that stay out of trouble	64
Youth that stay in trouble	66

<b>Discussion</b>	68
Lessons Learned from the SYS Case Study	68
<b>Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations</b>	76
Study Overview	76
Summary of Interpretation of Findings	76
Limitations	77
Implications, Practical Applications, and Future Directions	78
Researchers Reflections	80
<b>Bibliography</b>	83
<b>Appendix</b>	89
A: Maps of Sunset Youth Services	89
A-1: Map of Downstairs	89
A-2: Map of Up Stairs	89
B: Images of Sunset Youth Services Teen Center	90
B-1: Downstairs Offices	90
B-2: Downstairs Hangout Area	91
B-3: Upstairs Recording Booth	91
B-4: Upstairs Kitchen Space	92
C: Images of BoothStar	93
C-1: SYS UpSquad Employee leading a BoothStar recording session	93
C-2: Youth waiting outside of BoothStar to record	94
C-3: UpSquad Employee Setting up the Booth	95
D: Interview Protocol	96
<b><u>List of Images:</u></b>	
Image 1: View of Sunset Youth Services from across the street	26
Image 2: Three Sunset Youth Services' youth rallying during the Schools not Suspensions campaign	58
Image 3: Sunset Youth Services' youth rallying during the Schools not Suspensions campaign	59
Image 4: Sunset Youth Services' youth performing during the Schools not Suspensions campaign	59
Image 5: SYS youth rallying during the Schools not Suspensions campaign	60
<b><u>List of Figures:</u></b>	
Figure 1: The programmatic organization of Sunset Youth Services	5
Figure 2: Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs	8

Figure 3: Working Definitions of the Five Cs of Positive Youth Development	16
Figure 4: Table of Learning Frameworks	18
Figure 5: Reasons that youth come to SYS	31

## **Introduction**

In this thesis, I draw on data collected at Sunset Youth Services (SYS), a community based (non-profit) youth organization (CBYO) in San Francisco, CA, to understand the experience of the adolescent participants who attend. Employing ethnographic methods and conducting formal and informal interviews, I carefully observed and collected the perspectives of the young people. My research makes a case for the necessity of a proliferation of organizations that house positive mentors and program models that not only attract youth, but also sustain their participation over time. Further, I contend that the power of a CBYO like Sunset Youth Services, and all it entails, to supply youth with a sense of agency to create, to develop their identities, and to make positive decisions that affect their futures within a supportive community are the threads that keep the youth consistently tied to the Center.

The power of SYS to retain the youth it targets was of particular importance to this research. The youth population studied in this project had a significant investment often reflected by their years of attending the Center. I argue that the success of a CBYO like SYS relates to the investment and engagement demonstrated by the youth who participate. This case study analysis revealed that the collective youth commitment is connected strongly to the learning opportunities, emotional support, and guidance that Sunset Youth Services offers. With that context in mind, I gathered youth perspective to answer three main research questions:

- First, what are the characteristics of SYS that initially attract the youth?
- Secondly, and related: once the youth are at SYS, what are the primary programmatic structures that keep them involved over time? In other words, what is it about this particular Center that youth find appealing and why do they choose traveling,

sometimes across the city after school or work, to be at SYS rather than whatever else they could be doing in that free time?

- Lastly, I asked: where are the youth going and where do they go after they have left Sunset Youth Services?

The intent of this thesis in addition to exploring the above research questions is to tell the stories of young people and adults joining as a community to support each other in growth and change. Outcomes from this casework provide new ideas that can inform not only Sunset Youth Services, but also other CBYOs seeking to implement best practices. The opportunities for the creation of programs that address localized needs and keep youth actively involved are rich. The outcomes from this research will not be universally applicable, but I argue that combined with other similar inquiries youth organizations can learn a great deal (Strobel et al., 2008; Burton, Obeidallah, & Allison, 1996). The relevance of this research can influence practitioners, policymakers and researchers alike who wish to make sense of the ways in which urban youth become invested in seeking learning opportunities and positive relationships (Strobel, et al., 2008).

## **Project Background**

*“I don’t know. Sunset, they can be a parent when you need them. They can be a friend when you need them. They can be an instructor when you need them. They can be a disciplinary when you need them. The whole building is full of everything you need. I feel like it’s a place to hang out, a place to eat, a place to chill, to do music stuff, have fun with your friends, do crazy videos. Like, anything you want to do.” – Sunset Youth Services Participant*

Sunset Youth Services was founded by the Executive Director Dawn Stueckle, and Senior Case Managers Ron Stueckle and Delvin Mack. Currently, six other individuals staff the

Center and are all full-time employees. Wendy and Joel run the media arts program; Mustasem oversees the culinary arts program; Vicky is a transitional aged youth case manager; Maria is the family success coach; and Natalie is a juvenile case manager.

Sunset Youth Services is located in the Outer Sunset neighborhood of San Francisco, CA and began in 1993 when Dawn and Ron Stueckle moved to the city and wanted to “make a difference in the lives of local youth.”<sup>1</sup> They partnered with a high school in their neighborhood, the Outer Sunset District of San Francisco, specifically targeting the youth at the school and those in the surrounding areas. In 2003, after years of working from other locations that included their home, the SYS staff opened the doors to the teen center where I conducted the majority of my research.

The reach of SYS has expanded over the years. Now, their programs serve approximately 150 urban youth, throughout the Bay Area, considered at- or in-risk, and often their families.<sup>2</sup> Currently, the dominant ethnicities of youth in attendance at SYS are African American and Latino, but Asian and Caucasian populations are represented as well.<sup>3</sup> Sunset Youth Services works primarily with in-risk who they define as youth already “engaged in multiple systems of care and who exhibit compound risk factors” (Stueckle, 2009, p.1). On the other hand, at-risk youth are in danger of the same fate (Stueckle, 2009)

Speaking of the youth SYS serves, an important part of my personal research process was to define *which* youth I wanted to study. My intention always connected to researching a group of youth considered at-risk. Because I was interested in learning about how youth make the

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<sup>1</sup> For the full story see: <http://sunsetyouthservices.org/our-story/>

<sup>2</sup> Numbers provided by Wendy, an employee of Sunset Youth Services, and my direct contact for this research project.

<sup>3</sup> Of note is the fact that the work done with Asian youth happens primarily outside of the Center because of past issues with race relations inside of the Center.

choices they do, I elected to focus on older youth since they likely possess greater agency in their decision-making processes. I dealt with a concern that younger youth would be too heavily influenced to make their choices about whether or not to come to the particular program I decided to study.

Another aspect of developing my core questions related to the *type* of after-school program I chose for this project. Afterschool programs that focus on more structured and disciplined modes of instruction were of less interest to me than a program where learning opportunities differed greatly from the school day. I recognized over time that I was most interested in exploring youth experience and decision-making more than curriculum and instruction.

With the context for how I developed my research questions in mind, the services and programs SYS provides include:

Transitional Age Youth Case Management: Young people, aged 16-24, who need help transitioning to adulthood participate in this program. They receive job skill training, life skills workshops, resume writing, and assistance in accessing health care.

Digital Arts: Youth receive training in digital audio and film production, learn marketable skills, and tell their stories. The digital arts are project-based learning labs where the youth practice writing, recording, and editing. Ultimately, the youth learn to master their own music videos, photos and other audio projects. From this program, youth are able to develop their own portfolios especially if they are interested in future opportunities.

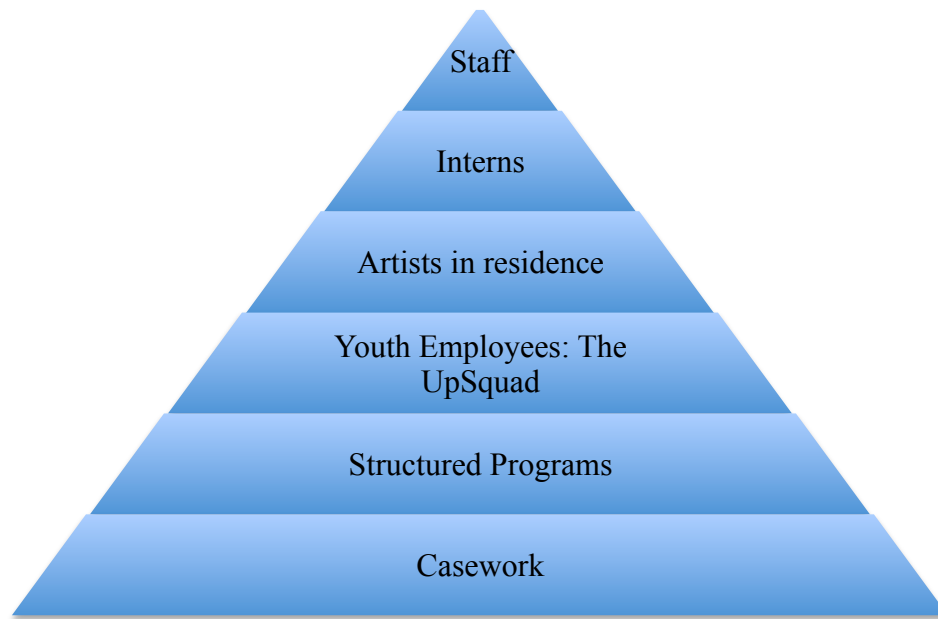
UpStar Records: A youth-run record label and workforce development program that provides youth with employment and leadership training. Participating youth run sessions using the digital arts lab and a traveling recording booth. Their learning is project based as they gain knowledge and skills related to mixing, mastering, releasing, and the distribution of their records.

Café and Garden: Experiential learning opportunity where youth learn to cook and garden. This program teaches youth to make healthy food choices with limited resources.

Family Services: SYS supports families in crisis. They run a parenting program, as well.<sup>4</sup>

The diagram below (Figure 1) indicates how SYS staff categorizes the employees and the youth functioning within the organization. The intention, as related by Dawn, was not to present the organizational structure as a hierarchy, but to show how youth might move from being a part of casework to employees of SYS.

**Figure 1. The programmatic organization of Sunset Youth Services (Van Steenis, 2014)**



In the case of this study, I focused specifically on the digital and media arts and UpStar Records, which included the youth employees. After spending some time at the Center observing the space more generally, I eventually focused on these two programs for four reasons. First, the digital recording studio saw the most youth action throughout the day in comparison to other programs like the café and garden. Secondly, the experience of community and acceptance was particularly present amongst the youth in the digital arts space. Third, the learning environment

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<sup>4</sup> For more detailed information on Sunset Youth Services' funding sources as related to programmatic structures see <http://sunsetyouthservices.org/our-story/financials/> and <http://sunsetyouthservices.org/our-story/financials/>



provided rich opportunities to collect meaningful data within a community of practice where the youth participated in experiential and experientially based learning opportunities. Finally, I found the space to be one where youth appeared most excited, engaged, and willing to share.

My research questions focused on my desire to understand why SYS youth, when given options, choose SYS day after day rather than partaking in alternative activities they might be assumed to explore. What was it about this youth center that drew them in and kept them engaged? Word of mouth through colleagues, friends, and other research opportunities as well as the construction of my initial research questions led me to SYS, and the understanding the culture kept me engaged throughout the process. In concert with other scholars (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Ginwright, 2010; Watson, 2012), my dominant goal in conducting this research was to carry out a case study analysis that brought meaning and importance to the power of safe environments, genuinely committed mentors, positive social outlets, and untraditional approaches to teaching and learning.

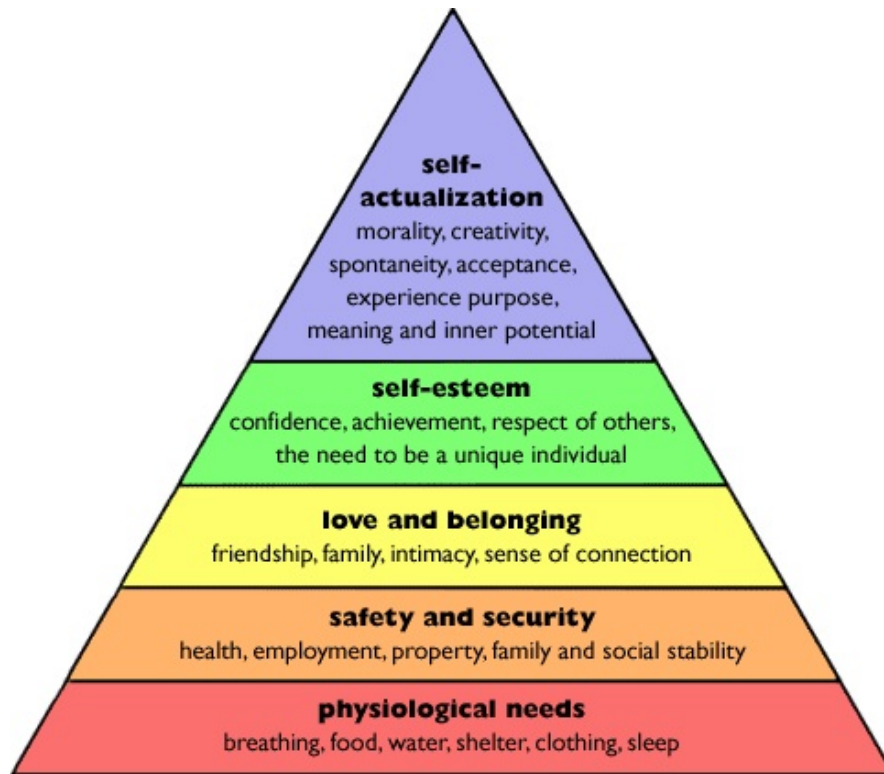
## **Theoretical Perspectives**

### **Community Based Youth Organizations**

**The youth.** Overwhelmingly, urban youth experience negative structures that repress their ability to be engaged critically, socially and politically (Checkoway et al., 2003; Nygreen, Ah Kwon & Sanchez, 2006; Halpern, 2005). Nygreen et al. (2006) define urban youth as an “underserved, poor, marginalized, ethnic minority youth” (p.108). The lens through which this paper’s research questions are investigated assumes a similar definition. However, in order to combat the notions that urban youth are deficit-based actors, authors like Ginwright (2010), Duncan-Andrade (2009), and Watson (2012) remind us of the power youth possess to scrutinize and change their circumstances.

Adolescence, according to Halpern (2005), is a time meant for forging one’s identity, making decisions about what is important, and recognizing one’s role in society. When a person grows up poor and devalued their ability to “address the tasks of that age period” is compromised (Halpern, 2005, p.13). The persistent internalization of stress often leaves minority urban youth feeling overwhelmed, in crisis, and without the ability to explore being young in the way Halpern defines (Akom, 2011; Ginwright, 2010). Duncan-Andrade (2009) investigates how stress significantly strains youth’s ability to learn saying, “the implications of chronic stress for teaching and learning are profound” (p.5). He urges us to consider Abraham Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Huitt, 2007; Figure 2). Every person in society has primary human needs and when they go unmet it is impossible for youth to pursue positive self-actualization.

