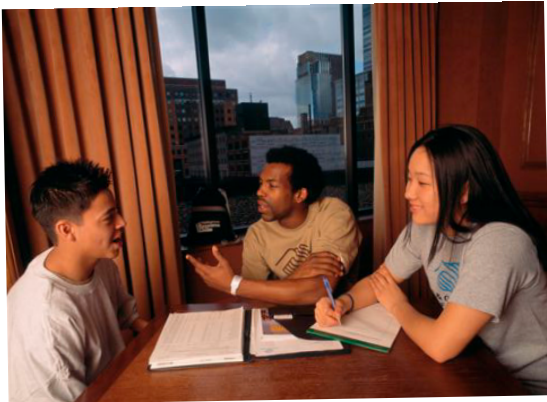


EXPANDING CAREER OPTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE:

# Evaluation of Boys & Girls Clubs of America's CareerLaunch Program

Adria Gallup-Black, Ph.D.

with Jessica Knevals, Nancy Nevarez, & Duquann Hinton



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Prepared by:

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Adria Gallup-Black, Ph.D., Principal Investigator

Jessica Knevals, MPA

Nancy Nevarez

Duquann Hinton

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# Executive Summary



In early 2008, Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) embarked on an ambitious initiative to enhance the scope and capacity of CareerLaunch,<sup>™</sup> a program designed to promote career preparedness among 13- to 18-year-olds. Developed in partnership with Gap Foundation, CareerLaunch is a comprehensive program that introduces young people to the world of work by providing the critical hard and soft skills that they will need to find and keep jobs.

This report contains the findings of a multisite evaluation of CareerLaunch, and includes results from on online surveys of CareerLaunch participants and facilitators, Club staff and leaders, site visits, and in-person and telephone interviews with leaders, staff, teens, BGCA staff, and Gap Foundation staff.

## About CareerLaunch

CareerLaunch grew out of a partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), which in the early 1990s developed an online dictionary of occupational titles called O-NET (Occupational NETwork). In an effort to encourage the use of the dictionary by young people, USDOL reached out to BGCA to help them make the online resource more teen-friendly. In 1998, USDOL provided funding

to BGCA to implement the online dictionary in the Clubs. With the USDOL funding, BGCA developed a web-based vehicle for information on employment skills and opportunities that, although limited, was valuable and useful to young people.

In April 2000, BGCA created an initial version of the web-based vehicle and called it “CareerLaunch,” which was then alpha- and beta-tested. In the years that followed, CareerLaunch went through several iterations, the most important of which was the addition of in-Club activities designed to introduce teens to the world of work. In November 2007, BGCA undertook a major overhaul of the curriculum based on surveys and focus groups with teens and staff. A satisfaction survey, conducted in 2007 by Teens Research Unlimited (TRU), revealed that teens were happy with the program and that they were eager to take advantage of what the program had to offer.

The research base of CareerLaunch was developed from the USDOL Secretary’s Commission of Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) report, which identified 11 core competencies that successful people bring to a job:

1. Making career decisions
2. Using labor market information
3. Preparing resumes

4. Filling out applications
5. Interviewing
6. Completing tasks effectively
7. Being consistently punctual
8. Maintaining regular attendance
9. Demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviors
10. Presenting appropriate appearance
11. Exhibiting good interpersonal relations.

### CareerLaunch Components

CareerLaunch offerings and activities are designed to address each of the 11 USDOL competencies within a youth development framework, though the following tools:<sup>1</sup>

- *Career Exploration Quick Review Reference Guide*, which contains career planning and job skills activities for Club staff and volunteers to use with teens individually or in small groups.
- *CareerLaunch Teen Tips*, a booklet for teens with job-hunting and on-the-job tips.
- CareerLaunch website ([www.careerlaunch.net](http://www.careerlaunch.net)), which enables participants to take a career interest survey, explore careers, identify training or college requirements, seek out financial aid, and play skills-building games.
- CareerLaunch CD-ROM, a tool to assist

<sup>1</sup> Boys & Girls Clubs of America (2007). *CareerLaunch Quick Reference Guide*. Atlanta, GA: Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

Clubs in their outreach efforts to teen Club members and teens in the community at large.

The program itself consists of 22 competency-based activities, designed for a small group setting, that are divided into four units: (1) goal setting; (2) career exploration; (3) job search skills; and (4) keeping the job:

#### **Unit 1: Goal setting**

1. Understanding goals
2. Developing a personal plan

#### **Unit 2: Career exploration**

3. Identifying personal skills
4. Exploring career opportunities
5. Choosing careers
6. Career barriers

#### **Unit 3: Job search skills**

7. Preparing a resume
8. Distributing a resume
9. Writing a cover letter
10. Filling out a job application
11. Handling difficult questions on an application
12. Obtaining letters of reference
13. Interviewing with results
14. Presenting a positive image in interviews
15. Following up on job leads

#### **Unit 4: Keeping the job**

16. Time management
17. Handling unavoidable absences and tardiness
18. Making a good impression

19. Hygiene and grooming in the workplace
20. Following directions
21. Communications skills
22. Using your Code of Ethics

Although the ideal CareerLaunch implementation includes all 22 activities, BGCA recognized that many Clubs lacked the time and/or resources to implement them all. Therefore, the activities were grouped into three Levels:

- **Level 1:** a basic introductory career prep curriculum.
- **Level 2:** Level 1 materials plus more in-depth, essential practice skills for teens to map out a personal career plan and get a job
- **Level 3:** all of the 22 skill-building activities listed above.

Clubs are given considerable discretion in their Level choice. Whatever Level is chosen, however, many Clubs that implemented Levels 1 or 2 often incorporate elements of the higher Levels based on resources and the needs of their teens.

### About the Evaluation

In March 2008, BGCA selected AED to conduct an evaluation of CareerLaunch. BGCA was responsible for identifying the Clubs (or sites) to participate in the evaluation. Some Clubs had been using the CareerLaunch

program for several years, while others were using it for the first time. There was also an effort to mix Clubs by geography (e.g., rural, urban), size, and type (traditional, traditional/school, military). In the late spring of 2008, BGCA negotiated Letters of Agreement (LOA) with 20 Clubs that would each receive \$6,000 to implement CareerLaunch in exchange for participating in the evaluation.

The quantitative data were collected through online surveys (designed using SurveyMonkey) to the CareerLaunch teen participants and staff prior to and at the end of their CareerLaunch experience, and an online survey administered to Club leaders at the start of the evaluation. In July 2008, AED selected five of the 20 Clubs for more intensive qualitative data collection. These included a Club in a large city undergoing urban renewal, a Club at a military base, a Club in a rustbelt industrial area, a Club in a rural area, and a Club in a mid-sized distressed city. AED staff conducted observations of CareerLaunch sessions and interviewed CareerLaunch or Club Directors [paragraph was split] responsible for teen programming, CareerLaunch facilitators, and a sampling of teens.<sup>2</sup> In July and August, AED conducted telephone interviews with the Club Directors who were not part of the five intensive-study Clubs, with BGCA staff, and with a representative from Gap Foundation, the funder of CareerLaunch.

<sup>2</sup> Written active parental consent was required before a teen was interviewed.



## Key Findings

**Does participation in CareerLaunch produce knowledge gains in Club members? What factors contribute to such gains?**

CareerLaunch did produce knowledge gains. The percentage of teens who answered all of the career assessment questions correctly rose from pre to post, with statistically significant increases in six of the 10 items (Table ES-2).

Based on the pre-and post- career assessment,

**Table ES-1: Career Assessment Findings, Pre-and Post-CareerLaunch Participation**

Questions (The correct answer is underlined.)	Pre, % Answering Correctly	Post, % Answering Correctly
Which is the best example of a realistic short-term goal for teens? a) Retirement from a job with a large savings account b) A small family with two children and a big house c) Selecting a major in college d) An <u>"A" on next week's math test</u>	60.2	72.6*
The following job fits into the Public Services career cluster: a) Advertising and design manager b) <u>Social worker</u> c) Sports announcer d) Farmer	57.7	67.9*
During a job search, letters of reference should be requested from: a) Parents b) <u>Teacher</u> c) Uncle who is in sales d) None of the above	48.4	57.7*
Things to take to a job interview are: a) Resume, proof of citizenship, chewing gum b) <u>Driver's license or high school ID, achievement awards</u> c) Your best friend or a family member d) All of the above	55.9	61.3*

**Table ES-1: Career Assessment Findings, Pre-and Post-CareerLaunch Participation**

Questions (The correct answer is underlined.)	Pre, % Answering Correctly	Post, % Answering Correctly
<p>What is the most appropriate response to this question: “What type of position are you looking for?”</p> <p>a) Anything you have available</p> <p>b) Anything that has a good schedule and pays a good salary</p> <p>c) <u>A sales position</u></p>	26.2	39.7*
<p>What is the most appropriate response to this question: “Why would you like to work for our company?”</p> <p>a) It’s close to where I live</p> <p>b) You have good pay and benefits for your employees</p> <p>c) <u>I would like to be part of a growing and successful company</u></p>	68.5	78.3*
<p>True/<u>False</u>: You should include your date of birth, nationality, religion, height and weight on your resume.</p>	40.1	60.8*
<p>True/<u>False</u>: You should attach your photo to your resume.</p>	62.4	69.1*
<p><u>True</u>/<u>False</u>: Jobs in the Environmental Control career cluster include workers who help protect the land and air.</p>	73.5	82.1*
<p><u>True</u>/<u>False</u>: Less than half of available jobs are advertised to the public through employment ads.</p>	69.2	73.3*

\* Statistically significant change, as per a two-tailed t-test calculated by a paired-samples comparison of means.

