

Summary of 2008 Evaluation Findings

Bolder Options contracts with Acet, Inc. for independent program evaluation. Acet exports data 2 times a year to produce a mid and end of the year report. Bolder Options' plan includes four outcomes for youth: (1) will learn **lifelong healthy habits**; (2) will exhibit **positive behaviors**; (3) will have **academic success**; and (4) will report **satisfaction** with the program. Bolder Options uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and instruments to learn more about youth circumstances and progress towards program goals. Acet analyzes youth intake and assessment forms, youth surveys, parent surveys, mentor surveys, and focus groups.

Bolder Options matched 124 youth with mentors in 2008. For the 2008 year-end report, Acet analyzed data from 264 youth who were matched in the program from May 2006-December 2008. The evaluation findings indicated that 52% of the youth are male and 48% are female. The average age at the time that the youth is matched with the mentor is 12.2 years old. The evaluation stated that 49% of the youth live with a single parent and 10% live with 3 or more adults in the home. The evaluation revealed that 6% of the youth are American Indian/Alaskan Native, 5% are European American, 2% are Asian/Pacific Islander, 14% are Latino, 55% are African American and 18% are Multi-racial. Over 90% of the youth served live at or below the poverty level. It was reported that 46% of the youth have a learning disability and 31% of the youth have a mental health challenge.

In general, the results of the 2008 independent evaluation by Acet, Inc. showed:

- o Sixty percent of youth reported healthy habits at post-assessment.
- o Over 80% of youth reported the achievement of personal goals at post-assessment. Compared to previous cohorts, more youth reported setting goals and acknowledged they had what it took to achieve their goals.
- o At graduation, youth were more likely to resist getting even.
- o Post-assessment results indicate that the majority of youth did not use tobacco, alcohol or illegal drugs on the post-assessment Youth Survey Assessment Questionnaire (YSAQ). Responses to the Youth Post Graduation Survey suggest that youth continued to abstain from substance use.
- o Less than 77% of youth reported engaging in high-risk behaviors such as stealing, vandalism, gang activity, and sexual activity. Responses to the Youth Post Graduation Survey also imply that youth continued to abstain from such behaviors.
- o Youth increased their comfort in making new friends and more frequently reported having friends that were positive influences in their lives. Post Graduation responses also represented favorable impressions of Bolder Options staff and mentors.
- o Youth reported positive attitudes and high levels of self-efficacy in reading, math and academic success.
- o More than 80% of youth reported satisfaction with the Bolder Options program.
- o Parents credited Bolder Options for improved relationships with their children, and for youth's increased life skills, better grades, and academic success.

In 2008, Bolder Options incorporated a new survey, the Youth Post Graduation Survey, into their evaluation plan. The Youth Post Graduation Survey is administered to youth who graduated from the program anywhere from 1-10 years ago. The Youth Post Graduation Survey is a 20-item

questionnaire that incorporates both closed and open-ended items in four broad areas: (1) youth healthy habits (2 items), (2) positive behaviors (8 items), (3) academic success (8 items) and (4) program satisfaction (2 items). Response options for the majority of these items are: YES! YES!; yes; no; NO! NO!; and not sure. In addition, the Youth Post Graduation Survey included three open-ended items giving youth the opportunity to provide feedback on the program and make suggestions for program improvement. The Youth Post Graduation Survey was administered via mail in October to youth who had completed the program at least one year beforehand. The survey was completely confidential. Bolder Options offered a ten-dollar gift card to youth who completed the survey based on an anonymous code that the youth were assigned. Twenty-four youth responded to the Post Graduation Survey in 2008.

The first series of questions on the Youth Post Graduation Survey focused on academic success. This section reflected items in the Youth Intake and YSAQ such as: “I want to do well in school.” And “I like going to school.” This instrument also asked questions on youth progress towards graduation and truancy. The vast majority of youth reported wanting to do well in school and slightly more than three quarters liked going to school. 57% indicated always completing their homework on time.

Aside from academic self-efficacy, youth reported positive behaviors indicative of academic success. For example, 83% of youth indicated they were on track to receive their diploma on time and 64% of youth reported having less than seven unexcused full or partial school days. Youth were also asked to share their career and/or educational plans for after high school. Nine youth reported intending to go to college, eight youth mentioned specific professions they were interested in, and three youth offered other comments such as attending alternative schools or other programs. It should be noted that some of the youth did not complete this section of the survey.

Youth also responded to a series of questions on positive behaviors and healthy habits. This series of questions also mirrored questions in other instruments used in Bolder Options evaluation. Students responding to the follow-up survey appeared to retain a high proportion of positive behaviors and healthy habits. Specifically, over three quarters of youth stated feeling good about themselves (84%) and having friends that are positive influences in their lives (76%). Further, approximately 70% of youth also reported that it was easy for them to talk to adults outside of the program (72%) and that they get enough exercise everyday (68%).

In addition, youth were asked if they still had contact with their mentor, how often, and in what ways. 50% (n=12) of youth responding to the Youth Post Graduation Survey reported that they still have contact with their mentors. Five youth in this group meet with their mentor at least once month, 20% meet less than once a year, and 3 meet at least every six months. The majority of their contact was via telephone (n=12), in person (n=10), and text messaging (n=4).

Similar to the other evaluation instruments, youth were asked a series of questions about their use of substance such as tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs. Again, it appears as though Bolder Options graduates are retaining positive behaviors as at least 65% of youth indicated not using any of the identified substances. Among those who used, alcohol was most frequently tried once or twice.

Youth asked a series of questions that gauged their participation in high-risk behaviors such as stealing, vandalism, and gang activity. Bolder Options youth retained their abstinence of high-risk behaviors (stealing, vandalism, gang activity) as the majority of youth reported NOT engaging in any of the behaviors after graduation. Further, youth were asked if they had ever been convicted of a crime. The majority of youth (84%) reported that they had never been convicted of a crime. The 16% that were convicted had committed the crime prior to starting Bolder Options and were referred to the program for that reason.

Youth were asked two open-ended questions on program satisfaction. First, youth were asked what Bolder Options did well in supporting their program participation. Most youth offered that they appreciated the personal attention they received from Bolder Options staff and mentors. They talked about how the program helped them set realistic goals, become a better person, and appreciated the patience of the Bolder Options staff. Other youth respected the support, motivation, self-efficacy and inspiration they got from the program and their mentor. One youth said, *“Made me feel like I can do something if I just put my mind to it.”* Another group of youth discussed how participation in physical activities led to healthy habits. Youth also shared how Bolder Options supported them in their academic success.

Second, youth were asked what Bolder Options could have done better to improve their experience. Youth had difficulty identifying weaknesses in the program. One youth said, *“It was one of those things I will remember for a lifetime.”* Another encouraged Bolder Options to keep up the good work. They said, *“Continue helping others like you helped me learn how to run and make friends.”* Some youth offered suggestions for program improvement. Specifically, youth talked about not wanting to leave the program and wanting the program to last longer.