Figure 2. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs



Disproportionately, urban youth experience a constant attack on these needs (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). In his ethnography, “Black Youth Rising,” Ginwright (2010) explores the implications of oppression on urban youth through acts of violence. He tells the story of a young man named Kevin who witnesses his best friend Amir get shot to death. The trauma Kevin experienced from Amir’s death was overwhelming, and the treatment by police that he encountered was outrageous and an act of emotional violence (Ginwright, 2010). The story is told not as a means to demonize police, but to show how systematic structures of oppression actively inflict violence on urban youth.

Scholars believe that the circumstances, like in the narrative told above, that urban youth deal with negative beliefs that tear away at the chance for a positive future, and influence the temptation to make harmful decisions (Akom, 2011; Ginwright, 2010; Duncan-Andrade, 2009).

As a result of the environments in which youth grow up, reactions incite and urban youth often act in destructive ways. It is no question that their futures may be deeply affected, their social identities determined, and their coping abilities compromised by such circumstances (Akom, 2011; Ogbu, 1992).

In analyzing the issue, it begins to make sense why youth respond in the manner they do. Youth are often aware of the institutions, especially places like the school, that actively fail to work for and in support of them. The trajectory of oppression for urban youth repeats and compounds over time, and youth react accordingly. Noguera (2003) argues that youth response “is often manifested through a negative willingness to participate and fight against the system” (p.342). Often the response is frowned upon, punished, or causes a perpetuation of the negative ideas some might have regarding urban youth. As youth notice and act to subvert the systems in which they live, adults fail to realize the layers of those systemic issues that actively create and perpetuate the problem. Unfortunately, adults problematize youths’ actions, blaming them for being unwilling to participate or attribute it to their troubled nature. Rather, a reframing of these acts would define them as moments of empowerment where youth attempt to gain some control over their lives (Noguera, 2003).

Ginwright (2010) argues that urban youth are under constant attack, but do not only have the capacity to just respond negatively to those structures of repression. He states that certainly “trauma and the inability to heal from it are significant barriers to academic success, civic participation, and general health and well-being” (p.54). However, he notes that once a young person is given the tools to assess and understand their trauma they have the power to positively

grow from it. Sadly, even if youth do not respond negatively, there exists a belief that they are troubled or deserving of punishment (Noguera, 2003).

Nonetheless, like Ginwright (2010), Goodman (2003) also counters this notion describing urban youth as possessors of the capacity to change the systems around them rather than as deficient beings. Goodman (2003) contends that we must deconstruct the individualized blaming of youth. Noguera (2010) in exploring the implications of disciplinary structures in schools gives weight to this conjecture. He recounts that it is the students that need the most help who are often considered the problem and those who are most likely to be suspended, expelled or removed from the classroom. Removing these youth, who are often of color, from the classroom or suspending them is ultimately a disservice and a failure of the local learning institutions to be a place where youth feel safe and valued (McLaughlin, 2000). Understanding that youth act the way they do because of the very systems that oppress them is of upmost importance (Watson, 2012).

**The youth-adult relationship/partnership.** As discussed previously in this literature review, urban youth frequently face great obstacles to success. Kirshner (2008) explains that in “the context of youth empowerment” adults can and often do oppress and perpetuate the obstacles youth face. Adults might prevent access to opportunities, make decisions without a contribution from youth (Hogan, 2002; Kirshner, 2008), enact restrictive policies (Eubanks Owens, 2002), or enforce punitive punishments (Males, 1996; Noguera, 2010). Eubanks Owens argues that “merchants, homeowners or other well-meaning adults” perceive teens, even those who are “obviously [not] engaged in inappropriate behaviors’ as causing trouble” (Eubanks Owens, 2002, p.156). Besides that, even when adults do seek youth participation, the

opportunities might simply be a tokenization of the young person and their perspectives (Kirshner, 2008; Hart, 1992; O'Donoghue Kirshner & McLaughlin, 2002).

The institution of school is one example of a place where this relationship between adults and urban youth plays out (Akom, 2011; Ginwright, 2010). Educators and administrators target low-test scores, low grades, and dropout rates blaming students for their failures (Tough, 2012). Furthermore, schools are not “positive developmental settings for many low-income children, and they become steadily less welcoming as children advance in grade” because of their access to resources and a lack of understanding for the circumstances they face (Halpern, 2005, p.12). In addition to school, the media depicts young people as delinquents, violent, and non-conformists (Eubanks Owens, 2002). Policies like curfews, anti-loitering laws, and skateboarding ordinances make public spaces off limits and inaccessible (Eubanks Owens, 2002). These policies and perceptions form in conjunction with the conception that children are “broken or in danger of becoming broken and therefore were regarded as problems to be managed” (Benson, 2003, Roth et al., 1998; Lerner et al., 2005).

Historically, from the view of the adult, a young person doing well in the world was “depicted as someone who was not taking drugs or using alcohol, not engaging in unsafe sex, not participating in crime or violence” (Lerner et al, 2005). This theory is flawed and enables the negative relationship between adults and young people. It is important to say that adults do not necessarily act out these forms of oppression intentionally. Fortunately, adults possess the power, privilege, and ability to develop awareness and change their view of adolescents. Akom (2011) tells us that, “we have to move beyond looking at individuals, but have to look at it on a number of levels like internalized, interpersonal, ideological, institutional, and inter-institutional”

(p.843). He goes on to say that, “uninterrupted, these structures reproduce and naturalize social meanings” that focus on the individual rather than the system (Akom, 2011, p.836). Adults with an awareness of the greater structures at work may seek to reframe urban youth as resources rather than damaged individuals (Checkaway et al., 2003).

Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory supports this. According to PYD scholars, “every child has talents, strengths, and interests that offer the child potential for a bright future” (Damon, 2004, p.13), and that youth are resources not problems to be managed (Roth and Brooks Gunn, 2003a, 2003b). Adults who are able to perceive youth as asset-based also have the opportunity to be allies and advocates of youth voice or partners in learning processes and ultimately healers (Kirshner, 2010). Approaching youth as positive stakeholders in their own development and learning allows them to form higher levels of competency, confidence, closer connections to adults, and greater care and compassion (Lerner et al., 2005). In PYD these are also known as the Five Cs (Lerner et al., 2005). Along with this reframe of youth communities, those adults willing to confront the harsh realities of social inequality both through their approach and pedagogy can potentially restore a sense of hope within urban youth (Duncan-Andrade, 2009).

According to Zeldin, Larson, Camino, and O’Connor (2005), central to this different type of approach to the youth-adult relationship are three things to keep in mind:

1. Ensure youth rights of participation in decision-making: youth are capable and should have their views taken seriously.
2. Promote the positive development of youth: positive relationships with adults can empower youth and allow them to feel supported.
3. Build community and civil society: together both youth and adults might become more competent and confident thus improving their communities.

Other scholars like Ginwright (2010), Duncan-Andrade (2009), and Watson (2012), express the need for high levels of communication, community centered approaches, compassion and commitment when attempting to successfully reach, teach, and develop urban youth communities. The opportunities for adults to work on affective relationships with youth are great. Attuning to their emotional state, listening, providing decision-making power, and working side-by-side with youth actively help to break down barriers created by institutionalized oppressions (Zeldin et al., 2005).

**The exercise of agency in an adult run society.** The difficulty of the context described above often inhibits adolescence's ability to exercise agency and enact control over their present situations (Halpern, 2005). Zeldin et al. (2005) explain that power dynamics within the adult-youth relationships exist and are unavoidable. However, they acknowledge that, "adults have knowledge, experience, and social capital that they can bring to relationships, resources that often are not available to youth and that are necessary for the sustainability of programming overtime" (p.8). Ambivalence of one's own power is problematic. At the same time, understanding the contributions that can be made in the youth-adult relationship are important especially in terms of youth development.

Kirshner (2008, 2010) goes further addressing the dilemmas that arise for adults when attempting to provide youth with agency especially in out-of-school context community based programs. He explains that the emphasis on youth-led programming and leadership can cause adults to struggle with when to facilitate, interject, or be more directive in their relationship with a young person or group of young people (Kirshner, 2008; Kirshner, 2010). This exploration of



when and how adults might appropriately exercise their power shows the capacity, privilege, and agency adults are afforded in their relationships with youth.

Central to the recognition of adult power should also be an exploration of how youth might be supported in the exercise of their own agency. Articulations of youth agency, in forms deemed positive, act as counter narratives to the notion that urban youth often only choose acts of defiance and self-destructive behaviors (Noguera & Cannella, 2010). Noguera & Cannella (2010) urge us to value the capacities of understanding youth possess:

Any serious researcher who seeks to understand the answers to such questions must recognize that young people constantly make decisions and choices; one goal of research must be to learn under what conditions these choices are made. They must also realize that like most human beings there is typically some underlying logic to youth behavior and that, like adults, young people are also capable of coming up with rationalizations for their mistakes and errors in judgment (Noguera, 2003, p.335).

This research attempts to recognize how youth are indeed “agents capable of change and transformation” (Kirshner, 2010; Ginwright & James, 2002).

### **The community-based youth organization (CBYO) as a landscape for change.**

Positive physical and emotional spaces that provide support and outlets are essential for youth development. As “oppression in urban communities threatens the type of community spaces that foster hope and imagination,” CBYOs provide opportunities for positive development (Ginwright, 2010, p.12). Noam and Tillinger (2005) argue that, “it is partly because schools are failing many children that so many people dedicate themselves to afterschool programs and to the idea of intermediary developmental environments” (p.76).

Community-based youth organization and the services they offer are defined in multiple ways throughout the literature. First, Halpern (2005) states that CBYOs are a:

...set of institutions [existing] as a thin, decentralized, idiosyncratically, and inadequately funded network sponsored by a diverse array of community-based agencies, youth serving organizations, arts, sports, or other focused organizations and a small number of vocationally oriented organizations. Some youth programs are primarily places to hang out, play ball, feel safe, and receive a small measure of help in thinking about the future (p.14).

Community-based youth organizations are also defined as intermediary spaces for youth to go in the time after school lets out (Strobel et al., 2008; Noam & Tillinger, 2004; Winnicott, 1975).

Building on these definitions, O'Donoghue (2010) sees CBYOs as counterpublics. She explains that:

The counterpublic concept points to the importance of looking at CBYOs as spaces, rather than simply places, for youth participation and learning. This understanding emphasizes the internal aspects of such organizations (mission and culture, participation practices, content and pedagogy), as well as ways in which they link youth to broader publics and engage them in work toward community change (p.231).

Together these definitions address CBYOs as places suitable for youth in ways that school and other environments may not be (Noam & Tillinger, 2005).

When CBYOs are an option, urban youth have a place to seek refuge. Ginwright (2010) explains how “neighborhood-based organizations” in black communities recognize their power to be healing and caring places for youth to come. In other words, the potential organizations have “to bridge the multiple worlds of youth, creating a safe space that is generally more accepting and supportive” is great (Noam & Tillinger, 2004).

With that in mind, CBYOs are places that may promote a youth's sense of value and position them as asset-based community members and students (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; O'Donoghue, 2010; Fine et al., 2000). Strobel et al. (2008) find that youth perspective often lacks from the process of organizing structures and that as a response CBYOs have the opportunity to honor their voice. It is the job of researchers to:

...capture what adolescents find appealing and what motivates their involvement over time and in meaningful ways. Too often, however, the perspectives of youth themselves are missing from discussions about how after school contexts should be organized (Strobel et. al. 2008).

CBYOs provide youth with a voice to fight back against the systems that repress them and can show them how to interrogate their identities and the cultures in which they live (Camangian, 2010). We must recognize that young people, even when reacting negatively to the situations they face, are deserving of equitable services and treatment. Winnicott (1975) theorizes that in these inherently safe places youth can experiment, form an identity, solve crises, and make choices (Strobel et al., 2008). These are “lower-stakes environment” where youth can feel supported, accepted, and validated (Noam & Tillinger, 2005).

Positive Youth Development approaches support these assertions. Lerner, et al. (2005) argue that “there is reason to believe that both positive development and youth contributions to self and to their ecology are likely to take place in the context of community-based youth development programs” (Lerner, et al. 2005, p.24). Within these environments the whole person is considered and there is opportunity for positive feedback. Measurable outcomes in the form of the Five Cs framework provides information for CBYOs to focus on when approaching asset based youth development (Lerner, et al. 2005, p.23; Figure 3). When the Five Cs are present in youth they are more likely to invest in their communities, contribute to self and to others, and make a contribution to their own development.

**Figure 3. Working Definitions of the Five Cs of Positive Youth Development**

<b>Five Cs</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Competence	Positive view of one’s actions in domain specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational.
Confidence	An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy; one’s global self-regard, as

	opposed to domain specific beliefs.
Connection	Positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship.
Character	Respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity.
Caring and Compassion	A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

## Learning Frameworks

In her book “Learning to Liberate,” which is an exploration of four community-based educators and their pedagogical practices, Watson (2012) reminds us that learning takes place not only in school, but also in out-of-school contexts. Community-based youth organizations provide opportunities for youth to engage in alternative practices and environments of learning. This particular study focused on four theoretical learning frameworks presented in the literature in an effort to understand the forms and opportunities of learning taking place at Sunset Youth Services (Figure 4): interest and self-sustained learning, apprenticeship learning, collegiality, and legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice. Threads of these learning frameworks connect, relate, and significantly overlap. Understanding the relationship between these approaches of teaching and learning sheds light on the research questions asked in this study.

This section’s exploration of the literature attempts to situate the learning frameworks occurring at SYS. I do this in an effort to provide context for the relationship between the learning opportunities youth take part in at SYS and the subsequent engagement, commitment,

and investment youth make as a result. Along with that, further highlighted in this section is the importance of community based educators and the essential role they have in carrying out and facilitating these processes. Halpern (2005) and Musick (1999) observe that the youth-adult relationship is essential for “personal growth in teens in out-of-school programs” and that these relationships are particularly wonderful when they occur within “the context of meaningful, shared endeavors” (Halpern, 2005, p.12). Watson (2012) points out the necessity of this type of exploration as the current literature is missing a more detailed explanation of the pedagogical contributions of community-based educators, and the outreach they do in lives of youth.

**Figure 4. Learning Frameworks (Van Steenis, 2014).**

<b>Learning Frameworks</b>	<b>Theorists</b>	<b>Defining Characteristics</b>
Interest and self-sustained learning	Brigid Barron (2006)	Once interest in a topic is sparked, youth might choose and create learning opportunities for themselves. These interest-driven learning activities are boundary crossing and self-sustaining.
Apprenticeship learning	Rogoff (1995), Lave and Wenger (1991), Lave (1990), Kirshner (2008, 2010), Vygotsky (1978), Halpern (2005)	Project-based collaborative work that breaks from the traditional top down teaching structures of school. Apprenticeship learning resembles collaborative activity, in which novices learn from a master or expert of the skill. The apprentice receives just enough guidance to emulate the tasks. Over time they are become the expert and are able to teach others.
Collegiality	Soep and Chavez (2010), Kirshner (2008, 2010)	Youth-adult or peer-to-peer partnerships and collaborations in an effort to complete joint-tasks with a common goal in mind.
Legitimate Peripheral Participation in a Community of Practice	Lave and Wenger (1991), Watson-Gegeo (2001)	The learner begins as a legitimated participant in a learning process eventually moving through a series of increasingly expert roles as skills develop.