In a separate battery of questions, teens were asked how well they thought they knew the steps to finding and keeping a job. There were significant knowledge gains with respect to creating resumes and cover letters; searching for information about colleges; preparing for job interviews; finding a job that matched their skills and interests; getting advice about the career process; learning how to do well and keep a job; and learning how to set short-term and long-term goals.

Through CareerLaunch, teens learned how to apply the knowledge (e.g., writing a resume, writing cover letters), understand the consequences of not using that knowledge (e.g., dressing inappropriately, behaving unprofessionally), and they were able to see results stemming from that knowledge (interviews and jobs). One Director noted, “You can always tell the CareerLaunch resumes and cover letters from those from the ‘outside.’” Moreover, the teens strongly felt that CareerLaunch was an excellent source of knowledge about finding and keeping a job.

*I have a lot of friends who are unorganized and this program will help them think better about what they want for the future and how to prepare for the future.*

–CareerLaunch participant

*If I knew someone who is totally clueless about filling out resumes, I would [recommend CareerLaunch]. This is definitely good for a person who have no experience and who was never exposed to the workforce before.*

–CareerLaunch participant

*Yes, I would recommend it. A lot of kids think life is a joke. CareerLaunch prepares you and helps you think in concrete ways about what you want to be successful at in the future. I would go through the program again because I might learn even more the second time around.*

–CareerLaunch participant

**Does participation in CareerLaunch produce attitude and/or behavior changes in participants? What factors contribute to such changes?**

CareerLaunch helped the participants to become more future-minded and hopeful, set goals, recognize barriers to work and how to overcome them, and become more appreciative of their individual talents and assets. Several Club staff members noted that they had already seen small changes in the attitude and behavior of the participants only a few weeks into the sessions. Many teens felt more confident about their future and felt they had a better handle on applying for jobs and planning for a career and/or college. Both Club staff and the teens themselves reported that CareerLaunch provided a healthy “reality check” in that it heightened the participants’ awareness of the working world and of what it took to get a job and be a good worker.

*Before, I thought a job was all fun and games and you could do whatever you wanted. Now, I see a job is more than fun and games. Thinking about a job is helping me to determine what kind of future I want.*

–CareerLaunch participant

*In the beginning, some had irrational hopes. For example, some had 1- to 5- year long-term goals, and some thought they could work for 5 years and then retire. This program has given them a sense of what the real thing is and brings them back to reality.*

–CareerLaunch director

*It helps me find myself. It helps me know what I'm good at. I've also learned my weaknesses and my strengths.*

–CareerLaunch participant

The factors that contributed to those changes the most were the mock interviews and the preparations for the mock interview, the skills assessment, and the goal-setting exercises. The lessons on how to keep a job were useful to teens as well because they involved the interpersonal and communications skills that would serve teens in or out of the workforce.

*It is preparing me well. I know that I can do this and get an interview done without falling into pieces.*

–CareerLaunch participant

*They now know what a resume is. They learned what to do at a job interview and that they should make eye contact. They learned how to look for a job. It's rewarding to see teens learn about stuff that they will do in the future. It's empowering to see them grow.*

–CareerLaunch facilitator

### **Considering the vast differences in Clubs, what best practices can be shared with Clubs in various settings?**

Initially, “settings” was defined in terms of Club size, budget, and location (e.g., rural, urban) While we found few differences among the Clubs based on size and budget in their implementation of CareerLaunch, we did find that the locale, the population of teens served, the teen programming strategy, and the leadership expertise of the Club or Unit Director played a strong role in defining the differences among the Clubs.

*Locale.* In this context, locale encompassed the socioeconomic, demographic, and geographic characteristics of any given area. In general, most Boys & Girls Clubs are located in high-poverty, high-need communities, with high rates of high school non-completion, unemployment, and crime (particularly juvenile crime). CareerLaunch directors and facilitators were highly attuned to how the environment might shape teens’ perception of barriers and used the program tools to address them, such as skills assessment and goal setting.

*Most of my teens have it in their mindset that they will not be able to go to college because of their family and financial situation.*

–CareerLaunch director

*We know their issues and challenges at home and at school. So we use CareerLaunch to help some of these participants meet those challenges.*

–CareerLaunch director

For example, Clubs in areas with low high school graduation rates coupled CareerLaunch lessons with math and literacy instruction. Some Clubs relied on practical means to sustain participation, such as help with transportation in the more rural locales or those areas with few transportation options for young people. Conversely, because CareerLaunch was tailored to the so-called “typical” Club in a distressed area, Clubs in more affluent communities felt that some of the materials were not relevant (e.g., looking for colleges, goal setting); as a result, these Clubs focused on the web component of CareerLaunch.

*Teen population.* Specifically, this pertains to the age of most of the teens in any given CareerLaunch session. In some cases, there was a mix of 13- to 18-year-olds, but in many cases either young teens (13-15) or older teens (16-17) predominated, which at times presented some challenges. Some Clubs were successful at tailoring some of the activities to make them age-appropriate. This was particularly true for those serving younger teens, for which some of the CareerLaunch materials were not

relevant or easily understood. (For example, the job application activity was either modified or dropped entirely.) The directors and facilitators adjusted their programs to make it relevant to their particular population of teens that they served, and to facilitate outreach to teens in the community. According to one Chief Professional Officer (CPO):

*We’re looking for teens that understand and are mature enough to be in a place so that the information they learn is relevant and they can apply it. We were very specific when we chose the age level of kids for this program. We thought seniors were almost too late because they already took most of their high school classes, and we didn’t want to start with 8th grade because we thought it wouldn’t be relevant for a few more years. So, 9th to about 11th grade was our target range for the program.*

*Teen programming practices.* One of the main strategies employed by some of the Clubs was the deliberate tie-in to other programming aimed at teens: Money Matters, Keystone Club, Torch Club, SMART Moves, etc.

*[On encouraging CareerLaunch teens to take Money Matters:] Now that you’re making money, you need to know how to manage it.*

–CareerLaunch director

In addition, several Clubs enforced this linkage by requiring CareerLaunch participation in order to be eligible for a job at the Club, either as part of the Junior Staff program or as a regular counselor. A very common approach that tied participation to employment a scaffolded strategy based on

the age of the member: typically, Level 1 was offered to 13 and 14 year olds; Level 2 was given to 15 year olds; at 16, members were eligible to apply for Club positions or Junior Staff but needed to take Level 3 if they did so.

*Leadership.* Leadership—defined narrowly as the skill and experience of the Club or Unit Director directly responsible for CareerLaunch—was a critical element in shaping the practices at any given Club. Some directors were intentional in bringing their own talents and resources to the job, which shaped how the program offerings were delivered.

*You need to bring in the kind of personal experience that makes [CareerLaunch] jump off the page.*

—BGCA teen programming director

Tenure was also important in that the more experienced directors were better positioned to forge relationships in their communities in order to bring in additional resources for CareerLaunch. This was especially true for those leaders with pre-existing relationships going into their jobs. Other qualities of effective leadership included the ability to raise the visibility of their Clubs in the community, and in their creativity in implementing CareerLaunch.