**Interest and self-sustained learning.** Earlier discussion in this review revealed conclusions drawn in the literature about urban youth and their relationship with in-school learning. Because of strained economic conditions, violence, toxic learning environments, the negative beliefs placed upon them, and a low access to resources adolescents growing up in urban environments sometimes lack the capacity and frequently the desire to participate in traditional in-school learning environments (Ginwright, 2005; Ginwright, 2010; Akom, 2011; Noguera, 2010; Watson, 2012). Related, in their exploration of formal and informal learning environments, Scribner and Cole (1973) conclude that the demands of formal schooling “by their very nature [are] discontinuous with those of everyday life” (p.558). They go on to explain that:

...it seems unreasonable to expect masses of children to cope successfully with them so long as they perceive the school to be a hostile institution. Yet this is exactly the situation in many poor and minority neighborhoods in the United States. The antagonism the schools generate by their disrespect for the indigenous culture and by ignorance of its customs almost guarantees the production of nonlearners (p.558)

Therefore, if the formal school environment is failing urban youth how and where might available, accessible, and interesting learning environments be provided?

Community-based youth organizations and youth outreach practitioners have the opportunity to provide young people with forums to learn in an informal environment. In these informal environments interests that cut across home, school, and out-of-school learning contexts can form (Barron, 2006). It becomes important then to advance our awareness related to fostering informal learning environments, and also for understanding the impetus amongst youth to latch onto particular activities.

Barron (2006), in her exploration of learning ecologies, which are defined as opportunities to learn, conjectures three things:

1. Within any life space, a variety of ideational resources can spark and sustain interest in learning.
2. People not only choose but also develop and create learning opportunities for themselves once they are interested, assuming they have time, freedom and resources to learn.
3. Interest-drive learning activities are boundary crossing and self-sustaining.

Barron argues that once an idea is sparked people are likely to foster their interest, develop it, and then apply it in various aspects of their lives barring they have the resources to do so (Barron, 2006). Furthermore, this learning ecology framework shows evidence of the influence informal learning environments might have on the formal (Barron, 2006). Of importance to this study are the sparks of inspiration that occur when interest develops in the informal setting. Identities develop, and an investment in future learning forms (Barron, 2006).

**Apprenticeship learning, collegiality, and legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice.** Apprenticeship, collegiality, and legitimate peripheral participation are closely related theories of teaching and learning. Literature that defined these frameworks, in addition to connecting and relating them to youth-centered learning environments, was explored for this paper (Kirshner, 2010; Kirshner, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Soep and Chavez, 2010; Rogoff, 2003; Halpern, 2005; Heath, 1999). These types of learning expose the importance of informal teaching environments, youth-adult partnerships, peer-to-peer learning, and the acquisition of expert knowledge.

Kirshner (2010) defines apprenticing as a process in which “novices receive just enough guidance from experts” to pursue their goals (Halpern, 2005; Rogoff, 2003; Kirshner, 2010), with the eventual desired outcome being that the learner can perform tasks without the support of an expert (Kirshner, 2010; Brown, Collins, Duguid, 1989; Heath, 1999). Soep and Chavez

(2010) consider a similar and related theory called collegiality where adults and youth participate “in meaningful goal-oriented activities” alongside one another (Kirshner, 2010, p.40; Soep & Chavez, 2010). Other theorists, most notably Lave and Wenger (1991), define these processes as legitimate peripheral participation where the learner begins as a “legitimated participant on the edges (periphery) of the activity, and moving through a series of increasingly expert roles as learners’ skills develop” (Watson-Gegeo, 2001, p.24).

Apprenticeship, collegiality, and legitimate peripheral participation do not only occur as transfers of information between youth and adults. The transfer of information may happen when a young person teaches an adult or also between peers. In conjunction, these theories highlight the importance of sharing information between colleagues, partners, masters and apprentices who share common goals. Vygotsky (1978) explains these interactions with inexperienced members are essential to peer development. Furthermore, the exchange of information that takes place in a community of practice allows for the prioritization of relationships between learners, and building knowledge with similar goals in mind (Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Watson-Gegeo, 2005; Barron, 2006).

Kirshner (2010) explains the impacts of these learning models in depth. In his article “Apprenticeship Learning in Youth Activism,” he investigates apprenticeship learning in a multiracial organization called Youth Rising (Kirshner, 2010). At Youth Rising, adults focus on teaching young people about political organizing, persuasive speaking, and problem framing through an apprenticeship approach. In reference to the success of this model, Kirshner (2010) questions how high school students especially those that by “many measures are failing academically” are able to learn how to perform complex demands of running campaigns



effectively (p.37-38). The importance of this is two fold. First, youth known to fail academically show a level of sophistication unexpected of them. Secondly, these youth in partnership with adults are able to prove themselves as competent individuals.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This is a single site case study that utilized multiple ethnographic methods. My methodology, including interviews and observations, were informed by a critical and interpretive ethnographic approach (Carspecken, 1996; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973; Spradley, 1980; Thomas, 1993). Further, my research is a single case study that involves “a real-life contemporary context or setting,” which Creswell (2013) argues as being a methodological approach itself (p.97; Yin, 2009). For the purposes of this research, I did not distinguish between the two, as I believe them to be deeply interconnected in my data collection process.

The SYS case study is instrumental in showing how the model might be replicated to meet a similar need in other contexts. I wanted to make sense of why youth remain invested in the culture of SYS, doing so by exposing their shared language, patterns of behavior, and their attitudes (Creswell, 2013). Through a systematic collection of observations, thick descriptions of SYS’s culture emerged (Karen-Watson Gegeo, 1992).

One-on-one interviews were determined to be the most practical and useful for answering my research questions. Subsequently, I designed an interview protocol that included lead off and follow up questions. This design allowed for flexibility during the interviews (Carspecken, 1996; See Appendix E). I conducted the interviews with ten youth and three adults determined by the Center to be the most representative of the current SYS culture.

Participant observations also helped identify the youth most appropriate to interview for this study. Their ages ranged from 18-22 years old, and individuals varied

in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and number of years involved with SYS. The three adults interviewed included two females and one male. Each previously attended SYS as youth participants, and now each of them has fulltime employment at the Center. Their ages range from 30-40 years old. As a collective, the interviews were meant to clarify and confirm the findings yielded by participant observations. Before interviewing, all of these people were believed to have openness to sharing their ideas (Creswell, 2013). The interviewees showed how they make meaning and interpret the culture of SYS (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

I conducted this study under the approval of Karen Watson-Gegeo's Education 205A/B Ethnography courses and with IRB approval, which I gained in January 2014.

### **Description of Participants**

Sunset Youth Services provides extensive program options to 150 youth per year. Roughly one hundred of those youth, and sometimes their families, participate in the case management program. While the total number of youth served by the Center provides an overall context for the study, the actual data collected focused primarily, but not entirely, on youth participants in the digital and media arts program. This included 35 young people ages 14-22 years old that regularly attend SYS to record their music. In addition to those 35 youth, I observed eleven young people currently employed by the Center to run the in-house youth-run record label called UpStar Records. Sunset Youth Services calls these youth employees the UpSquad.

In addition to the programs like digital media arts offered by SYS, youth may also attend the Center and not participate in any structured program. Observations and interviews included many of these young people. I considered these youth in data collection because like the youth participating in the digital and media arts program, they also consistently attend and participate at SYS.

### **Description of Settings (See Appendixes B-D)**

**Participant observations at Sunset Youth Services.** I collected my data in two main settings. Over one-half of my data collection took place at the Sunset Youth Services location in the Outer Sunset neighborhood of San Francisco, CA. Apartments, houses, small businesses, and the ocean surround the Center (See Image 1).

Employee desks and offices are located immediately to the left as you enter SYS. To the right is a large open area with computers, a portable recording booth, a climbing wall and the restrooms. In addition to these two spaces, the Center has a second floor where the recording studio and a kitchen are to be found. I spent a large portion of my observation time upstairs because I most extensively focused on Sunset Youth Services' digital recording and media arts program, and the most youth centered action and interaction, at the time of my study, occurred there. Recording sessions frequently took place between 4:00-8:00pm daily.

**Image 1. View of Sunset Youth Services from across the street.**



**Interviews at Sunset Youth Services.** All thirteen interviews conducted for this study took place in a small conference room at the Center. The room was quiet and allowed for minimal distractions when interviewing.

**Observations at BoothStar.** I spent a fourth of my observation time collecting data outside of SYS at local high schools observing BoothStar recording sessions. This year SYS received a large grant to buy a mobile recording booth, called BoothStar, which is taken to local high schools in the surrounding community. The goal of this endeavor is to influence youth at to create music rather than participating in violence, gangs and other potentially harmful activities. BoothStar remains on high school campuses for two-week time periods, and the UpSquad, along with Vicky, Wendy, and Joel advertise and run recording sessions with interested students. Anyone from the high school can participate.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

The study draws upon the previously discussed data sources including the participant observations and semi-structured interviews. My data collection at SYS began on October 28, 2013 and ended March 30, 2014. I also collected two main artifacts from the SYS staff: a timeline of the program and a paper written by staff at the Center called “Smart Compassion: Why We Must Invest In Attachment Communities.”

All of my participant observations occurred at SYS and BoothStar locations. I visited SYS twice per week for five months, with visits lasting four hours and occurring during different times of the day and on different days of the week. Sometimes because of scheduling conflicts, miscommunications, and the occasional closure of the Center I would only visit once per week. I observed the youth participants as they engaged in various tasks; however, I also participated in activities, like recording sessions, video production, and listening to music, alongside of the youth. These opportunities allowed me to build rapport with many of them and to verify my observations through informal conversations.

During observations, I recorded my notes in a notebook dedicated only to the SYS field site visits in order to maintain confidentiality. To build rapport and limit barriers between participants and myself, notes were not taken using my computer. After completing site visits, I expanded my notes in a Word document using my computer, which was then transferred and coded in a web based qualitative software program Dedoose. The expansion of field notes included the writing of observer, methodological, and theoretical notes (Carspecken, 1996; Schatzman and Strauss, 1973).

A substantial portion of my findings for this research emerged from the interviews I conducted. If at any point a member of the study wished to withdrawal from participating, his or her request would be granted and someone new recruited. In the end, a participant did not refrain from the study once it was underway. Upon gaining consent from the appropriate parties, I digitally recorded and transcribed interviews. All data collected from the interviews were subsequently entered into Dedoose to be coded.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis for this paper was an iterative process that began alongside field note collection. Initially, I utilized Word Processor and a color scheme to code my notes, but then switched to Dedoose, which advanced my data analysis abilities significantly. I entered expanded field notes, interview transcriptions, and media into the tool and created a coding scheme that evolved throughout the process.

The analysis also included a great deal of selecting excerpts, coding them and then writing memos on said excerpts. These processes aided in organizing my thoughts, seeing themes emerge from the data, and were rooted in processes related to grounded theory in addition to ethnographic analysis and representation (Creswell, 2013). An open coding method was used in order to honor what emerged from the data, and from that the coding categories were constructed revealing relationships and central phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, the analysis process was free of a particular framework allowing me to draw on interpretations of the culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2013; Charmaz, 2006).

The initial content analysis yielded five main codes: “adult-youth relationships,” “instances of agency,” “community,” “creativity, collaboration, mastery,” and “youth openness.” These codes remained a major focus and provided a framework that I worked with throughout data collection and analysis. Eventually these codes became my parent codes to which I added sub-codes to further assess the data. These sub-codes included things like “moments of structure” and “lack of censorship” housed under the parent code “adult-youth relationships.” Other sub-codes related to the informal teaching and learning process, including moments of apprenticeship learning, and identity development through social justice work with the youth. Some of the sub-codes also deeply connected to the key findings in this project.

As the process continued, I housed codes within categories centrally related to my three primary research questions: “Why do the youth come?,” “Why do the youth stay?,” and “Where are the youth going?” Clear divisions between these categories are boundary crossing and interconnected as many of the interactions that take place present layers of depth.

### **Positionality and Relationship with Participants**

As Spradley (1980) reminds us, our research can have negative implications and we have the responsibility to represent information in a thoughtful way that protects the subject. I attempted to represent findings in a meaningful way that described in detail the everyday accounts of how the youth and adults at SYS understand their lives in the space (Geertz, 1973).

Upon gaining entry, the staff at SYS defined my role not only as a researcher but also as a volunteer. Sunset Youth Service staff granted me freedom to conduct my research and to



interact with the youth however I felt appropriate to the data collection process. The trust I experienced at the field site allowed me to feel comfortable in the space.

There are three things to note about the process related to discussions with Dawn, specifically, and my own insecurities in terms of my positionality. Upon gaining entry, Dawn informed me that the youth who came regularly to the Center were acquainted with SYS's dependence on grant money and were accustomed to taking surveys and speaking to auditors. She stated this, I believe, to put me at ease as a researcher who hoped to conduct interviews.

Secondly, Dawn mentioned the issues they encounter regularly with volunteers. As almost a point of warning, Dawn explained that volunteers often get turned off because of what she described as their "free formed and kind of messy" vibe and approach as practitioners. Dawn also warned me about the nature of the population they serve and that volunteers leave because of the challenging environment. This cultural reality for the staff and youth at the Center never proved problematic for me.

Lastly, but not least important, was my own notion of what it was like to be a white woman studying youth of color. There were various moments entering the environment that brought up feelings of awkwardness and a sense that I may not belong. I felt that my own white privilege might get in the way of actually doing the research. I relate to Peggy McIntosh (1988) when she states: "...my school gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture" (p.6). This reality was the nature of my growing up as well and by no means did I want to take that into SYS with me. I acknowledge my own privilege to conduct this research, and I make no claims in having any true ability to empathize with what it means to grow up marginalized.

## Results

### Why do the Youth Come? (See Figure 5)

The youth who attend the Center initially come to SYS for a number of reasons. Of the ten youth interviewed for this project, nine of them reported coming to SYS through a friend, an adult mentor, or a family member. Findings showed that word of mouth most strongly pulled youth into SYS. The youth interviewees included a range of those highly involved in the Digital Arts and Media program, but also those who utilize the center as just a hangout space. Further, observations indicated that court-ordered mandates and caseworker assistance still play a prevalent role in drawing youth into SYS. The avenues of access into SYS often overlap. For instance, a youth brought to SYS by a court-ordered mandate might stay because of a newly developed music-based interest.