*We operate under a ‘drill and kill’ philosophy. We have lunchtime sessions where we have games and a CareerLaunch rendition of Jeopardy in which we take questions from the pre-test and the book and other places of relevance. Our teens get bombarded with the stuff but in a fun way.*

—CareerLaunch director

*Overall.* Several best practices were implemented by all of the Clubs in the study. For one, the synergy of the Clubs’ practice of mentoring and CareerLaunch was apparent across the board—an artifact of a Boys & Girls Clubs’ culture that nurtures healthy youth development. Another involved approaches to staffing and what directors looked for in a CareerLaunch facilitator: all agreed that they wanted people who liked teens, could work effectively with them, and could present the material. Yet another was the use of incentives to lure the teens to CareerLaunch and keep them there (especially during the summer months, when teens would rather be elsewhere). Clearly, the common denominator among the Clubs was that leaders and staff enjoyed what they did and liked implementing CareerLaunch. This CPO said it best:

*We’re excited to implement the program. We think it’s a great program. We just wish we had more time to dedicate to the program. Teens have a cramped agenda with sports and have other things on their minds, or they are working already. I think it’s a great curriculum. We’re going to do it as often as we can. We serve over 100 kids in a session. Kids know me around town as “CareerLaunch guy.” We know we’re inspiring kids about getting jobs and getting started on their careers.*

**Given the multiple entities involved in the implementation of CareerLaunch --including BGCA, Gap Foundation, volunteers, Club staff and Club members -- what impact does this collaborative have on the program delivered to Club members?**

AED found great variation in the nature and the scope of the collaboration among the Clubs and BGCA, the Boys & Girls Clubs Regional Teen Advisory Offices, Gap Foundation, and the surrounding community.

*BGCA, the Regional Teen Advisory Offices, and the Clubs:* The relationship between the BGCA national office, located in Atlanta, GA, and the individual Clubs around the country is semi-autonomous: Clubs can use the Boys and Girls Club name, implement the programs, and, most importantly, receive funding from the national office, but are not bound to strict programming mandates or even requirements to maintain program fidelity. The connection between the Clubs and the Regional Teen Advisory Office was even more tenuous. That said, those Club directors that did have relationships with the national office and/or Regional Teen Advisory committees tended to be very proactive in their implementation of CareerLaunch with respect to building the necessary resources (human and financial) to make it work. In addition, those directors who did have a relationship with the Regional Teen Advisory Office in particular felt that it was a valuable, if untapped, resource for networking and information sharing about what works for teens.

*There are classes that you can take when the teens are in sessions, and you can work with other advisors from other clubs that have done programs for several years. You get to meet your regional advisors that you may not have known. You may not realize there's a whole committee.*

–CareerLaunch Director

*CareerLaunch and Gap Foundation:* Gap Foundation and BGCA have been partners in CareerLaunch since 1999. Gap Foundation has been, and remains, the sole funder of the program at the national level. While Gap Foundation has never assumed a formal role in determining program content, it has been actively involved in the expansion, delivery, and assessment of the program. In CareerLaunch, Gap Foundation sees a win-win situation: in its professional development, Gap focuses on job readiness for first-time workers, which was a natural tie-in to CareerLaunch. In addition, CareerLaunch was attractive to Gap Foundation because there was a ready-made infrastructure that facilitated partnerships between local Clubs and local stores. Gap Foundation is fully committed to CareerLaunch, and for both organizations it is a mutually beneficial relationship.

*CareerLaunch and the surrounding community.* As noted earlier, having strong relationships with the community and local business is often a reflection of strong Club leadership. In practice, although outside entities such as community organizations, local businesses, and public agencies are approached for support, they are used more often for shadowing opportunities, internships, and

volunteers. Asking outsiders to serve as mock interviewers is another way in which directors try to get CareerLaunch on the radar screen of local businesses, and Club development officers in particular hope to use these mock interview efforts to expand their network of funders. The Clubs did feel that efforts to engage the community to hire teens could be stronger. But recruiting local businesses to hire CareerLaunch participants in the more distressed communities is close to impossible. This did not mean, however, that the directors were not proactive in seeking community and local business support to generate some form of work experience for the teens.

*Some of the businesses in our community are managers of some of our volunteers in the CareerLaunch program. We'll go to these businesses and get job applications and give them to the kids, and sometimes [those businesses will] and take and submit the job applications.*

–Boys & Girls Club CPO

### CareerLaunch and Healthy Youth Development

What underscored the evaluation agenda was the role that a career preparation program such as CareerLaunch might play in youth development, which AED's Center for Youth Development and Policy Research defines as “a combination of all of the people, places, supports, opportunities and services that most of us inherently understand that young people need to be happy, healthy and successful” (AED Center for Youth Development, no date) as

they move towards adulthood. Our findings were very consistent with what Charner (1996) found in his cross-sectional analyses of School-to-Work programs: mainly, short term (i.e., immediately or shortly after program participation) outcomes of “skills and knowledge, career direction, motivation, and empowerment” – all of which are positive conduits to adulthood.

Through the conversations with teens and adults, and in the examination of the quantitative survey data, AED found that CareerLaunch served as a youth development vehicle because of the Boys & Girls Club culture (see Arbreton et al., 2009; Deutsch & Jones; 2008; Hirsch, 2005; and Rhodes, 2004). This culture is defined by its passion for young people and operationalized in its practice of hiring staff that share that passion. One director, who had been at the helm of her Club for over 10 years and who had been with the Boys & Girls Club system for almost 20 years, exuded, “I love my job! I'm not going to make the most money, but we're about family here.” Another director said something similar, “I'm not going to get rich doing this. If you're in it for the money, I'll show you the door because you won't last a week.”

CareerLaunch is described as a “career exploration and mentoring program” on the BGCA website and on the Clubs' own websites. The mentoring aspect of CareerLaunch makes it a strong youth development program in itself. However, this gets short shrift in the marketing efforts by the national office and local Clubs possibly because many CareerLaunch participants have



been members of their Clubs for several years and have established mentoring relationships, making the mentoring aspect in CareerLaunch more or less a given.

However, Club directors and facilitators unanimously felt that mentoring in and of itself could not be separated from CareerLaunch implementation, and they intentionally used the mentoring relationship to connect to the participants during the sessions. In addition, data from BGCA on the Clubs that implemented an early version of CareerLaunch showed that 70% of the Clubs with CareerLaunch also had teens in Power Hour, Smart Moves, Smart Girls, Youth Unity, Daily Challenges, and Healthy Habits: programs that were less focused on “hard” skill development and more focused on developing as a healthy and engaged adult.

What is more, based on previous studies of programs that serve teens (Moore & Lippman, 2005; AED Center for Youth Development, no date; Pittman & Zelden, 1995; Learner, 2005; Bartko & Eccles, 2003; Klein et al., 2006), we found that CareerLaunch in and of itself was

instrumental in promoting safe and healthy youth development through the following domains of youth programming, as defined by: as defined by Eccles & Gootman (2002) in their meta-analysis of youth programs:

1. Physical and psychological safety
2. Appropriate structure
3. Supportive relationships
4. Opportunities to belong
5. Positive social norms
6. Support for efficacy and mattering
7. Opportunities for skill building
8. Integration of family, school, and community efforts

*[CareerLaunch] reminds me that my future is and will always be in my hands. Even though I'm still a kid, life comes fast. CareerLaunch teaches us that even though we are kids, we should always have the future in mind. Other programs don't do that... Everyone is born with the ability to learn, but society messes people up. CareerLaunch motivates and teaches and equalizes.*

*—CareerLaunch participant*



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In early 2008, Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) embarked on an ambitious initiative to enhance the scope and capacity of CareerLaunch,<sup>TM</sup> a program designed to promote career preparedness among 13- to 18-year-olds. Developed in partnership with Gap Foundation, CareerLaunch is a comprehensive program that introduces young people to the world of work by providing the critical hard and soft skills that they will need to find and keep jobs.

This report contains the findings of a multisite evaluation of CareerLaunch, and includes results from on online surveys of CareerLaunch participants and facilitators, Club staff and leaders, site visits, and in-person and telephone interviews with leaders, staff, teens, BGCA staff, and Gap Foundation staff.

## History

CareerLaunch grew out of a partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), which in the early 1990s developed an online dictionary of occupational titles called O-NET (Occupational NETwork). In an effort to encourage the use of the dictionary by young people, USDOL reached out to BGCA to help them make the online resource more teen-friendly. In 1998, USDOL provided funding to BGCA to implement the online dictionary in

the Clubs. With the USDOL funding, BGCA developed a web-based vehicle for information on employment skills and opportunities that,

although limited, had good value in being something that the young people could use.

In April 2000, BGCA created an initial version of CareerLaunch, which was then alpha- and beta-tested. At that time, BGCA had several career-related programs for children and teens:

1. *Goals for Growth for ages 6-12*—goal setting and implementation program for youth
2. *Explorers Club for ages 13-15*—program to help teens explore a broad range of career possibilities and help them determine their likes and dislikes, and other factors
3. *Job Ready for ages 16-18*—program teaching teens 11 cross-functional job competency areas and assisting them in finding employment
4. *Junior Staff Career Development for ages 13-18*—program to help teens focus on a career in helping services, particularly but not limited to positions with the Boys & Girls Clubs

The research base of CareerLaunch was based on the USDOL Secretary's Commission of Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) report,<sup>1</sup> which identified 11 core competencies, successful people bring to a job:

1. Making career decisions
2. Using labor market information
3. Preparing resumes
4. Filling out applications
5. Interviewing
6. Completing tasks effectively
7. Being consistently punctual
8. Maintaining regular attendance
9. Demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviors
10. Presenting appropriate appearance
11. Exhibiting good interpersonal relations.

CareerLaunch offerings and activities were designed to address each of these competencies within a youth development framework. In the years that followed, the program went through several iterations (both electronically and programmatically), until 2005 when BGCA undertook another major overhaul of the curriculum. In November 2007, the materials were revised again based on surveys and focus groups with teens and staff. A satisfaction survey, conducted in 2007 by Teens Research Unlimited (TRU), revealed that teens were happy with the program and that they were eager to take advantage of what the program had to offer.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Labor (1991), SCANS Report. Washington, DC: USDOL.

### CareerLaunch Program Components

According to the CareerLaunch Quick Reference Guide for staff, the program contains the following tools:

- Career Exploration Quick Review Reference Guide for Club staff and volunteers, which contains career planning and job skills activities for Club staff and volunteers to use with teens individually or in small groups
- CareerLaunch Teen Tips, a booklet for teens with job-hunting and on-the-job tips
- CareerLaunch website ([www.careerlaunch.net](http://www.careerlaunch.net)) that allows participants to take a career interest survey, explore careers, identify training or college requirements, seek out financial aid and play skills-building games
- CareerLaunch CD-ROM, a tool to assist Clubs in their outreach efforts to teen Club members and teens in the community at large

The program itself consists of 22 competency-based activities designed to be used in a small group setting. They were divided into four units:

#### **Unit 1: Goal setting**

1. Understanding goals
2. Developing a personal plan

**Unit 2: Career exploration**

3. Identifying personal skills
4. Exploring career opportunities
5. Choosing careers
6. Career barriers

**Unit 3: Job search skills**

7. Preparing a resume
8. Distributing a resume
9. Writing a cover letter
10. Filling out a job application
11. Handling difficult questions on an application
12. Obtaining letters of reference
13. Interviewing with results
14. Presenting a positive image in interviews
15. Following up on job leads

**Unit 4: Keeping the job**

16. Time management
17. Handling unavoidable absences and tardiness
18. Making a good impression
19. Hygiene and grooming in the workplace
20. Following directions
21. Communications skills
22. Using your Code of Ethics

Although the ideal CareerLaunch implementation includes all 22 activities, BGCA recognizes that many Clubs lacked the time and/or resources to conduct all of them. Therefore, the activities are grouped into three Levels (from the Quick Reference Guide):

- *Level 1:* provides a basic introductory career prep curriculum.

- *Level 2:* Level 1 materials plus more in-depth, essential practice skills for teens to map out a personal career plan and get a job
- *Level 3:* incorporates Levels 1 and 2 and uses the 22 skill-building activities listed above.

Clubs are given considerable discretion in their implementation of CareerLaunch. Whatever Level is chosen, however, many Clubs that implement Levels 1 or 2 often incorporate elements of the higher Levels based on resources and the needs of their teens.

**About the Evaluation**

In March 2008, BGCA selected the AED to conduct an evaluation of CareerLaunch. BGCA was responsible for the selection of the Clubs to participate in the evaluation, which varied by the degree of experience implementing CareerLaunch: some had been using the program for several years, while others were using it for the first time. There was also an effort to mix Clubs by geography (e.g., rural, urban), size, and type (traditional, traditional/school, military). In the late spring of 2008, BGCA negotiated Letters of Agreement (LOA) with 20 Clubs that would each receive \$6,000 in funding for CareerLaunch in exchange for participating in the evaluation. For confidentiality purposes, the individual Clubs will not be identified in this report, and no names will be used.

The quantitative data were collected through online surveys (designed through SurveyMonkey) to the CareerLaunch teen participants and staff prior to and at the end of their CareerLaunch experience; an online survey was also administered to Club leaders. In July 2008, AED selected five of the 20 Clubs for more intensive qualitative data collection. These included a Club in a large city undergoing urban renewal, a Club at a military base, a Club in a distressed industrial area, a Club in a rural area, and a Club in a mid-sized distressed city. AED staff conducted observations of CareerLaunch sessions and interviewed CareerLaunch or Club Directors responsible for teen programming, CareerLaunch facilitators, and a sampling of teens.<sup>2</sup> In July and August, AED conducted telephone interviews with the Club Directors who were not part of the five intensive-study Clubs, with BGCA staff, and with a representative from Gap Foundation, the funder of CareerLaunch. The quotes used in this report come from in person or telephone interviews, and open ended responses from the online surveys.

Other data sources included documents provided by BGCA (including memos, notes, and prior internal and external evaluations). We also mined information from an evaluation conducted by AED in 2000 for Gap Foundation, for which several of its grantees—including BGCA—were interviewed. For the program scan, we also delved into the literature on youth development initiatives and

measurement, including reports produced by AED's own Center for Youth Development and Center for Schools and Community Services on effective youth programming. (Additional details about the data and their analyses may be found in the Technical Appendix.)

The evaluation was designed to answer following questions:

- Does participation in CareerLaunch produce knowledge gains in BGCA participants? What factors contribute to such gains?
- Does participation in CareerLaunch produce attitude and/or behavior change in participants? What factors contribute to such changes?
- Considering the vast differences in BGCA Clubs, what best practices can be shared with Clubs in various settings?
- Given the multiple entities involved in the implementation of CareerLaunch -- including BGCA, Gap Foundation, volunteers, and BGCA staff and members -- what impact does this collaborative effort have on the program delivered to Club members?

Underscoring these four questions was a fifth: what role might a program like CareerLaunch play in the healthy development of the young people who participate? Accordingly, the evaluation was also designed to uncover the programmatic variables within the CareerLaunch program that might explain this critical construct.

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<sup>2</sup> Written parental consent was required before a teen was interviewed.

## II. The Evaluation Clubs



As with most Boys & Girls Clubs, most of the evaluation Clubs served teens in areas with high unemployment, high poverty rates, and low rates of high school graduation (Table II.1). They varied in location, from large urban areas to rural communities; however, all but two Clubs were within part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), indicating that there was some linkage to a large or mid-sized city.

Using the NCES locale designations (NCES, 2006), the evaluation Clubs were located in seven large cities, one mid-sized city, two small cities, five large suburbs, one distant town, one remote town, and three fringe rural areas.<sup>1</sup>

*About the Evaluation Clubs*

At the time of the evaluation, most (83%) were implementing Level 1. As per an online survey of directors, 60% of the respondents indicated that the program covers sessions, as outlined in the Quick Reference Guide, that

were offered regularly and at set times during the week. Of the rest, 30% implemented CareerLaunch in the summer to support their teen employment programs, and 10% integrated CareerLaunch into other teen activities with no set schedule for sessions.

**Club Leadership Survey Findings**

The Club Leadership surveys, administered at the start of the evaluation, were designed to capture an overall view of the environment in which CareerLaunch operated within the

**Table II-1: Comparisons between the Evaluation Clubs and National Averages (2008)**

	Evaluation Site Average	National Average
Poverty(2008)	18.5%	12.5%
Unemployment(2008)	5.1%	4.6%
Percent 25 or older with at least a high school diploma (2000)	80.6%	85.7%

<sup>1</sup> A full listing of sources is included in the Technical Appendix.

participating Clubs. The responses came from five CPOs, six Program Directors, one Club Director, and two staff members: 14 respondents in total.

#### *Club Leaders' background*

- The majority had served with the Boys & Girls Clubs for three to five years or longer. CPOs served as staff and/or Program Directors in the past, and Program Directors had served as staff. Two had ever been a member of a Boys & Girls Club as a child or teen.

#### *About the teens they serve*

- Seven of the 14 identified all or most of their teens as good readers. All of their teens were currently in school. Nine indicated that at least half of their teens were good students (i.e., with A or B grades).
- Eight of the 14 leaders felt that at least some of the teens were at risk of joining gangs or taking drugs, and ten reported that some to most were at risk of underage drinking.
- Five of the leaders reported that fewer than 10% of the teens had no access to a computer. This was important because BGCA initially marketed CareerLaunch as a web-based program and promoted the web functionality as a unique element of the program.
- All of the teens were interested in participating in the following: community involvement (e.g., community service projects, volunteering); figuring out what they wanted to do after high school (e.g.,

more education, job); learning how to get a job; sports, fitness, and recreation; and learning how to use a computer. Teens were least interested in arts and crafts (a finding that was confirmed by both the staff and member surveys).