**Figure 5. Reasons that youth come to SYS**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Influence</b>
<b>Word Of Mouth</b>	Friend
	Family Member
	Adult Mentor
	BoothStar
	UpStar Records
<b>Mandated</b>	Court Ordered
	Forced by an adult not a part of the justice system
	Mandated by Group Home

**Music-based interest.** Data from this investigation revealed that many of the youth initially came to SYS and stayed involved because of their music-based interest. Drew, a multi-year SYS participant,<sup>5</sup> reported that an adult mentor influenced his involvement:

....so he sat in on the session and in 30 minutes we recorded this session and as soon as it was done he was like “dude that was really impressive have you heard of SYS?” I was like “no” and he was like oh alright here is my number and address and he kind of just told me alright come here and stop by. So, I came here and checked it out and I really liked it and I recorded one of my first songs here that I put on iTunes...so I started coming back. And then I started volunteering, started learning (personal communication, February 5, 2014).

On the other hand, Stephanie a young woman who has been involved for over 7 years told me that her friend Geraldine brought her to the Center and that she ended up loving it because of her collaboration on music projects (Geraldine, personal communication, December 19, 2013). Other youth like Marcus and Damien came because of BoothStar’s presence at their high school.

At the time of data collection, seven of the youth interviewed were employees of UpStar records. These youth teach beat making, facilitate recording sessions, and edit videos amongst other tasks. Initially, they came to the Center because of their musical interests, became engaged with the music making process, and showed a level of commitment that led to employment with UpStar records. I consistently witnessed these seven youth’s presence at SYS. Not initially the case, their employment was the impetus for regular attendance.

**In-risk youth.** The youth observed for this study also came to SYS because they found themselves in challenging situations. Geraldine, a young woman who has been

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this report, all youth are referred to by pseudonyms.

involved with SYS for 10 years, reported that Vicky brought her in because she was “a troubled youth and they wanted to get [her] off the street and make [her] a better person” (personal communication, January 22, 2014). Geraldine’s long-term involvement signifies investment and the level of support that SYS provides in terms of their dedication to the youth. Geraldine exemplifies the population of youth utilizing and becoming involved with SYS for reasons other than media and digital arts.

Grey, another youth, told me that the circumstances he was in when he came to SYS were “weird” and that initially he “didn’t even like being [at SYS],” but that the group home he was living in made him come. In other words, Grey had little to no agency in the decision-making process to come to SYS. Today, Grey has been attending SYS in some capacity for 5 years, with varying levels of weekly attendance. He reported during his interview that he comes at least three days of the week because he knows Dawn and Ron will worry about him if he does not stop by (personal communication, January 8, 2014).

Sunset Youth Services staff considers the majority of their youth to be in-risk. Dawn and Ron explained to me, on a number of occasions, that the current culture at SYS was different than it had been in the past. While youth like Geraldine and Grey still frequented the Center, Dawn and Ron referenced the fact that many of the most involved youth, at the time I conducted my research, did not arrive because of a court ordered mandate or casework. They came on their own volition because of an excitement to be involved with the Center.

**Word of mouth.** Interviewees reported frequently that word of mouth was one of the main reasons they came to SYS. Participant observations confirmed this. One day while watching a BoothStar recording session, I noticed the UpStar employees invite two male high students to SYS on three separate occasions. Jerome, one of the UpSquad employees, invited the boys to come on Friday to collaborate on a music project. Ron also offered for both boys to come down to the Center so he could teach them about ProTools, the recording software they use.<sup>6</sup>

BoothStar spread the word about the opportunities that existed at SYS and being involved with music-making. The gestures enacted by the staff to invite youth seemed natural, commonplace, and nonchalant. The philosophy, practice, and availability of SYS inspired the others to enter the community and embody the same open arms practice. I, as a researcher and volunteer, even felt the power of this. When I gained entry at SYS, Dawn expressed to me, “I think Sam made a good decision sending you to us” (personal communication, November 8, 2013).

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<sup>6</sup> Observations occurred on 11/18/2013

## **Why do the Youth Stay?**

The data revealed a variety of factors that contributed to youth retention, including:

- The community
- Youth relationships and partnerships with adults
- The lack of censorship and traditional disciplinary structures
- A sense of SYS being a safe place
- Models of informal learning
- The possibility for identity development through participation in social justice work

In the following sections, each of these topics will be discussed in detail to show the significant impact SYS has on the lives of youth.

**The Sunset Youth Services community.** The community, in the case of this study, comprised youth participants, employees and others who connected to SYS because of proximity of the Center to their home, school, and juvenile hall. I learned, immediately upon gaining entry that Dawn and Ron live in the neighborhood within close proximity of the Center. Their closeness allows them to be available whenever needed. Dawn explained to me that she and Ron spend more time at the Center now that their son is away at college. In the same conversation, she told me that even though the Center closes at 8:00 p.m., they often find themselves there later because they are helping the youth or wrapping up their work (Dawn Stueckle, personal communication, November 16, 2013).

During almost all of my site visits, and throughout interviews, I found evidence for community being a central part of the organization's philosophy and its attractiveness to the youth. Overwhelmingly, the youth and adults I interviewed spoke of the community at SYS as resembling a family and the Center to being like a home.

The word family seemed to be used to create a feeling of acceptance. One youth told me: “Anyone’s welcome. Everyone is kind of like family. That’s what they told me here when I first came: we’re a family” (personal communication, February 5, 2014). I could relate. When I began conducting research at SYS, Dawn told me that I was now a part of the SYS family. SYS uses the word family to create a strong sense of inclusion. The focus on community and inclusion is meant to give youth who have abandonment issues a feeling of consistency and support. Dawn said to me that the “focus is on building relationships when volunteers or youth come they are joining a family” (Dawn Stueckle, personal communication, November 16, 2013).

Further, individuals at SYS mentioned, exemplified, and explained the importance of community in a number of ways. Many of the youth, and the three adults I interviewed, expressed a commitment to the SYS family. Most of these youth, and of course the adults, participated in SYS for longer than a year, worked with or as caseworkers at the Center, or experienced close relationships with the adult employees. Grey told me that he comes to SYS because he “feels like it’s a family” (personal communication, February 8, 2014). The closeness Grey expressed to SYS was exemplified during my first visit to the center when I witnessed him visit Dawn and Ron’s home to check on Ron when he was sick.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> During the volunteer training, I encountered Grey offering to go check on Ron who had been experiencing some health issues having just been released from the hospital. Grey offered to go check on Ron after he saw Dawn express concern for her husband. He also noticed that she needed to finish the training. I experienced the trust that Dawn had for Grey and also the depth of his relationship with the couple through this interaction.

Two other youth, Geraldine and Stephanie, who have both been participants at SYS for over 7 years, called the adults at the Center their mom, dad, aunties, and uncles.

In Stephanie's interview she explained:

Dawn is like my mom. When I was living with my dad, my mom was living in Ireland, and I didn't see her for years. Like, five, six, seven years. Dawn was there for me the whole time. I was going through it with my dad and his family because he's Filipino and he is one of those strict Filipinos...he wouldn't let me do anything. Dawn has always been Mom. She is like the mom of this place to everyone. Even my brother just moved back over here from Washington, and he is new to the Center and even if he is, like, every time I see Dawn she makes me smile. The love she gives you is like you're her kid (personal communication, December 19, 2013).

In the same vein Geraldine said:

Vicky is like my Auntie Vicky, that's what I call her. We have a lovable relationship. We all actually have a lovable relationship. Mama Dawn's my mom. Her husband is my dad. My pa is Mutasem. My Auntie Natalie she's cool too, like, she's more like a sister to me, but I call her Auntie Natalie. She's always there for me when I go through it a lot (personal communication, January 22, 2014).

These youth expressed an intense sense of closeness to the adults. This sentiment exists first because of their long-term involvement at the Center and, secondly, because all three of these youth have been through traumatic situations where the adults supported them.

Findings also indicate that other youth use the word family differently, and appear invested in it to lesser degrees than the examples provided above. For instance, one youth who spoke to me about SYS being like a family had no idea what role Dawn and Ron play at the Center, while other youth considered them their surrogate "mom" and "dad." I asked Marcus:

Erica: Do you interact with Dawn and Ron at all?

Marcus: Who?



Erica: Dawn and Ron the folks who...do you not know them?

Marcus: I probably seen them a couple of times (personal communication, February 5, 2014).

This answer surprised me, but it also demonstrated that culture of inclusion that has been instilled in the SYS community. Some youth buy into SYS being *like* a family rather than feeling deeply connected to the sense that it was *their* family.

In addition, SYS was often described as fulfilling the role of a home. Two excerpts exemplified this:

Marquis: It feels like home really. Like, yeah its just like home. I can't really say it any other way.

Erica: Yeah. What is a place being like home...what does that mean to you?

Marquis: It just feels normal, routine, you feel like you just belong there. Like that is your space. That is where you be at. Yeah. Like home. Like, I am more comfortable here than I am in my own house (personal communication, January 8, 2014).

While Marcus told me:

Yeah it's like basically a second home. Like, if I don't want to stay at home I just know I can come here and just chill relax do homework listen to music talk on the phone (personal communication, February 5, 2014).

Others shared similar feelings like, "I am able to go there and just feel comfortable" and that it is a place to get good food after being at school all day.

Other instances of community occurred through physical gestures. My first field visit with youth present was at a pizza place because Joel, Vicky, and Wendy threw a pizza party for the UpSquad to honor their accomplishments so far. When I arrived the food was out on the table and everyone was eating. The moment, I sat down at the table,

a youth handed me a plate. This instance occurred before I even introduced myself, and it felt like being welcomed to the small community.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, before introducing myself Joel winked at me indicating a point of welcome, and that same day, as I was leaving Joel gave me a hug and thanked me.

Later that day while eating pizza, three youth who experienced the BoothStar set-up at their school showed up to the pizza place. Two girls arrived together and both were immediately offered food and a spot at the table. Later, a young man arrived alone and although we were wrapping up, was also offered food and a seat to sit. All three of them expressed their desire to be more involved with SYS because of an invitation from and their positive and inviting experience with the UpSquad.<sup>9</sup>

**Relationships and partnerships with adults.** Evidence showed that youth-adult relationships influenced sustained youth participation at SYS. Individual relationships and the focused ways adults treated the youth played a major role in this result. At SYS, at the time of the study, adults acted as supporters, teachers, nurturers and friends. In response the youth respected the adult employees, looked up to them, and sought out their expertise.

Dawn noted on a few occasions how relationships with the youth are challenging because of the nature of serving in risk youth. She elaborated on this stating that relationships “can be messy” and that “relationships *are* messy.” Dawn did not leave it at that. She contended that we as adults “are earning a right to be a part of their lives,” because “the kids are vulnerable and precious,” and seeking stability (personal

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<sup>8</sup> Observation occurred 11/15/2013

<sup>9</sup> Observation occurred 11/15/2013

communication, November 16, 2013). Throughout my time at SYS, on no occasion did Dawn speak disparagingly or reproachfully of the youth, even though they did get into trouble and struggled with boundaries both emotional and physical. Related, Dawn encouraged me to lock up my stuff when I came to SYS because if a youth stole my computer it would be “both the [my] bad and the kid’s bad.” All of this shows, how she positions the youth as people deserving of the same care and respect as anyone else regardless of their past, and she makes space for the complicated aspects of relationships that inevitably arise.

Sunset Youth Services’ staff also nurtured youth through making meals available and accessible. Dawn mentioned a few times that they feed the youth and cook at least one meal each evening for them. They do this, she explained because the youth experience food insecurity and hunger. During my first field visit to SYS, Joel showed care for a young man by making him cinnamon rolls to eat.<sup>10</sup> The care Joel demonstrated, and the availability of food provided an opportunity for a connection between youth and adults.

In addition, the benefits of the youth-adult relationship emerged from various instances of mentorship and teaching outside of just the music-making.<sup>11</sup> During the pizza party, as described in the previous section, one conversation exemplified this. The UpSquad team at the time was made up mainly of young men. Joel inquired with the boys about female participation. Chris spoke up first, relating how more girls are involved than he originally thought might be. Overall, everyone agreed that things were going well, but

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<sup>10</sup> Observation took place on 10/28/2013

<sup>11</sup> A more detailed conversation of mentorship related to music making will be discussed later in the paper.

that girls seem to be more nervous to sing and perform. Vicky asserted herself saying that it is responsibility of the boys to make the girls feel comfortable. Vicky reminded them “every day is a boy’s day,” and Joel said women might not be as comfortable with the scene and with singing as the boys. Joel concluded saying that they should be “service oriented realizing that everyone can be just as creative as the next person not just the boys elbowing each other to get in.”<sup>12</sup>

Instances of praise confirmed the positive relationships between the youth and adults at SYS. Praise frequently occurred through body language, small phrases, and the music creation process. There were two moments where Joel made an effort to positively praise the UpSquad members. During the pizza dinner each of us shared our high and low moments for the week. Having the option to pick any high moment, Joel chose to speak about two of the youths’ success in raising \$10,000 for SYS and UpStar records. Joel explained the excellent job they did in communicating SYS’s mission to the grantors. Even though the grantors lacked familiarity with “what a beat was,” Joel said “because of the awesome job Deandre and Angelica did they came home with a donation.” In this moment, Joel credited the earning of the money to the two youth and showered them with public praise.<sup>13</sup>

At the same dinner, Joel praised the entire group saying that multiple teachers have communicated the great impact the UpSquad is having on the school. Joel explained that students who do not usually stay after school, let alone come to school in the first place, were excited about making music with the BoothStar and the UpSquad and were

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<sup>12</sup> Observation took place on 11/15/2013.

<sup>13</sup> Observation took place on 11/15/2013.

attending school because of it. Joel credited the UpSquad's presence with being the positive influence on others rather than simply the program.

Like Joel, other adults praised the youth consistently, but the youth also showed appreciation for the adults and for each other. For example, Dominic praised SYS during the highs and lows activity at the pizza dinner. Dominic spoke of his gratitude and thankfulness for being included in the SYS and BoothStar communities. This moment of genuine appreciation demonstrated the impact of SYS on his life.

Furthermore, during music-making sessions praising one another happened frequently. In one instance, I witnessed Joel tell a young woman that "she is a boss" for being so on top of learning how to play the keyboard.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the youth generally praised each other's beats and showed investment in each other's writing and music production.

Praise in the aforementioned findings came in the form of positive reinforcement that was honest and unassuming. I conjecture that the youth feel drawn in to SYS because of the nurturing environment present, the mentorship they experience and the approval they receive and are in turn able to provide as a member of the community.

One individual that exemplified mentorship was Joel. I discussed the ways in which adults showed a great amount of care to the youth in detail above. However, Joel deserves special focus because of his direct working relationship with the youth, his knack for teaching, and his approach to mentorship. The youth consistently expressed the importance of their relationship with Joel to me both informally and in interviews. From my observations and interviews, I believe Joel is a major reason youth stay invested in

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<sup>14</sup> Observation took place on 01/22/2014.

the Center, especially those youth who participate in media arts. Multiple examples discussed below illustrate this finding.

Rheanna, a young woman coming to use the recording booth, finished a recording session, and Joel asked her how it went. She said it went well and that her song was called “Peace on my Mind.” Joel asked her why that was the name of her song, and her response was that she has not been coming outside much because “she was just going through it.” It appeared that Joel was unsure exactly what she meant by that statement, but encouraged her to schedule more time in the studio. When Rheanna said she did not know her work schedule and could not make a time Joel pushed her saying, “well let’s just pencil some more time in to get you outside more.” Rheanna put two hours on the schedule. This moment showed Joel’s awareness for Rheanna’s situation, and her possible need to be at the Center. His approach was tactful and careful.<sup>15</sup>

Another young woman Stephanie told me a story during her interview:

I did a song with Joel actually. Me and Joel have a cool relationship. We like doing music together and he, he always says I miss your face cause like me and Cate used to come here all the time and then as we started working we barely showed up and like the song that we actually did together he wrote because me and Cate actually were going through a stage where we weren’t talking to anyone and we just kind of went MIA and went to LA for two weeks without telling anyone and Joel was like “where have they been, like what have they been up to” and he started writing this song and then when I came back he told me the idea of the song: “I missed you so much” like “I missed you guys...I have this idea of this song I wrote” and then him and Cate kind of collaborated writing it together and then I was the one singing it with Joel (personal communication, December 19, 2013).

This example showed how Joel made youth feel wanted, especially when they seemed to be in trouble or troubled. As the excerpt showed Joel reconnected with the two girls who

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<sup>15</sup> Observation took place on 11/21/2013.

had been missing and drew them back to the Center through the recording and music opportunities.

A number of youth explained to me how they feel close to Joel and how he taught them everything they know about recording and making beats. Deandre explained:

I think I have the best relationship here with Joel cause Joel is basically the first person that I met that actually showed me how to make beats and record video and show me more with video editing. Its like when I talk to Joel I am not even talking to a boss. Its like I am talking to somebody that is my friend. Like, we talk to each other on a friend basis. We can joke and talk and still like be serious at the same time so its like we all know the deal around here (personal communication, December 19, 2013).

Another youth said that he “wouldn’t know as much as he did right now” without Joel’s help (personal communication, February 5, 2014).

On a number of occasions I watched Joel counsel youth through writing a song with them. I witnessed one writing session with a young woman named Rosa. At first, Rosa said she did not know what to write about, but then came up with the idea to write about young mothers. She followed by sharing a personal story with Joel about the loss of her own baby. She said that, “she couldn’t watch [her] friends go through this on their own.” This moment seemed therapeutic for Rosa. Joel showed her, albeit not by directly saying it, how to use music as a tool to process and as a coping strategy.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, Joel laughed frequently with the youth. For instance, Joel joked with a boy named Marquis about how he has more hair on his head than Joel will ever have on his whole body. And, Joel reminded the youth that he was not going to do things for them and that they have to try on their own, referencing the fact that he should make a website called “joelism’tyourmom.com.” In these moments, I noticed that there was a positive

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<sup>16</sup> Observation took place on 01/08/2014.

exchange between the youth and Joel. Comedic relief and a willingness to laugh with each other likely strengthened the relationships and created a dynamic that was fun.<sup>17</sup>

**Lack of censorship and traditional disciplinary structures.** Related to me on multiple occasions, I learned that the Center makes an effort not to censor the youth's music or behaviors. Dawn explained that they are always asked: "How do you get kids out of gangs?" She recounted that: "Getting kids out of gangs is not our goal." In the same conversation, she explained the awareness that like attracts like, and said that the goal of the Center is "to infuse the webs that already exist with positive attachments" (Dawn Stueckle, personal communication, November 16, 2014). The lack of censorship around the music that takes place supports her statement. The nature of the music the youth create often has swear words, is derogatory, and the lyrics are violent. Nonetheless, the staff allow the youth to create any type of music that they want because they rather the youth be at the Center than anywhere else. Dawn said that the youth often end up censoring their music and taking a different direction than using profane language (personal communication, November 16, 2014).

At the same time, I witnessed moments of direct censorship and discipline did occur but in subvert ways. During my last field visit, Joel reminded a group of six boys sitting in the common area that if they were going to "listen to nasty and foul music to rock the headphones" because "small kids" were around. Joel lightened the boundary holding, by saying "blah, blah, blah and all that stuff" at the end of his direction. The

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<sup>17</sup> Observation took place on 11/15/2013.



boys showed respect toward Joel, turned down the music, and scattered around the Center.<sup>18</sup>

Another instance I witnessed, the youth were again using profane language in the recording studio while Joel was attempting to teach. Before disciplining the crowd he said, “I love you guys,” and then followed it with “can we clean up the language?” In this statement, Joel showed care for the youth by reminding them of his love for them and then provided them a choice to clean up their language. Presumably, because the youth quieted down and discontinued their use of foul language they respected what Joel said.<sup>19</sup>

In my interview with Marcus, he explained how the structures of censorship and discipline are set up in the SYS recording space:

Marcus: If you wanna come here have fun and just kick it, just be you then you could come here. They don’t put you down and tell you cant do this or you can’t do that. If you do something wrong they’ll be like okay find a better way to do this or just calm down and do something better and do something positive.

Erica: Do you have an example of that?

Marcus: Yeah, I don’t know an exact example but Joel when I first came, Joel was like you could express yourself through music but just make sure if you do say something bad just make sure just that its nothing you want to get into trouble for. Like, as long as you want to keep doing it right doing it good it’s okay.

Erica: So he said you could express yourself through music but just make sure...

Marcus: Just make sure its not going to get you into trouble (personal communication, January 22, 2014).

The above examples exemplify SYS’s approach to discipline and censorship. My findings showed examples like this throughout informal conversations, observations and interviews. While SYS staff had expectations the youth were not treated like kids.

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<sup>18</sup> Observation took place on 11/21/2013.

<sup>19</sup> Observation took place on 01/22/2014.

Dominic and Deandre supported this explaining that they are treated as adults in the SYS space. Dominic said that the adults gave him advice instead of telling him what to do, while Deandre said that he was able to make decisions on his own because of the support from the SYS adults.<sup>20</sup>

Findings also showed that adults appreciated and sought out the youths' opinions on issues. For example, a discussion about a new UpStar T-shirt design took place during the pizza party. While nothing was agreed upon, the adults conversed with the youth and provided a forum for them to express their opinions. In another instance, Dawn told me that they were building a new recording booth because that is what the youth wanted (personal communication, November 15, 2013).

**A sense of SYS being a safe place.** Youth exemplified a willingness to share personal information with the SYS community, including both the adults and other youth. This emerged from the great level of trust, the support provided by the adults and the fact that they feel safe at SYS. It might also have emerged from a level of transparency that is a characteristic of SYS's mission as an organization. The findings yielded information about the trust level of the youth that participate in SYS activities. While they perform tasks that build expertise and professional experience, they also share their life events freely because the nature of the organization makes it acceptable to do so. This is another attractive feature of SYS and a reason youth come back again and again.

Many examples appeared in the data. During a "highs and lows" activity at the pizza parlor, ten of us shared, and everyone referenced a high or low that had to do with the state of their personal life. Angelica spoke about the difficulty she was having at

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<sup>20</sup> Interviews took place on 12/19/2013.

school, her current failing grades in many of her classes, and how she consequently planned to take the “F-track” in order to “get out” and on to other things. Chris, who is in a relationship with Angelica, shared that his high was reaching their one-year anniversary because “they didn’t think it would happen.” Similarly Deandre talked about the trouble he was having with his girlfriend because of a miscommunication and things she saw on Facebook that she “wasn’t supposed to see” (Angelica, Chris, and Deandre, personal communication, November 15, 2013).

On another occasion, Dominic spoke to me, unprompted, about how often his family moved when he was growing up. While not many other details were given his willingness to share this information with me was an example of the trust that exists in the SYS community.<sup>21</sup>

The next week, Kel candidly explained to me the details of an altercation he had with security and the police at his continuation school. Kel is 20 years old and struggled to graduate because he could not pass math and had a stint with being in legal trouble. The conversation occurred in the recording booth at SYS and arose because of a discussion about the difficulty of algebra. He explained that the school kicked him out and forced him to apologize for creating an altercation with the authorities. Kel told me with conviction that he had yet to write the apology because he did not believe he had any reason to apologize. He recounted the reason he argued with the authorities was because he was “wanting to be heard,” “felt ganged up on,” and was waiting to “talk with their manager.” Throughout the account, Kel seemed emotional and asked me if “I knew what he was saying” multiple times. He also said that he eventually left the altercation to

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<sup>21</sup> Conversation took place on 11/19/2013.

avoid arrest because he did not want to get “arrested for that stupid-ass shit” (personal communication, November 22, 2013).

Both Dominic and Kel’s accounts of their personal lives made me think deeply about why these youth willingly shared with me. I wondered if their desire to be heard influenced their opening up or if their sharing was their comfort with being in the SYS community. The data showed that the combination of feeling safe and having a supportive community that listened allowed the youth to be at ease with sharing personal and vulnerable stories. Possibly, the activities the youth participated in alongside each other and adults helped facilitate the process of vulnerability and expression of the personal.

Everyone I interviewed described how and why they believed SYS felt like a safe place. During his interview Dominic said to me that he often did not feel welcomed in places unlike SYS. He explained it like this:

There are a lot of places I feel like I am not welcomed probably because the way I look, or the way I dress, or the way I act. But, over here, I always feel welcomed and everybody over here always has open arms for me.<sup>22</sup>

Others reported that SYS felt safe because everyone at the Center was peaceful, that the Center felt comfortable, and that SYS staff put people in their place if they acted unkind to one another. While the Center does experience instances of theft, fights between youth and some violence, the sentiment expressed overall was that the place provides a level of comfort for the youth that they lacked elsewhere.

**Models of informal learning.** Various models of informal learning in collaboration with adults and between peers emerged as I conducted this study. At the

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<sup>22</sup> Interview took place on 12/19/2013.

core, these practices included apprenticeship-learning and collegial relationships rooted in a dedication to a collaboratively creative process. These processes occurred frequently between peers, and between Joel and the youth involved with UpStar records and the digital and media arts program.

The dedication to these teaching and learning approaches is emphasized in SYS's teaching philosophy, which is a dedication to the facilitation of project based and experientially based learning where youth and adults work in collaboration so the youth could achieve mastery in particular skills (Dawn Stueckle, personal communication, November 16, 2013). In their online description UpStar Records is described as:

A youth-run record label aimed at turning today's hip-hop enthusiasts into tomorrow's digital technology leaders. Trained by a cadre of talented industry professionals, youth get hands-on experience recording, mixing, mastering, releasing, distributing and promoting their own music and videos. Through project-based learning, youth gain knowledge, skills, and abilities to be successful in their path to a career or continued education (retrieved from <http://sunsetyouthservices.org/programs/#DigitalArts>, 2014).

At the same time, they describe the Digital Arts Program as a place where:

Youth get access to and training in digital audio and film production, so they can express themselves, learn marketable skills, tell their stories, and build confidence in themselves and their work. Through a series of project-based learning labs, they practice writing, recording, editing and mastering their own music, films, animations, photography, and audio projects. Each youth develops their own professional portfolio, suitable to use in career planning or to pursue further education (retrieved from <http://sunsetyouthservices.org/programs/#DigitalArts>, 2014).

The same youth who are often stereotyped as being poor learners and underachievers, demonstrated achievements in their creative processes and the acquirement of varying levels of competency in skill sets related to music-making as a result of these learning frameworks.

Currently, Joel works closely with the youth who come to SYS hoping to learn new skills related to music-making, and also with those who come to produce their own music. Youth become apprentices under the supervision of Joel, the expert of the music-making practices. He teaches the youth various techniques and skills, which include a set of principles related to running a recording session, the complications of using the ProTools software, and the perseverance and diligence involved in song writing and beat making. My observations showed that while Joel was the teacher of these skills, the processes were also deeply collaborative with the youth positioned as colleagues in the creative process.

Numerous examples of informal learning models in the form of apprenticeship natured approaches stood out in the findings. During one interview, Marquis told me:

When I was worried about my album cover, and I was asking Joel to do it for me he was like “no” but he taught me the software and enabled me to do it myself and then if I had any questions he just answered them for me. And, he wants you to learn everything on your own. He is not cool for that (personal communication, January 8, 2014).

Marquis joked in the last sentence that Joel was “not cool” for making him figure things out on his own. However, this statement indicated his recognition for what Joel tried to accomplish: he taught Marquis what to do and now he wants him to do it on his own. This process pointedly illustrated the apprenticeship learning approach.

In another moment, Joel related to Dominic’s frustration with how long a recording session took to facilitate. Joel recounted that he once worked with a paying client and it took seven hours to complete the session. Joel empathized and related to

Dominic. Joel's own knowledge and willingness to share it allowed Dominic to regard him as the teacher and one with wisdom related to making music.

Youth in this study learning under the mindful, but direct supervision of Joel were able to progress in their abilities to facilitate recording sessions on their own, to make beats, and to perform other tasks without his help. One example of this was the case of Deandre and the trust he was given by the staff to run BoothStar recording sessions without adults present. As explained earlier, the BoothStar recording sessions take place on local high school campuses away from SYS. The fact that Deandre was entrusted to run these sessions on his own showed his levels of expertise and his achievements in the program.

My findings demonstrated that the model of apprenticeship learning at SYS also yielded an opening for the relationships between adults and youth and peer to peer to work collegially. In one instance, Joel worked alongside a young woman named Brynn while they collaborated on making a beat together. While Joel taught Brynn new skills, the process of working together in collaboration was distinct. Joel asked Brynn what she would like to do and what she had been working on. She said what she produced so far sounded like the "same thing [she heard] from everyone." Joel asked her how it could be different. In response, Brynn stated that she "wanted to do a sad but joyful song...like Firework." Joel listened, aided Brynn in learning how to play the keyboard, and also collaborated with her to construct the ideal beat.<sup>23</sup>

A few weeks later, I sat in on a recording session that included Marcus, Sean, and Joel. Joel facilitated the recording session because both Marcus and Sean were new to the

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<sup>23</sup> Observation took place on 01/22/2014.

UpSquad. During the session, Joel and Sean coached Marcus how to hit a note so it fit into the song in the right way, but Marcus had trouble. Both Joel and Sean practiced patience with him. After they got it as close to right as possible, Joel edited the song, but in the end, Sean did not love the way Joel put it together:

Joel: “Yes, No?”

Sean: “I’m saying no.”

Joel: “Don’t like the long note?”

Sean: “No don’t like the echo.”

Marcus reentered the booth with Joel and Sean. Joel taught Sean some aspects of the ProTools program. Sean changed that piece of the song to how he would like it, and then it was his turn to sing since it was both his and Marcus’s song. Sean struggled to find his voice and came out of the recording booth to write more before recording.<sup>24</sup> Joel demonstrated teaching moments, but also the desire to collaborate on the creation of the piece alongside the youth. Furthermore, Sean demonstrated some autonomy over the creative process when he told Joel he did not like how it sounded. This example, like the moments Joel shared with Brynn, illustrated the related aspects of apprenticeship learning and collegiality. During data collection in the SYS context, they related and overlapped with each other significantly.