#### *About teen programming at their Clubs*

- On average, the Clubs employed two full-time staff and three part-time staff and volunteers (each) to implement their teen programming. The range went from only one full-time staff person to five part-time and full-time staff apiece and 10 volunteers.
- Only one leader reported spending more than 50% of the Club budget on teen programming. The others reported spending under 50%, with half stating that they spent 25% or less.
- Two received supplemental funding to run or implement teen programming; the primary source of this funding came from federal grants, followed by state grants and foundation/private contributions.

#### *About implementing CareerLaunch*

- All of the leaders who responded to the survey reported using multiple strategies to recruit teens for CareerLaunch. Handing out information about the program – i.e., flyers, CD-ROMs, etc. was the most common strategy. At least half used the following additional methods: holding meetings for volunteers, teachers, and/or parents of potential participants and talking about CareerLaunch to teens attending a job fair or career conference. At the time of the survey,

half of the leaders were implementing CareerLaunch annually. However, eight were planning to implement it at least twice a year in the next year, and eight would also implement it more often in an ideal world.

- For the most part, there was some measure of fidelity of implementation: ten indicated that their CareerLaunch program covered sessions as outlined in the Quick Reference Guide, and was offered regularly and at set times during the week. Three of the leaders reported that their CareerLaunch program was offered once during the year to support teen summer employment, and one integrated CareerLaunch into other teen activities.
- Table II-2, below, shows the extent to which individual CareerLaunch components were implemented in the Clubs, from the most to the least (Table II-2):

**Table II-2: Percentage of Club Using Selected CareerLaunch Components**

CareerLaunch Program Component	% of Leaders Incorporating
Define "goal" and identify short- and long-term goals	100.0%
Identify personal skills and abilities through a skills inventory	100.0%
Fill out a job application	100.0%
Learn how to keep a job	100.0%
Use the CareerLaunch website	100.0%
Identify and explore career opportunities	83.3%
Identify career barriers and how to overcome them	83.3%
Practice effective interviewing skills	83.3%
Use the "Teen Tips" booklet	83.3%

**Table II-2: Percentage of Club Using Selected CareerLaunch Components**

CareerLaunch Program Component	% of Leaders Incorporating
Prepare a portfolio containing a resume, a cover letter, and reference letters	75.0%
"Shadow" an employee	66.7%
Present a professional image	58.3%
Attend a college visit	41.7%
Visit a job fair	33.3%

### Staff Survey Findings

Of those completing the surveys, 29 staff members took the pre-survey, and 19 completed a post-survey. The purpose of the surveys was to gather information about the staff: their background, their training on CareerLaunch, the teens they served, and the extent to which they felt prepared to run CareerLaunch prior to implementation. In the post-survey, they were asked to reflect on their CareerLaunch experience.

#### Staff background

- The staff were predominantly female (77%), Caucasian (62%), and between 18 and 34 years old (77%). All but seven had at least some college education or more.

- Nine had been members of a Boys & Girls Club when they were younger. Six had worked as a volunteer before joining the staff.
- Sixteen were full-time staff members. The others were part-timers; of those, eight had another job (either full- or part-time).
- With respect to tenure, staff had been on board for either more than five years (44%) or one year or less (30%).

#### Working with teens at the Clubs

- Based on how the staff worked with teens outside of CareerLaunch, the top-ranked response—helping teens figure out what they want to do after high school—was consistent with CareerLaunch’s mission of preparing teens for a career (Table II-3):

**Table II-3: Percentage of Club Using Selected CareerLaunch Components**

Activities with teens	% of Staff Responding
Helping teens figure out what they want to do after high school	83.3%
Getting teens involved with their community	75.0%
Teaching teens how to stay safe (avoid drugs, alcohol, gangs, etc.)	75.0%
Teen sports, fitness, and recreation	70.8%
Helping teens improve study skills	62.5%
Teaching teens how to use a computer	58.3%
Teen arts and crafts	41.7%

When asked to rank the following teen-focused activities in the order of the amount of time spent, on average staff spent time on (from most to least):

1. Planning activities and programs for teens
2. Working directly with teens on a daily basis
3. Program supervision/planning
4. Administrative support
5. Staff/volunteer supervision
6. Advocating for teens
7. Planning community activities in support of teens

Sixteen (64%) reported that they spent at least 11% to 25% of their time on CareerLaunch.

#### *Preparing to run CareerLaunch*

- About half of the respondents stated that this was the first time they had worked with teens using CareerLaunch.
- Most staff (12) got their primary training by receiving the materials and reading them on their own. Other forms of training included national meetings and sessions with Club supervisors.
- The majority of staff reported that their training made them “well prepared” to implement all of the CareerLaunch components. However, opinions were mixed as to which most effectively prepared them to implement CareerLaunch: when “practical experience” was included among the choices, most felt that it was either practical

experience alone or practical experience combined with CareerLaunch training that best prepared them to implement the program.

### *Opinions about CareerLaunch*

- In retrospect, staff overall felt that all of the CareerLaunch components would be “very useful” to the teens they served: creating resumes and cover letters; preparing for job interviews; finding a job that matches their skills and interests; getting advice about the career process; teaching how to do well and keep a job; using the Teen tips booklet; one-on-one counseling; group sessions; and the CareerLaunch website. Searching for information about colleges was deemed “moderately useful.” Since career fairs were not offered in most of the Clubs, staff was unable to determine how useful they were. The same was true with respect to the CareerLaunch website itself: all of the website components were considered “very useful” by most staff.

### **Member Survey Findings**

The purpose of the member surveys was twofold: first, to capture teen members’ opinions about school, work, hobbies, themselves, and their future, and, secondly, to serve as the official CareerLaunch Career Assessment, which were embedded in the surveys but would ordinarily have been administered using a paper and pencil

questionnaire. The teen data from the pre- and post-surveys were linked by the Club member user name. Overall, the surveys captured responses from 300 teens, broken down as follows: pre and post-survey: 170; pre-survey only: 108; post-survey only: 22. Unless otherwise specified, the data in this section will come from the linked pre- and post-survey data. (See the Technical Appendix for details about the matching process, response bias tests, and data cleaning.)

### *Member background*

- The teens ranged from 13 to 18 years old; the majority of them (29%) were 13, followed by 15-year-olds (27%). Slightly under a quarter of them (24%) were 16 or older.
- The gender breakdown was 52% male, 48% female.
- Twenty-nine percent of the teens had at least part-time jobs when they started CareerLaunch. Many of those (68% of all workers) had full-time jobs, which could have been a function of the season (i.e., summer employment, because the surveys were conducted in June and July).

### *Activities at the Club*

Over 40% of the respondents had been Club members for at least three years. Slightly over 20% were newer members (i.e., fewer than three months). The vast majority—74%—attended a few times a week.

Teens ranked the following reasons for going to their Boys & Girls Club, in the order of importance (from most to least):

1. Learn how to get and keep a job
2. Learn how to get into college
3. Stay out of trouble
4. Learn how to plan for the future
5. Learn new things
6. Hang out with friends
7. Play sports
8. Use computers
9. Having an adult to talk to
10. Get help with schoolwork
11. Counseling/getting advice from adults
12. Play games
13. Study
14. Do arts and crafts

This ranking did not change between the pre-and post-surveys.

#### *Perceived barriers to work*

When asked to name some of the barriers that young people might face in an effort to find and keep a job, transportation was noted as the primary barrier (81%), followed by school work (71%), and then by family responsibilities (62%). (All of the teens were still in school.)

#### *Perceptions of school*

All of the responses in this section come from the pre-survey. (The teen respondents were allowed to check multiple answers.)

- Twenty-six percent of the teens indicated that math was their favorite subject. Almost three-quarters (74%) considered themselves “very good” or “pretty good” students.

- According to the teens, the chief barrier to young people doing well in school was bad grades (67%), followed by not seeing how school is important to the future (57%) and becoming a parent (56%). (For this item, the teens were allowed to check more than one response.)
- When broken down by gender, bad grades remained the primary reason for both boys and girls, but when it came to the second reason, girls were more likely to say “not getting seeing how school is important” while boys leaned towards “not getting along with teachers.” However, for the third reason, both boys and girls answered “Becoming a parent.” (For boys, “Boring classes” tied with this for third).

When broken down by gender, bad grades remained the primary reason for both boys and girls, but when it came to the second reason, girls were more likely to say “not getting seeing how school is important” and boys said “not getting along with teachers.” However, for the third reason, both boys and girls answered “Becoming a parent.” (For boys, “Boring classes” tied with this for third).

#### *Adult influences*

- On the pre-survey, parental involvement in their children’s education seemed strong: over half (52%) strongly agreed with “My family keeps a close watch on how I am doing in school.”
- When asked on the pre-survey to name the top three people who had the greatest influence on their thinking about a future,

82% answered “parents.” “Friends” ranked second (38%), and teachers ranked third (34%) These rankings remained unchanged between the pre-and the post-surveys: parents, 81%; friends, 42%; and teachers, 38%.

On both the pre-and post surveys, the percentage who answered “An adult at the Boys & Girls Clubs” remained fairly steady (32% and 34%, respectively). However, by the end of their CareerLaunch participation, teens in areas with high unemployment and high percentages of adults 25 and over without a

high school diploma were significantly more inclined to feel that an adult at their Club was a positive influence.<sup>2</sup> As will be seen, CareerLaunch, by employing a youth-centered approach to teaching about the importance of education and employment, served a critical need in the lives of many young people.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on a Pearson bivariate correlation between the pre-and post responses to “Who had an influence...” and county-level rates of unemployment (2008) and percent 25 and over without a high school diploma (2000 estimate); significance was measured at the  $p < 0.05$  level.





### III. CareerLaunch and Teens: The “**Kick-Off**” To Adulthood

According to the Quick Reference Guide, CareerLaunch was designed to generate the following outcomes:

1. Greater interest and appreciation for the world of work
2. Knowledge of careers and the role of education in success
3. Development of career goals
4. Knowledge of how to conduct college searches, find financial aid
5. Knowledge of how to find a job, complete an application and resume, development of interviewing skills
6. Develop appropriate work habits
7. Begin to apply for jobs
8. Begin the college application process

Accordingly, we asked the following questions:

- Does participation in CareerLaunch produce knowledge gains in Club members? What factors contribute to such gains?
- Does participation in CareerLaunch produce attitude and/or behavior change in participants? What factors contribute to such changes?

Initially, we felt, as evaluators, that a program that lasted six weeks (at the most) would have limited impacts. As such, we assumed that CareerLaunch would play a limited role in a teen's personal growth apart from merely teaching about how to find and keep a job. We were wrong. Therefore, we needed to “unpack” the purported outcomes of CareerLaunch to deepen our understanding of the true impact of the program.

What we learned was consistent with the growing literature on the impact of youth programs in general and career preparation programs in particular on youth development (Charner, 1996; Eccles & Goodman, 2002; Lee & Staff, 2002; Mortimer, 2003; Klein et al., 2006; Bartko & Eccles, 2003, Benson & Lerner, 2003). Career preparation gives teens a new perspective on the future. For teens who might be apprehensive of what that future might bring, systematically learning about the steps that one can take to a career demystifies the “unknown,” and makes the future something over which they can have a degree of control. This is extremely empowering, particularly for those teens in living distressed areas who might see their future as growing up and growing old with a low-paying job (if any job at all), and no allusions of success. Taking control, and, along with it, responsibility for one's future plays a huge role in a person's development from a teen to an adult (Benson & Lerner, 2003; Benson, 1997; Wasserman et al., 2003; Benson et al., 2004, Luthar et al., 2000). For many teens, CareerLaunch was a “kick-off” to adulthood. For perhaps the first time, they needed to think about the future in an optimistic yet realistic way, mainly in terms of being more aware of what they needed to do and who they needed to be to be successful. In a real sense, it was a step towards maturity.

### Knowledge Gains: From Learning to Applying to Getting Results

The primary objective of CareerLaunch was to increase teens' knowledge about how to find

and keep a job. At a minimum, this required little more than retaining what was learned in the sessions. However, with knowledge should come application (e.g., writing a resume, writing cover letters), internalization, learning the consequences of not using that knowledge (e.g., not dressing appropriately or behaving professionally), and, in some cases, achieving the results that come from using that knowledge (interviews and jobs). We found that CareerLaunch resulted in all of these aspects of knowledge gains. More importantly, the teens agreed.

Our key measures in gauging the extent to which CareerLaunch increased knowledge in the teens were the pre and post Career Assessment questions which were embedded in the member surveys. Although the teens had a general idea of what it took to find and keep a job prior to participation, it was clear that there were still some knowledge gaps and much room for improvement. However, by the program’s conclusion, there were real gains in knowledge, some statistically significant (Table III-1).

**Table III-1: Career Assessment Findings, Pre-and Post-CareerLaunch Participation**

Questions (The correct answer is underlined.)	Pre, % Answering Correctly	Post, % Answering Correctly
Which is the best example of a realistic short-term goal for teens? a) Retirement from a job with a large savings account b) A small family with two children and a big house c) <u>Selecting a major in college</u> d) An “A” on next week’s math test	60.2	72.6*
The following job fits into the Public Services career cluster: a) Advertising and design manager b) <u>Social worker</u> c) Sports announcer d) Farmer	57.7	67.9*
During a job search, letters of reference should be requested from: a) Parents b) <u>Teacher</u> c) Uncle who is in sales d) None of the above	48.4	57.7

\* Significant change from pre-survey to post-survey at the  $p \leq .05$  level as per a two-tailed t-test of paired sample comparison of means.

**Table III-1: Career Assessment Findings, Pre-and Post-CareerLaunch Participation**

Questions (The correct answer is underlined.)	Pre, % Answering Correctly	Post, % Answering Correctly
<p>Things to take to a job interview are:</p> <p>a) Resume, proof of citizenship, chewing gum</p> <p>b) <u>Driver’s license or high school ID, achievement awards</u></p> <p>c) Your best friend or a family member</p> <p>d) All of the above</p>	55.9	61.3*
<p>What is the most appropriate response to this question: “What type of position are you looking for?”</p> <p>a) Anything you have available</p> <p>b) Anything that has a good schedule and pays a good salary</p> <p>c) <u>A sales position</u></p>	26.2	39.7*
<p>What is the most appropriate response to this question: “Why would you like to work for our company?”</p> <p>a) It’s close to where I live</p> <p>b) You have good pay and benefits for your employees</p> <p>c) <u>I would like to be part of a growing and successful company</u></p>	68.5	78.3**
<p>True/<u>False</u>: You should include your date of birth, nationality, religion, height and weight on your resume.</p>	40.1	60.8*
<p>True/<u>False</u>: You should attach your photo to your resume.</p>	62.4	69.1*
<p><u>True/False</u>: Jobs in the Environmental Control career cluster include workers who help protect the land and air.</p>	73.5	82.1*
<p><u>True/False</u>: Less than half of available jobs are advertised to the public through employment ads.</p>	69.2	73.3*

When these data were correlated with gender and age, we were able to determine who was more likely to answer correctly (pre- and/or post):<sup>1</sup>

- Although boys slightly outnumbered girls in CareerLaunch, girls were overwhelmingly more likely to correctly answer the Career Assessment questions on both the pre- and post-survey
- Older teens were more likely to correctly respond to the Career Assessment questions

on the pre-survey than the younger teens. However, by the end of CareerLaunch, differences due to age declined to insignificant levels.

In a separate battery of questions, teens were asked how well they thought they knew the steps to job seeking. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = “extremely well” and 5 = “not well at all,” there were significant gains in all of the items, as shown in Table III-2, below.

<sup>1</sup> Based on significance levels of  $p < .05$ , as per a Pearson correlation.

**Table III-2: Perceptions of Extent of Knowledge About Careers**

Thinking about job-related activities, please rate how well you know about or how to do the following activities: (1=extremely well;5=not well at all)	Pre (1-5)	Post (1-5)	% change (improvement)
Create resumes and cover letters	3.1	2.5*	19%
Search for information about colleges	2.7	2.2*	19%
Prepare for job interviews	2.6	2.2*	15%
Find a job that matches your skills and interests	2.4	2.1*	13%
Get advice about the career process	2.6	2.2*	15%
Learn how to do well and keep a job	2.4	2.0*	17%
Learn how to set short-term and long-term goals	2.3	1.9*	17%

\* Significant change from pre-survey to post-survey at the  $p < .05$  level as per a two-tailed t-test of paired sample comparison of means.

In our observations of CareerLaunch sessions, we saw how some of the knowledge was being imparted:

- The instructor covered a section on punctuality and attendance in the workplace by reviewing the acceptable reasons (death in a family) and unacceptable reasons (sleeping in late) for missing work. The participants were highly engaged in asking many clarifying and nuanced questions.
- During the mock interviews, the Club’s human resources representative, acting as an interviewer, was generous in his feedback to the interviewees: how to speak, what vocabulary to use, and what to wear when going on an actual interview. More importantly, he spoke to the teens as adults and treated them with the same level of respect that he would grant any adult.

More than one staff person noted that their teens entered CareerLaunch thinking they already knew how to find and keep jobs, which caused some tension at the beginning. One facilitator remembered, “At first, they came in kicking and screaming because they thought they knew about getting a job. They think they know everything, but then they find that they have a lot to learn.” Another recalled, “During the career assessment, the kids were complaining, ‘We know this already!’ And we said, ‘Oh, no, you don’t!’ Eventually they realized that they didn’t know this stuff.”