My observations proved that the collegial practices occurred between peers as well. During a BoothStar recording session with Kel and Dominic, I experienced collaboration and an expression of approval for each other’s creative process. After Kel, finished troubleshooting an issue with the soundboard and recording booth, he began

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<sup>24</sup> Observation took place on 02/12/2014.



crafting a beat. The moments of watching Kel solve the problem with the technology and then move to making a beat demonstrated his level of understanding for ProTools and recording music. An exchange between Dominic and Kel occurred:

Dominic said to Kel: “I have never really heard your beats.”

Kel replied, “I just be fucking around, I just be making random shit.”

To which Dominic expressed his approval saying: “you can do something with this. I like this”

Kel: “I am just experimenting with shit”

Dominic nodded his head.<sup>25</sup>

This exchange was one of admiration on Dominic’s part, and also an example of how the recording sessions provided the youth a forum to work, create, and collaborate together.

Observations showed that the process of learning in community between adults and youth allowed the youth to become masters, but also to own their achievements. Deandre smiled widely when I praised him for running BoothStar on his own, and Kel exemplified a sense of pride when he troubleshooted the issue with the soundboard. Also the youth appeared to have a deep sense of appreciation for not only their personal work, but also each other’s.

One time, I stood in a group with various young men, and at some point Deandre took out his phone and turned on his recently created beat. He began freestyle rapping to the beat, and as he did so, the other boys inadvertently pushed me out of the group moving closer to him, listening to his rap, praising him by dancing along, and shouting

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<sup>25</sup> Observation took place on 02/12/2014.

verbal expressions of approval. The positivity and sense of confidence amongst the youth reinforced the power of SYS's learning models.

**Identity development through participation in social justice work.** Youth at SYS have the opportunity to participate in social justice work that allows them to develop both as creators within the realm of digital and media arts and as young men and women of color. I observed a group of youth who were directly involved, and in the midst of, participating in two different projects related to social justice throughout January and February 2014. One group of youth, including Deandre, Drew, and Marquis, produced a rap song called "Unstoppable" for the Adobe Youth Voices Competition. The competition asked youth to address issues of poverty in San Francisco via some form of media arts.<sup>26</sup> The song the boys created and the music video were and continue to be powerful. The opening verse from the song and chorus read:

*Yo mom when are we gunna get some food in this house  
She says, "As soon as that food stamps check comes around"  
But see my dad's a contradiction  
He takes the food stamps and sells them to dope fiends  
And takes the earnings to do crack with  
You see my dad's tripping  
Doing lines on my math books.  
And my mom is pretty stupid  
So he hits her with my math book  
And you see I'm crying because I am so traumatized  
My mom says, "Do as I say your dad has lost his mind."  
What would you do if you were here instead?  
Sitting on this bed with all of these thoughts in your head?  
Hungry but all there is to eat is some bread.  
I will have to wait until Monday because school is the only place I get fed.*

*In my neighborhood you never see white pickets  
All you see is dead bodies  
On the street*

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<sup>26</sup> For more information visit: <http://youthvoices.adobe.com/awards/prizes>.

*A whole hour went by  
Before I seen the police  
Think about it  
What if you were the first hand witness?  
They're building more schools than jails  
Man, what is this?  
They say education is power  
Well that's very strange because I am at school everyday  
And, there is no food on my dinner plate.  
I can't stop my dad from swinging at my mom, anyway.  
Those with the wealth that never dealt with poverty  
Understand that this verse really means a whole lot to me  
I'm tired of the system beating and trying to topple me  
Help me out, put down the wine glass  
And, stop watching me.*

*Chorus:*

*Too many people living in this city  
It's over capacity, over capacity  
Living in poverty  
Possibly probably  
Gain nothing from it  
But invisibility*

*And, I just wanna make a change  
But I, keep screaming  
They seem not to know my name  
So, I, shout louder  
Shout louder  
Keep fighting  
Keep fighting  
Keep screaming  
It's either do or die.*

“Unstoppable” reflected Deandre, Marquis, and Drew’s experiences with growing up as youth of color in San Francisco. This excerpt is only a small piece of the song, but it illustrated the overall message the youth wished to communicate to their audience. They comment on gentrification, the education system, what it was like for them growing up with food insecurity, trauma, addiction, violence, and the invisibility they experience

daily. Most pivotal, though, is their ability to ask the listener to reflect and ask us to think about how we might feel if we were in their position.

This song's lyrics are moving because they reveal the realities of the society in which the young men live. The writing process allowed all three of them to reflect on the injustices they encounter on a daily basis. It positioned them as active participants in responding and attempting to do something about the oppressions they experienced growing up and continue to encounter daily. Through this song, they voice their opinions, develop their identities, heal from past wounds, and urge other's to listen. The finalists for this competition were announced in April, and unfortunately, their video did not make the finals.

A second group participated in a Schools Not Suspensions rally. They also performed a song they wrote addressing suspensions and the pending passage of the "Safe and Supportive Schools" resolution that called to end suspensions as a punishment for willful defiance. This resolution addressed the fact that youth of color, especially young African American and Latino men, experience suspension at three times the rate of other youth (SF Gate, 2014). If the resolution passed it would:

Extend restorative practices and positive behavioral supports to all schools, develop an evidence-based tiered behavioral intervention matrix, end suspensions for willful defiance, and take strategic steps to reduce disproportionate punishment of African American students (SF Gate, 2014).

Since the rally, the resolution was passed.

Directly below are four images (Images 2-5) of the youth who participated at the rally. These photographs show six individuals who were invested in social justice and worked to bring change to the San Francisco community. The pictures also illustrate how

these SYS youth engage with their community, fight for social justice, and show their own personal investment in improving their schools based on their own experiences within the system.

**Image 2. Three SYS youth rallying during the Schools not Suspensions campaign.**



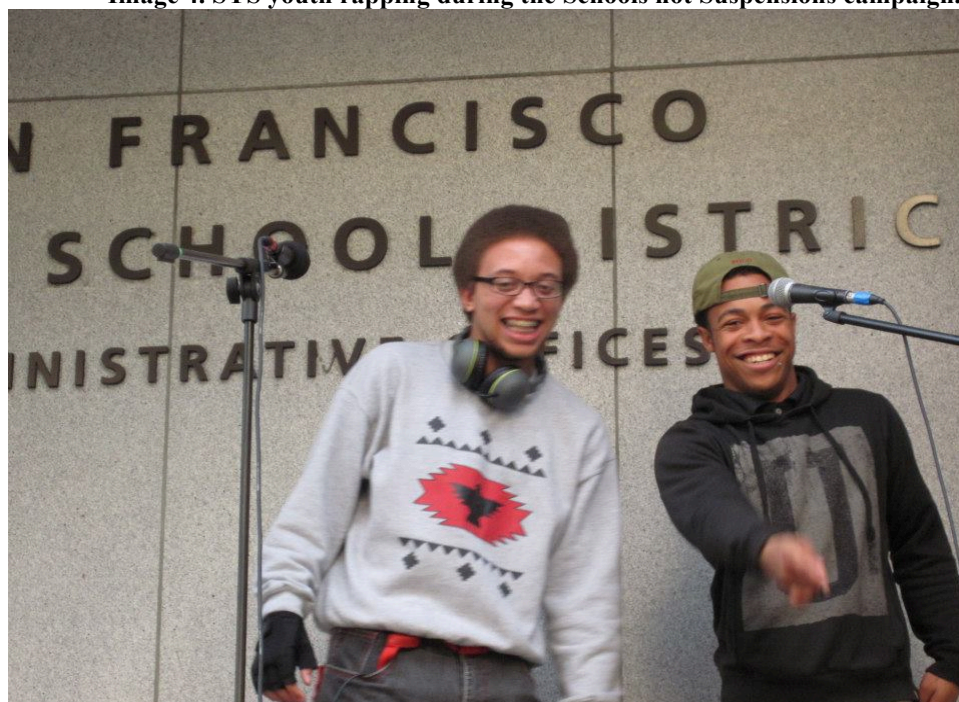
**Photo Credit: Sunset Youth Services, 2014**

**Image 3. SYS youth rallying during the Schools not Suspensions campaign.**



**Photo Credit: Sunset Youth Services, 2014**

**Image 4. SYS youth rapping during the Schools not Suspensions campaign.**



**Photo Credit: Sunset Youth Services, 2014**



**Image 5. SYS youth rallying during the Schools not Suspensions campaign.**



**Photo Credit: Sunset Youth Services, 2014**

Of note, was the role adults played in the Adobe Youth Voices project and Schools Not Suspensions campaign. As discussed in the last section about informal learning models, adults play an integral role in teaching the youth things like writing songs, beat making, and creating music videos. The youth and adults at SYS are constantly engaged in a collegial process where apprenticeship models of learning occur. Knowledge is often transferred from the adult to the youth, but this also happens between peers.

In the case of the production of “Unstoppable,” Joel and Wendy played a pivotal role in providing feedback and guidance, but the youth did the entirety of the music writing and video making and editing on their own. Also, “Unstoppable” demonstrated Deandre, Drew, and Marquis’s expertise and ability to collaborate and share their vision with others.

Findings showed that the social justice work the youth participated in was significant in two ways. First, through the collaboration process that music-making allowed the youth processed their personal experiences in a safe and inclusive environment. Second, they did so alongside a community of people who were similarly invested in fighting for justice.

### **Where are the Youth Going?**

Youth participants in this study showed a great level of investment in the SYS program. It is one thing for a CBYO to be a physical place for youth to go after school, but it is another thing for it to actively reshape youths' lives. The environment, the adult mentors, the goals of the program, and the youths' consistent involvement are just a few things involved that influence the youth to see their futures in a different light. Findings showed that SYS's active intervention and the youths' willingness to show up day after day gave them the agency to form more positive futures for themselves.

**Life Changing.** Youth consistently reported to me that SYS changed their lives for the better. In multiple interviews youth explained how SYS gave them something to invest in and provided them with more than just positive outlets. One youth told me:

I would want them to know that this experience has changed my life and probably will change my life forever whether or not I become the person on stage I will probably hopefully be the person behind recording Justin Bieber or something...Pretty much it's changed my life and my goals...so basically it changed my life and my perspective on things (personal communication, February 5, 2014).

Another said, that she would not be where she was today without SYS explaining that, "they've basically helped me become who I am today because like they are my family"



(personal communication, February 19, 2014). Marquis stated, “Sunset saved my life. Yeah, easy as that” (personal communication, February 8, 2014). All three of these youths’ statements were said with conviction demonstrating the overall sentiment expressed by many of the youth and adults most directly involved with SYS.

**Job Skills Development.** SYS provides the opportunity for the participating youth to learn significant job and related life skills. By employing youth under the guidance of adults at the Center, SYS acts as an employer where youth are trained to abide by a schedule, show up on time for work, run their own recording sessions, and facilitate management processes before actually entering the job force where stakes might be higher. Throughout my time observing the UpSquad and UpStar records, I found that SYS youth showed a high level of investment in their jobs. The adults did a great deal to help facilitate this process. Deandre explained:

If you need somebody to help me do pictures and stuff because you can’t take your own pictures I have Joel. And, with stuff on how I want to go to college later, Vicky is trying to help me get stuff together so when I actually start applying I am ready for it. So it’s like they actually help you for the future that you want to reach instead of just doing like you’re doing this now and then its over. You can always come back and get support afterwards (personal communication, December, 19, 2014).

While Drew told me:

We have meetings and they teach us, I don’t know, they teach us, I don’t know its hard to explain, they teach you different qualities that you need to know just in everyday life not just only in the studio. They help you with public speaking like when you need to go present something. They taught me how to write a grant. I never knew how to write a grant. They taught me how to present a question when someone is busy. Like, they say “hey, do you got a minute?” Instead of just being like “hey you.” A little bit more formal and polite (personal communication, February 5, 2014).

As these data show, the lessons the youth at SYS learn are important in helping them prepare for their futures. Similar to the music-making process the adults work alongside youth to teach them this skill set.

During the time of the study, Vicky was an integral guide for the youth in the realm of job skill development at SYS. Vicky expressed to me that she is worried that the youth will not make it because they cannot afford to live in the city and no one will hire the youth. She helps youth build resumes and portfolios and manages their time and schedules.

**Investment in the future.** One of the more hopeful and reassuring things I found in my time at SYS was the fact that youth showed an investment in their futures outside of the Center. As previously explained, UpStar records employs some youth on a team called the UpSquad. Youth receive a significant amount of guidance from Vicky and other staff when it comes to job applications, resume building, and collecting important documents that are needed to navigate the systems they face. During interviews and in informal conversations, I often asked youth what their future plans included. Answers varied, but never once did I receive the answer “I don’t know” from the youth I spoke to about this topic. In one conversation, I asked:

Erica: Are you going to go to school?

Stephanie: Yeah, I am going to go back to school, like that is my main thing after I take care of me having a place because my brother just moved with me too (personal communication, December, 19, 2013).

Stephanie demonstrated conviction around this statement and an investment in her future. She also showed me that she was able to take care of herself and others, and that she

understands what it means to be an adult. She had goals and also was facing the reality of her circumstances. Nonetheless, it did not appear to me that she lost sight of what she wanted for her future.

Deandre expressed similar sentiments about his future:

If I wasn't working I think I would still be here...like when I start going to college and stuff I want to be able to do music production and dance so that way I can actually say I already have the experience now...from a job that I had before. Now, I can just show that I can actually prevail in that through just learning more (personal communication, December 19, 2013).

Another instance of this came up when Kel, an 18-year-old UpStar employee, told me about graduating from high school. Before this conversation, the last I heard from Kel was that he was struggling to get out of school because of a math class he was taking and some altercations with the authorities on his campus. I felt incredibly proud of Kel when he told me he graduated. I congratulated him. He responded that finally graduating was “a monkey off his back” (personal communication, January 22, 2014). He followed that statement and told me that he planned to go to City College and to continue working at SYS to help make ends meet. He also explained to me that he wanted to get a job as a lifeguard, but that he was looking for other jobs as well. In the case of Kel, a youth that faces significant learning challenges, struggles with authority, an unstable family situation, and little support, his desire to continue participating in positive endeavors is truly laudable.<sup>27</sup>

**Youth that stay out of trouble.** Three of the young men I interviewed told me directly that SYS helps them stay out of trouble. From my observations, SYS is a place

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<sup>27</sup> Observation occurred on 01/22/2014.

where youth go because people care about them and accept them. Sunset Youth Services provides youth something to invest in and to be a part of, and people who care for, love them, and want to see them succeed.

In my interview with Grey we discussed the Center and what it means to stay out of trouble:

Erica: Would you say that SYS helps you stay out of trouble?

Grey: Kind of.

Erica: Sort of?

Grey: I mean at the end, I make my own decision regardless you know what I mean? But, at least when I got nothing to do I come here you feel me?