In those Clubs the ones in the more affluent communities, the teens wanted to pick and choose what they wanted to learn. At one Club, the director remembered that her teens didn’t want to “waste time” on activities like the

goal setting exercise, preferring to “get to the good stuff,” which for them meant learning about specific skills, such as interviewing, resume writing, and job searching. At another, the director noted that the lessons on proper behavior and good attitudes were more likely to resonate with her teens than those on looking for work. “In our situation, at least one parent is fully employed in every family. In several cases both parents are employed and the older students have part time jobs already. We are definitely starting from an advanced level when it comes to the teen’s knowledge of the ‘World of Work.’”

In most of the Clubs, however, the teens were very eager to learn everything. “During each class, everyone wanted to know more about CareerLaunch and what more can it offer,” recalled one director. This particular Club had initially offered Level 1 and decided to offer Level 2 later on because the teens wanted to take their knowledge to the next level. Some directors observed that the teens who were able to make the best use of their CareerLaunch experience were those who wanted to enter the workforce right away, either as full- or part-time employees. This was especially true for those who took CareerLaunch in the late spring and early summer, in preparation for summer employment.

#### *Applying the Knowledge Gained*

To what extent do teens actually use the knowledge gained through CareerLaunch? Are they more likely to dress appropriately? Are they more likely to act professionally? Are they more likely to be on time?

In many Clubs, participation in CareerLaunch was a prerequisite to being considered for Junior Staff or a Club counselor position. These positions were also available to the public at large. However, directors in these Clubs were unanimous in stating that there was a world of difference between the resumes submitted by CareerLaunch alumni and those submitted by teens who had not participated. One director remembered getting a resume from someone who had not been in CareerLaunch: “I actually got a resume handwritten in pencil! Can you believe that? You can always tell the CareerLaunch resumes and cover letters from those from the ‘outside.’” This same director went on to say that CareerLaunch produces better workers: “They are professional, they ask permission, they are consistent in what they do.”

The mock interviews gave the teens the first real opportunity to go through the steps of convincing someone that they were worth hiring. The teens took these mock interviews seriously, as if they were interviewing for a real job. The boys usually dressed up in suits and ties, and the girls wore suits or dresses. A director from a large metropolitan area reflected:

*In our area, there are a lot of different accents, and we had to tell [the teens] that they have to speak a lot slower because it may be difficult for people to understand what they were saying. I was really impressed with the mock interviews, kids came in suits and shook hands and made eye contact. We really got across what it means to make a first impression.*

A staff person at that Club reported that the mock interviews gave teens the confidence to actually inquire about real jobs: “They are now asking about what the next steps are for working at the Boys & Girls Club here in the fall. They realize they are old enough to start thinking about their future and getting a job.”

For the teens, the “take-away” lessons consisted of both the hard and soft skills needed to get a job, from learning how to use the internet to look for work to how to make that important first impression at an interview:

*I learned how to get ready to get a job. I didn't know anything about how to get a job.*

*I've learned how to write a resume, how to fill out a job application and how to act and dress for an interview.*

*The information is very useful. This is my first resume and now it's on the computer and whenever I need to update it, I can do it.*

*I've learned to manage my time better.*

*I know how to prepare to get a job. I know how to keep a job. I know how to dress properly. I know how to keep myself organized. CareerLaunch taught us to be respectful of staff.*

*When I go to an interview, I won't chew gum. And when my boss yells at me I know how to handle it.*

Some of the teens directly connected their CareerLaunch experience to college or actual employment:

*When I start looking for work I'll already know the do's and don'ts of writing a resume & a cover letter. And when I start applying for college, I'll have a better sense of how I should fill out applications.*

*I am going to join the Military—Navy Seals. Hopefully what I learned from CareerLaunch will help me, especially that activity that we did today. [referring to an activity that he did during the observed CareerLaunch session in which the overarching lesson was to follow directions]*

*I'll be applying for jobs and this has helped me improve my writing skills. This will also help me with college because I'll pay more attention now to how I write something on an application.*

I'll be applying for jobs and this has helped me improve my writing skills. This will also help me with college because I'll pay more

attention now to how I write something on an application.

*Teens' Own Assessment of CareerLaunch*

How would teens rate CareerLaunch as a viable source of information about career options against the other available information sources? Do they attribute their knowledge gains to CareerLaunch or to something else? On the online survey, teens were asked a series of questions that captured their perceptions about the usefulness of CareerLaunch and its components, and the extent to which they could use the information in CareerLaunch to find a job, keep a job, and apply to college. First, we asked teens to rate the best way to learn about selected competencies taught in CareerLaunch, comparing CareerLaunch to other venues for information and advice (Table III-3). For all except looking for colleges and goal setting, teens felt that CareerLaunch was the best source of information:

**Table III-3: Perceptions of Extent of Knowledge About Careers**

<b>What is the best way to learn about the following job activities?:<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Career Launch</b>	<b>Websites (not CL)</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Friends</b>	<b>Other</b>
Create resumes and cover letters	29.9%	61.1%	1.4%	5.6%	0.0%	2.1%
Search for information about colleges	43.1%	29.2%	14.6%	7.6%	0.7%	4.9%
Prepare for job interviews	17.6%	60.6%	2.8%	12.7%	2.8%	3.5%

<sup>1</sup> The original question wording was, “Earlier we asked you about job related activities. Thinking about them again, please indicate what is the best way to learn the following...”



**Table III-3: Perceptions of Extent of Knowledge About Careers**

What is the best way to learn about the following job activities?: <sup>1</sup>	School	Career Launch	Websites (not CL)	Family	Friends	Other
Find a job that matches your skills and interests	23.9%	50.0%	7.7%	9.9%	2.8%	5.6%
Get advice about the career process	23.9%	53.5%	2.1%	16.9%	1.4%	2.1%
Learn how to do well and keep a job	22.2%	51.4%	3.5%	19.4%	0.7%	2.8%
Learn how to set short-term and long-term goals	45.1%	36.1%	3.5%	10.4%	0.7%	4.2%

Regarding the CareerLaunch components themselves, what the teens found most useful were the lessons on preparing for job interviews, followed closely by lessons on how to prepare resumes and cover letters (Table III-4).

**Table III-4: Perceptions of Usefulness of CareerLaunch Components**

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat not useful	Not useful at all
Sessions about preparing for job interviews	68.5%	23.8%	7.0%	0.7%
Sessions on how to create resumes and cover letters	68.1%	24.1%	7.1%	0.7%
Learning how to do well and keep a job	64.8%	27.5%	7.0%	0.7%
Sessions on finding a job that matches my skills and interests	59.9%	31.0%	7.7%	1.4%
Getting advice about the career process	59.2%	32.4%	8.5%	0.0%

**Table III-4: Perceptions of Usefulness of CareerLaunch Components**

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat not useful	Not useful at all
Sessions on searching for information about colleges	55.7%	36.4%	6.4%	1.4%
"Shadowing" someone on the job	49.6%	38.3%	5.2%	7.0%
CareerLaunch website	47.8%	35.3%	11.8%	5.1%
Career fair	42.9%	39.5%	12.6%	5.0%
Teen tips booklets	42.5%	36.6%	18.7%	2.2%
One-on-one counseling with a staff member	41.6%	38.4%	16.8%	3.2%
Group counseling sessions	40.3%	34.9%	17.8%	7.0%

Because CareerLaunch was marketed as a web-based tool, we asked about the website functions. Of these, E-Pak was the most useful, followed by College Search (Table III-5).

**Table III-5: Perceptions of the Usefulness of CareerLaunch.net**

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not useful at all
College Search (scholarships, financial aid)	55.7%	36.4%	1.4%
My Epak (resume, job applications)	49.6%	38.3%	7.0%
Career Exploration (Interest Assessment, career descriptions)	47.8%	35.3%	5.1%

**Table III-5: Perceptions of the Usefulness of CareerLaunch.net**

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not useful at all
Pre-Career 13-15 (self assessment, games, career connection)	42.9%	39.5%	5.0%
What’s New? (summer programs, internships, teen corner)	42.5%	36.6%	2.2%
Job Readiness (R U Ready, Biz Quiz, Virtual Valet activities)	41.6%	38.4%	3.2%
Talk Back	40.3%	34.9%	7.0%

On the online survey, the majority said “Very likely” when it came to recommending a friend to CareerLaunch activities. Over half (53%) stated that they were very likely to recommend CareerLaunch overall (Table III-6):

**Table III-6: Likelihood of Recommending CareerLaunch to a Friend**

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Somewhat not useful	Not useful at all
CareerLaunch overall	53.1%	33.6%	9.1%	4.2%
CareerLaunch website	47.4%	38.0%	8.8%	5.8%
CareerLaunch group sessions	46.8%	38.1%	8.6%	6.5%
CareerLaunch activities	45.5%	38.5%	9.1%	7.0%
CareerLaunch Teen Tips	42.1%	39.8%	12.0%	6.0%

Teens who were interviewed were also asked directly if they would recommend CareerLaunch to a friend. Because the directors selected these teens, we did not expect to hear any negative responses (although one 17-year-old teen did qualify his answer by saying, “But I wouldn’t recommend it to anyone my age or older because it is too easy and boring at times.”). We heard only positive responses, and, as shown below, they were quite nuanced with respect to why they would recommend CareerLaunch: some talked about practical job search skills, others spoke of goal setting, and still others reflected on how CareerLaunch helped them improve their attitudes towards work.