At that point, I probed him further:

Erica: What would you be doing if this place didn't exist?

Grey: I don't know. Probably still in trouble.

Erica: Probably still in trouble?

Grey: Yeah (personal communication, February 8, 2013).

This exchange between Grey and I proved interesting because he wanted to be sure to acknowledge that he possessed agency and emphasized his capacity to make his own decisions. However, when I questioned him further he acknowledged that his active choice around coming to SYS, instead of participating in delinquent activities, does keep him out of trouble. At the time of this study, Grey held down a job at Pizza Hut, paid his own rent, and continued to come to the Center at least 3 days a week.

Marquis and Dominic reported similar stories to me. When I asked Marquis what he would be doing if he were not coming to SYS daily, he told me, "I don't know. I

would be getting into trouble, pretty much, to be honest.” Dominic told me that if he were not working at SYS, “he probably wouldn’t be working at all. I don’t know. I don’t even know what I would be doing right now” in response to my asking him whether or not he would be in trouble without SYS (personal communication December 19, 2013 and February 8, 2013).

Today, youth like Grey, Marquis, and Dominic appear to be the norm at SYS. Many of the youth struggle with authority, staying out of trouble, and having a positive investment in their future before coming to SYS, and many of them still deal with similar issues and find themselves in trouble at times. However, SYS gives them options. Because of their relationship with SYS, getting into trouble had higher stakes; they were often employed, working on an album, or had intense relationships with the adults.

**Youth that stay in trouble.** Some youth involved with SYS continued to get in trouble even though they participated regularly in the program and had adults and sometimes caseworkers invested in them. One day when I arrived at the Center, I noticed that Vicky was upset about something. I inquired about what was going on with her, and she openly told me that a young man I had encountered a few times named Kenny was getting locked up again. She explained to me that she had just been in court with him the day before for a misdemeanor and the judge warned him to stay out of trouble. Kenny had been coming to the Center for some time, had a relationship with the other youth there, and even brought a few of them to the Center for their first time. Unfortunately, the day Vicky recounted this story to me Kenny had been caught with marijuana outside of his school and was arrested. Vicky indicated to me that she felt uncertain about what

Kenny might do explaining that he might run from the police so he does not have to serve time (personal communication, March 19, 2014).

Vicky showed genuine concern for Kenny, but her demeanor also told me that she knew she had no control over what Kenny might do. As often as possible, the adults at SYS intervened and attempted to keep youth out of trouble, but as Grey reminded me, at the end of the day, they always make their own choices. In my experience, the stories like Kenny's did not occur frequently, but were indeed notable.

## **Discussion**

### **Lessons Learned from the Sunset Youth Services Case Study**

As argued in this paper's introduction, the proliferation of organizations that house positive mentors and program models that not only attract youth, but also sustain their participation over time can significantly influence the positive development of urban youth communities. Findings from this study showed that the SYS staff, the program philosophy, and the teaching approaches taken all provide opportunities for youth to form a sense of agency and to develop their identities. These possibilities, in concert with strong relationships formed with adult mentors and participation in powerful programmatic structures, influence youth investment and participation. The community interviewed and observed for this study attended the Center multiple days a week staying involved for sustained periods of time.

The relevant practices utilized by SYS may be useful in other contexts. This discussion draws on the outcomes of this research to make meaning of the various salient elements of SYS' practices, philosophy, and teaching approaches that might influence program development in other environments. To that end, the discussion is organized around four lessons learned from researching Sunset Youth Services:

1. The SYS case study showed that a dedicated staff was integral and important to the youth community.
2. The SYS case study indicated that youth-adult partnerships around shared tasks created avenues for youth and adults to improve and heal traditionally oppressive relationships.
3. Sunset Youth Services' unstructured and nontraditional learning environments helped build assets amongst the urban youth they served.

4. Central to SYS's philosophy was the importance of a safe and accessible environment.

Other community-based educators and practitioners working with urban youth communities might consider these lessons to see if they have applicability to their programs. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the outcomes of this study do not claim to be universally pertinent. However, they may be able to influence leadership development, educational approaches, and program formation in other contexts of community-based outreach.

**The SYS case study showed that a dedicated staff was integral and important to the youth community.** Dedicated and committed community-based practitioners played an important role in the way the youth viewed the Center and in the retention of youth participation. These findings are consistent with Watson (2012) where she discusses this role comprehensively in her portraits of four community-based educators practicing throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to Watson's work, various other studies discuss the importance of community-based educators and the necessity for intergenerational relationships in urban communities (Duncan-Andrade, 2011; Ginwright, 2010; Halpern, 2005; Watson, 2012).

Adults at Sunset Youth Services work in various capacities. During the time of study, they provided job skills training, acted as advocates, gave emotional support when necessary, and were a consistent presence in the lives of the youth they served. Of note is the long-term investment and legacy that the SYS staff demonstrated. Dawn, Ron, and Delvin are the founders of SYS and are in their twenty-first year of working in the same community. Even some of their staff grew up attending the Center. Having once been



SYS youth participants themselves, Vicky, Mutasem, Natalie, and Maria demonstrated a particular understanding of the youth they worked alongside. Their capacity to empathize with the current youth participants was evident because of their connection to the location of the Center and their participation at the Center when they were youth.

The SYS staff develops open, authentic relationships with youth participants and also shows a dedication to empowerment, social justice education, and a deeply collaborative teaching philosophy. Furthermore, even when SYS youth found themselves in trouble, the staff continued to regard them with love, care, and respect. There appeared to be consideration and empathy that the adults maintained because of an understanding they had for the youth's experience good or bad. Pointedly, love and compassion are consistent with the literature on community-based education and urban youth. Watson (2012) declares, "love is a central, transformative force" (p.154), while Duncan-Andrade (2009) notes the connections between effective teaching and deeply caring relationships. Furthermore, Ginwright (2010) and Watson (2012) speak to the immense power community-based educators possess when they invest in the lives of youth over long term periods of time, when they are from similar communities as the youth, and when they show unwavering love and support.

**The SYS case study indicated that youth-adult partnerships around shared tasks created avenues for youth and adults to improve and heal traditionally oppressive relationships.** In addition to a talented staff of community-based educators, SYS prioritized youth-adult partnerships in their approach to teaching. Specifically, the adult employees worked alongside youth in the digital and media arts program to create

music and media projects. These shared tasks and partnerships allowed for relationship building between adults like Joel and the youth he taught because of an emphasis on shared tasks and collaborative projects.

Scholars describe the importance of youth-adult partnerships around shared tasks especially connected to relationship building between urban youth and adults who typically are viewed as the oppressor (Halpern, 2005; Ginwright, 2005; Kirshner, 2008, 2010). Halpern (2005) suggests:

In some cases, the consequences of accumulated hurts and insults are best addressed indirectly in the context of relationships that are about something else that is, joint work on a task or project, or in a discipline and are, in some respects, incidental (p.15).

Sunset Youth Services staff valued youth and communicated a sense of equality and respect to them when they approached projects in this joint way. At the Center, the emphasis was on the process of creating. Examples of this included Wendy's partnership with one youth to make a documentary about another local community-based organization, Vicky, working alongside youth to find housing and jobs, and Joel's daily contributions to the youth's music-making process.

Ginwright (2005) explains that intergenerational relationships of this nature produce a shared power. This is important because traditionally these relationships have been strained by limiting factors of the environments in which urban youth grow up (Ginwright, 2005). Through these types of partnerships youth sense empowerment through an emphasis on collaboration rather than the standard of a top-down approach to youth-adult relationships.

The case of SYS showed that youth-adult relationships in relation to a model of shared tasks, joint work, and collegial partnerships were central to success, retention, and positive relationship building with the youth they serve. The emphasis in this brief discussion of youth-adult partnerships is not on the type of program that is implemented. Rather, the importance is on the type of programmatic structure implemented related to the capacity it might have to influence connections and relationships between youth and adults. Of potential note to other CBYOs is the emphasis SYS has on the healing of traditionally oppressive relationships through shared tasks.

**Sunset Youth Services’ unstructured and nontraditional learning environments helped build assets amongst the urban youth they served.** Watson (2012) reminds us that learning takes place both in and out of school. Youth at SYS expressed their sense of agency through creative expression, media arts innovations, and the learning processes facilitated by adults and peers. The organization provided the context and created a space that helped the youth participants “develop a sense of agency and critical civic engagement” (Goodman, 2003; Morrell, 2004a.).

I witnessed this on a regular basis in the SYS recording studio through the holistic creation of hip-hop music. At SYS, youth overwhelmingly demonstrated a self-initiated and self-sustained investment in media arts through the production of music. The writing, recording, and editing occurred between peers, through adult-to-youth facilitation of learning, and also arose in some individuals independent artistic processes like designing their album covers or constructing a beat. The production of rap music and digital media-making more generally allowed for the formation of stronger identities, and the

opportunity for youth to politicize through deep self and social awareness. The various learning models that emerged in the SYS media arts space provided the context for these assets to materialize.

Some youth were drawn to SYS because of the training provided in digital and media arts, the free studio space, and the opportunities to collaborate on projects. Often, the SYS youth had these interests before coming to SYS, but had no medium to explore their talents and curiosities. Data from this investigation did not reveal where many of these youth began to conceptualize participation in media arts, but once at SYS they demonstrated a sustained interest in media making activities where the learning was both self-initiated and collaborative (Barron, 2006). The nature of this learning environment, in addition to the conditions set up through youth-adult partnerships and strong community-based educators, allowed youth to build positive characteristics and other assets such as competence, confidence, and connections with other youth and adults (Lerner, et al., 2005).

In the case of SYS, the digital media arts represented a pivotal component of their informal learning. While the emphasis is on music and media-making at SYS, it is important to consider that other informal learning environments can vary in terms of their focus. McLaughlin (2000) notes that while CBYOs might instill similar principles, there is no particular way to do things other than keeping the context of one's community in mind. Community-based organizations wishing to implement a programmatic structure that allows youth to learn skills that differ from those of normal school day have options. Most importantly though, attention should be paid to what youth want and what they will

engage in with respect to any program development and implementation, especially when retention and sustained participation are the goals.

**Central to SYS's philosophy was the importance of a safe and accessible environment.** The safe and accessible environment that SYS maintained as an organization was a key characteristic of its success with its youth population. According to many of the Center's participants, feeling safe at SYS meant that the environment felt like home and a place they felt comfortable expressing themselves and their needs. At the same time, participants acknowledged that the Center was not totally free of things like stealing, arguments, or drug use. Youth took care of their personal property they brought into the Center; sometimes tensions ran high between participants; and often, youth were found smoking marijuana around the corner and across the street from SYS coming back inside under the influence. However, these situations did not appear to create conditions that felt unsafe for participation. In other words, SYS did not have to be free of any conditions deemed negative to still feel like a safe alternative for urban youth.

In addition to feeling safe, the Center's location and staff were accessible. Findings showed that this was a key element to attracting and maintaining youth participation. The location of SYS, while on the far West end of San Francisco, can be reached easily by public transportation. Furthermore, at the time of study, the Center had an open door policy and rejected no youth who hoped and wanted to participate. Importantly, even when their doors were closed, the staff remained available to any youth that needed to be in contact. A commitment to this is aligned with what McLaughlin

(2000) argues: “as in the ideal family, adults provide caring, consistent, and dependable supports for youth and are available as needed” (McLaughlin, 2000, p.19).

## **Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

### **Study Overview**

The SYS case study examined the practices implemented in the various programs offered and the community-based educators' philosophies and approaches in order to understand what influenced youth retention and investment. In exploring this, three primary research questions were kept in mind throughout the time of data collection:

1. Why do the youth come to SYS?
2. Why do the youth stay at SYS?
3. Where are the youth going after they leave SYS?

Taking an ethnographic approach that included participant observations and thirteen semi-structured interviews with adult staff and youth participants, I explored my three research questions in depth. The process provided rich participant perspectives and created a deeper understanding of how community-based outreach might be successful in other contexts.

### **Summary of Interpretation of Findings**

Data analysis from this investigation revealed major themes and subthemes, including evidence that showed the connection between sustained youth participation and various aspects of SYS's approach to community-based outreach. The strength of the SYS community, the presence of influential adult mentors, authentic learning opportunities, and the forum for identity development all positively influenced youth participation. The findings also indicated that youth maintained a sustained connection. Furthermore, the older youth participants often pursued future learning in music-making,

held down jobs that SYS helped them obtain, and continued to work with caseworkers. These findings showed the sustained and integral role that SYS played in the lives of the youth participants in this study.

### **Limitations**

The limitations to this study are twofold. First, the short nature of my research timeline and unavoidable deadlines prevented me from capturing as much data and information about the Center as possible. During my most recent and last visit to SYS, I was reminded of the realities of conducting ethnographic research. The process requires a great deal of time and comprehensive data collection strategies because of the evolving and changing nature of any culture and group of people.

Secondly, in addition to my short data collection timeline, my interviewing strategies revealed various challenges. I only conducted one interview with each youth and adult interviewee because of the time allotted for this study to take place. This limited the depth of the conversations. Given that, the study would have benefited from follow-up interviews with each participant to clarify points and questions and to expand on thoughts. The transcription process highlighted this and the places where probing or follow up questions were appropriate.

Further, many youth seemed nervous or resistant to the interviews, expressing their discomfort with engaging in the interview process and revealing information about their personal lives. Possibly related, at least a third of the youth I interviewed were high during our dialogue from smoking marijuana. I wondered if this affected their ability to answer questions or to be fully engaged during the interview. At the same time, smoking



before the interview might have relieved stress or allowed the youth to feel more prepared. Either way, a second interview and longer timeline would have revealed more.

### **Implications, Practical Applications, and Future Directions**

As “oppression in urban communities threatens the type of community spaces that foster hope and imagination,” CBYOs provide opportunities for positive development (Ginwright, 2010, p.12). Sunset Youth Services attempts and arguably succeeds in doing so as they aim to supply urban youth with opportunities to positively alter their futures. As there exists a lack of outlets for urban youth communities, the accessibility and availability of outlets like SYS and all it entails becomes increasingly important. More organizations are needed that not only attract youth communities, but also sustain their participation over time.

To that end, findings from this study proved useful in numerous ways. First, they provide other community-based educators, practitioners, policy makers, and community members with case study evidence to consider in their own approaches. Elements of SYS’s practices and pedagogical philosophies might influence the ways in which others do their work. This study could encourage others to implement an informal learning environment that replicates some of the teaching and learning practices of the digital and media arts program at SYS. Furthermore, if possible, an organization might consider hiring staff drawn from a pool of former youth participants.

Secondly, the findings from this study also provide strong evidence for youth-centered community-based programming. Youth in this study noted the relationships they

had with adults, the empowerment and identity development they experienced within the informal learning environment, the safety and accessibility provided by the Center, and the strong community in which they had the opportunity to participate. While adults were an integral piece of these program elements, the youth participants were central to the decision-making and program implementation process.

All of this said, without further case studies and comparison studies, pointed and unwavering conclusions about whether the SYS approaches are indeed best practices or replicable ones are difficult to draw. In an effort to argue the practicality of this study, it is necessary to say that elements of the findings, like those discussed above, are potentially applicable to others looking to do similar work. However, future research is needed to make a stronger case about the importance of particular program elements.

The outcomes from this study provided various opportunities for future research. First, Sunset Youth Services is currently undergoing a major shift in programming that might be interesting to explore given the findings of this project. With even more emphasis being placed on the digital and media arts program, the SYS staff hopes to create more structure within their program. It would prove interesting to explore how and if this reality affects youth participation over time. In addition, during my last visit to SYS Wendy noted that the staff plans to begin addressing the drug use and selling of drugs that takes place amongst the youth participants and in proximity to SYS. It is of interest to see if these two shifts increase or decrease overall youth participation and retention.

There is also the opportunity to take this case study and do similar research projects in other contexts in order to broaden the arguments made in this thesis. Cross comparisons of SYS to other CBYOs might highlight or deepen significant findings. For instance, future research might explore other CBYOs with a different focus than digital and media arts. Alternatively, the study could take place within a CBYO with a different leadership structure or one in a location that contrasts from San Francisco. Studies like this might broaden claims made in this case study, as well as reveal common and consistent best practices and features of CBYOs that are consistently effective.

### **Researchers Reflections**

This study has been incredibly revealing, informative, and life changing for me as a researcher and hopeful practitioner in a similar field. During interviews, participants moved me with their stories, the connections they felt towards each other, and the positive impacts they seemed to make in each other's lives. Sunset Youth Services and the people there gave me hope that programs like it do and can work in changing the lives of marginalized youth.

Most importantly, SYS kept the youth's needs and desires in mind and adjusted portions of the program to meet their needs. As findings showed, the youth told me stories about the significant relationships they had with the adults, their investment in the UpStar Records program, and how SYS changed or even saved their lives. More so than just responding directly to the youth, SYS also took significant action to improve the

surrounding community as a whole from the Sunset neighborhood all the way to the East Bay.

As the youth who attend SYS choose to improve their lives, the surrounding communities are inevitably affected for the better. The case study of SYS exemplified the importance of CBYOs. While I hesitate to say that every youth community struggling with similar marginalization and oppression would benefit from community-based outreach, the structural elements of SYS are representative of a significant and possibly replicable model that practitioners, researchers, and policy makers could consider.

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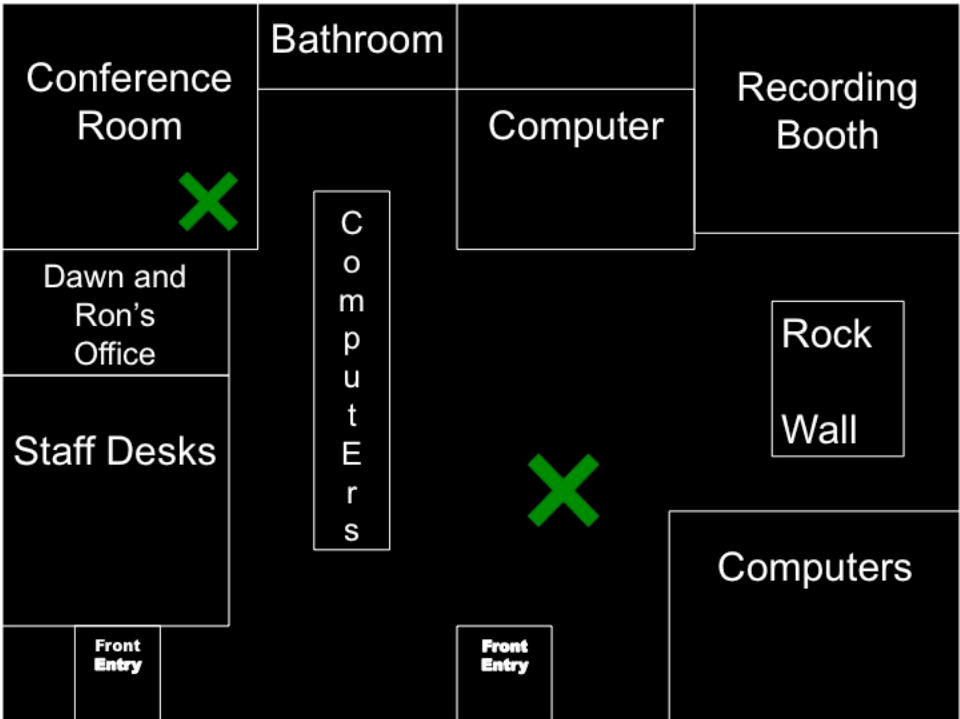
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Appendix A: Maps of Sunset Youth Services



A-1: Map of Downstairs

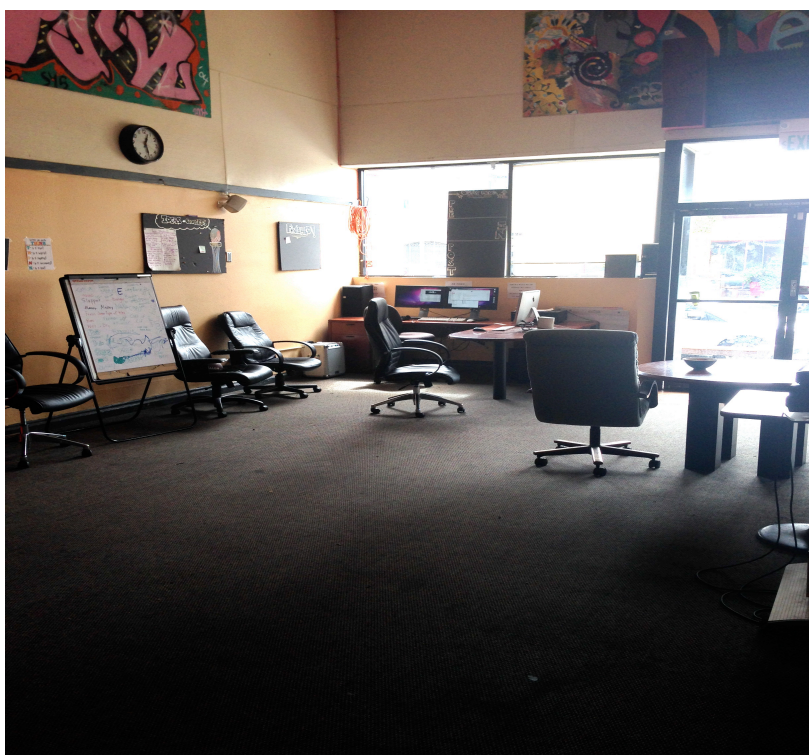


A-2: Map of Upstairs

## Appendix B: Images of Sunset Youth Services Teen Center



B-1: Downstairs Offices



B-2: Downstairs Hangout Area



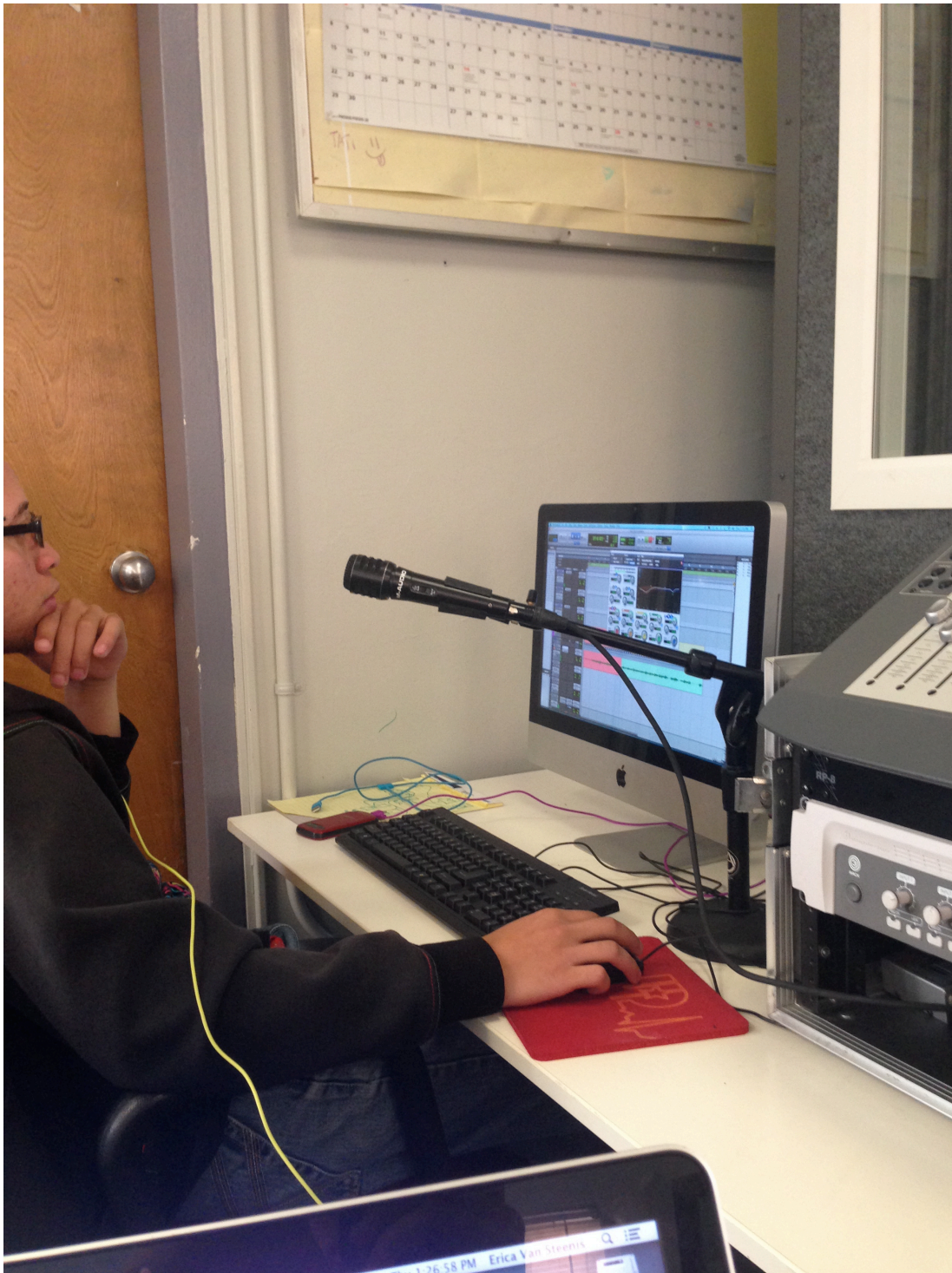
B-3: Upstairs Recording Booth





B-4: Upstairs Kitchen Space

## Appendix C: Images of BoothStar



C-1: SYS UpSquad Employee leading a BoothStar recording session





C-2: Youth waiting outside of BoothStar to record



C-3: UpSquad employee setting up BoothStar

## **Appendix D: Interview Protocol**

Thank you again for your participation in this study. Your comments and answers to my questions are valuable to my research and are greatly appreciated. Again, I am Erica, a graduate student at UC Davis in the Community Development Graduate Group. I am conducting this study in an effort to understand the levels of investment and participation amongst the youth at SYS. I am hoping to gain a clearer understanding of the programmatic structures that attract and keep youth coming back to SYS. I will be interviewing a total of 8 participants during this stage of my research.

Your responses to my questions are confidential, and every effort will be made to keep it this way. Your name will be changed in anything that I write and all notes taken will be protected. Before entering this interview you or your guardian/s signed a consent form for you to take part in this study. Right now, I would also like to gain your consent to record our interview. If you grant me consent to record the interview, please understand that it will be digitally recorded. Digital recordings that are personally identifying will be coded in such a way that protects you and any identifying information will be erased. The audio files will be protected under lock and key.

I will ask you a series of 10 open ended questions about your participation at SYS. This means that these questions are not rigid and at any point you wish to share something you feel is related or important please do so. This interview should take no more than forty-five minutes of your time depending on your willingness to discuss the questions. My intention is that our interview be as relaxed and as much of a conversation as possible.

I want to emphasize that you have every right to decline participation, right to skip a question and right to stop the interview when desired at any point during the interview. Finally, please let me know if you have any questions as the interview proceeds.

### **Interview Questions**

#### **How long you have been here and how you got here.**

1. Explain to me your role/purpose here at the Center.
  - a. If employed: Describe to me the nature and responsibilities of your employment.
  - b. Explain to me how you came to be employed at SYS.
2. Explain to me how long you have been coming to SYS.

Clarifying Questions:

  - a. What age are you now?
  - b. What age did you begin coming?
3. Discuss with me/explain to me the reasons why you first started coming to the Center.
  - a. Describe the details behind you coming to the Center if it was through a means other than your choice/initiative
4. Are you here by choice now?

#### **Why you stay.**

5. Describe to me the main positive qualities of SYS that keep you coming back?
  - a. How many days a week on average to you come to the Center?
6. Would you please explain to me 3 things about the Center that are the most inviting, appealing, fun to you personally.
7. Describe your relationship with the adult employees at SYS.
8. Explain to me how it feels for you to be at the Center.
9. Can you elaborate what SYS provides you that other places may not?
  - a. What are the other places?

- b. What would you be doing if you weren't here?
- 10. Does SYS feel like a safe place?
  - a. Define what it means for a place to be safe to you personally.
- 12. If there were anything you would like the organization to know about your experience here what would it be?
- 13. If there were one thing you could add to the Center what would it be?
  - a. Do you believe that would attract more participation?
- 14. Is there anything else you would like to share with me...is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think is really important?

### **Interview Questions-Adults**

#### **How long you have been here and how you got here.**

- 1. Explain to me your role/purpose here at the Center.
  - a. If employed: Describe to me the nature and responsibilities of your employment.
  - b. Explain to me how you came to be employed at SYS.
- 2. Explain to me how long you have been coming to SYS. How long did you come before becoming employed?
 

Clarifying Questions:

  - a. What age are you now?
  - b. What age did you begin coming?
- 3. Discuss with me/explain to me the reasons why you first started coming to the Center.
  - a. Describe the details behind you coming to the Center if it was through a means other than your choice/initiative
  - b. Why did you stick around for so long?
- 4. Are you here by choice now?

#### **Why you stay.**

- 5. Describe to me the main positive qualities of SYS that keep you coming back?
  - a. How many days a week on average do you work at the Center now?

- b. How often did you come when you were younger?
- 6. Would you please explain to me 3 things about the Center that are the most inviting, appealing, fun to you personally.
- 7. Describe your relationship with the youth and other adult employees at SYS.
- 8. Explain to me how it feels for you to be at the Center and to do the job you do.
- 9. Can you elaborate what SYS provides that other places may not?
  - a. What are the other places?
  - b. What would you be doing if you weren't here?
- 10. Does SYS feel like a safe place?
  - a. Define what it means for a place to be safe to you personally.
- 12. If there were anything you would like the organization to know about your experience here what would it be?