*If my friends didn't know how to get a job I would send them to CareerLaunch so they could learn.*

*If I knew someone who is totally clueless about filling out resumes, I would [recommend CareerLaunch]. This is definitely good for a person who has no experience and who was never exposed to the workforce before. It would probably be good for freshmen in high school.*

*Yes I would recommend it. A lot of kids think life is a joke. CareerLaunch prepares you and helps you think in concrete ways about what you want to be successful at in the future. I would go through the program again because I might learn even more the second time around.*

*I would recommend it because it helped me a lot. I learned it's important to show a good attitude, to be myself and to have confidence in who I am.*

*I want my friends to have the same experience to learn how to handle conflict and learn what they want to do in the future.*

*Yeah, I would recommend CareerLaunch to a friend. It helped me a lot so I figure it would help them too.*

#### *Results: Knowledge to Jobs*

To what extent does “effort” lead to “results?” For example, does resume writing lead to sending out resumes? Ultimately, does participation in CareerLaunch lead to jobs? We found that even if some participants had not taken any formal steps towards looking for work (which was the case with the younger teens), it was very clear that they learned what to do. In general, teens were keener on finding jobs than they were before; according to a staff member, “I’m seeing that more kids are motivated and more kids are coming to us saying ‘Hey we want to get a job!’” Those who were able to look for work were now doing so for the first time. Teens were now going out and picking up job applications. Overall, teens reported that the program made them well-prepared to seek, and in some cases, find work:

*Tomorrow I have a job interview. CareerLaunch helped me know how to dress, how to speak, and to talk clearly.*

*I applied for a job at Wal-Mart the other day and used the resume skills that I gained from CareerLaunch. I’m still waiting for their call.*

*I learned how to write resumes and how to impress interviewers. As a result of CareerLaunch I am a Club counselor in training now.*

One Club had a very impressive track record when it came to job placement. The director proudly reported that in the previous year all of the eighth graders obtained jobs as a result of CareerLaunch. When asked whether these outcomes can be linked to specific activities, she made a connection to the sessions on interviewing in general and to one particular activity in which the teens interviewed some of the guest speakers: “This puts the adults in the hot seat, so the kids can see that anxiety lives in adults too. This allows the teens to see both sides and humanizes the experience of interviewing.”

#### *Knowledge Internalized*

To what extent does CareerLaunch increase teens’ awareness of the consequences of using the knowledge they gained? When does it go beyond merely retaining what was learned? For the members, the knowledge internalized was the critical link between the program activities and the changes in attitudes and behaviors about work, which will be discussed shortly. At the very least, the teens learned about the practical ways in which they could avoid any negative consequences of not using the lessons in CareerLaunch:

*Now I know what type of job to look for and what things to say at a job interview.*

*When I get a job I know not to have a bad attitude and that I should dress like I care about the job.*

*I understand that you can bring your personality into the job but that you also need to be serious, be focused and don’t let yourself get side tracked.*

*Now I realize the mistakes I’ve made when I applied to jobs. I’ve learned I could have done a much better job. I feel more prepared now to apply for a job.*

*I’ve learned how to make a resume. I’ve learned how to interview and how to write a cover letter. Also I understand how important it is to make a good appearance and have a good attitude with your supervisor.*

*I like that we are gaining knowledge about what to do later on. It makes things easier by giving us a head-start. It shows us how to carry ourselves in front of a boss.*

#### **Attitude and Behavior Changes**

According to one director, “In CareerLaunch, they learn job search skills and they learn what kind of skills they need to develop, particularly attitude development.” In this section, we approach the construct of attitude and behavioral change from four vantage points: future-mindedness and hopefulness

(college aspirations; the “reality check;” and career exploration); goal setting (short and long term); awareness of barriers (educational; behavioral; and attitudinal); and awareness of individual assets (strengths and weaknesses; leadership development; self-awareness; confidence; and perseverance).

#### *Future-Mindedness and Hopefulness*

To what extent does participation in CareerLaunch lead to “future-oriented” thinking? Put another way, is there a greater sense of hopefulness about the future? We found that there was. A sampling of responses from the teens:

*I am more hopeful about my future because of CareerLaunch.*

*[CareerLaunch] is a very great place where I can learn to make my life a lot better in my adult hood.*

*[CareerLaunch] will give me a head start on what I want to achieve.*

*I’m more hopeful. [CareerLaunch] taught me things that will be helpful in the future when I’m going to find a job or look at colleges.*

Most of the staff and the teens themselves said that participation in CareerLaunch led to thinking more about the future than before, and that it generated a greater sense of hopefulness about that future. Some common themes emerged: teens were now thinking about or applying to college, even those who hadn’t before; teens developed a realistic perspective about what the working world is

like and what it takes to succeed within it – in other words, to see themselves as workers.

#### *College aspirations*

According to a CareerLaunch facilitator, “The teens are now looking at colleges and taking an active interest in their future; they seem more excited and aware [about their future] and are curious and want to explore.”

One teen reflected how CareerLaunch made her think about what she needed to obtain her dream job. “I know what I need to prepare for the job I want. I want to be a veterinarian.” For this teen and others like her, “mapping out the career steps” made aspirations seem more realistic and attainable. Many staff noted that teens who had never considered education beyond high school were now interested in applying to technical schools or college. From a practical standpoint, CareerLaunch helped participants find college programs in which they might be interested and scholarships for which they might be eligible through the search tools on CareerLaunch.net website. For one facilitator, the connection to colleges and scholarships was a major benefit of CareerLaunch; as she described her teens, “Most of my teens have it in their mindset that they will not be able to go to college because of family and financial situations.”

On the online survey, over 80% of the teens said they believed they would graduate from high school and go on to post-secondary education. Moreover, almost 27% indicated a higher educational goal on the post-survey than on the pre-survey. On the pre-survey, 77%

of the respondents indicated they would attain at least a bachelor’s degree if not higher; on the post-survey this number declined to 71% but this was because some of the teens who selected “4-year degree” on the pre-survey picked “Graduate School” on the post-survey. In addition, 33% of the teens who stated on the pre-survey that they would obtain only a high school diploma indicated on the post-survey that they would obtain a two-year degree. On the whole, these upward shifts show that teens were becoming more aware of the role that education plays in work.

#### *CareerLaunch as a “reality check”*

To one degree or another, most staff members felt that CareerLaunch served as a reality check for the teens. Now, the teens knew the working world from the side of the worker and were starting to plan their working lives through thinking about short and long-term goals.

*They didn’t know much when they first started. They are now more confident in knowing certain things. In the beginning, some had irrational hopes, for example, 1-5 year long-term goals and thought they could work for 5 years and then retire. This program has given them a sense of what the real thing is and brings them back to reality.*

*–CareerLaunch staff member*

Also, for staff, dealing with the attitudes that often accompany adolescence was something of a struggle, but the CareerLaunch activities helped to set the teens straight when it comes to thinking about their future. One director noted:

*They learn that work wasn’t put on this earth for their convenience. They seem to be at the age where they think they can do whatever they want whenever they want. They think they have more power than the employer. I have two or three who want to be professional basketball players and think if they can make enough money, they can do whatever they want. They can’t think of anything else they’d want to do if they break a leg, etc. I suggest [to them] that there are more hours in the day and the year than what can be devoted to basketball.*

A CareerLaunch teen, in his own way, concurred:

*Before I thought a job was all fun and games and you could do whatever you wanted.*

*Now I see a job is more than fun and games. Thinking about a job is helping me to determine what kind of future I want.*

#### *Career aspirations*

Teens were taught the differences between “jobs” and “careers” and used those lessons to map out their short- and long-term goals. One staff person explained it this way: “The strongest activity so far has been the career intro survey, that shows the kids the different occupations. This really made them think about careers as opposed to jobs.” Another talked about how she systematically went over the lists of jobs and careers so that her teens could understand the difference.

Many staff mentioned that in the beginning some teens would have one job or career in mind and not want to think about exploring

other career possibilities. Choice of career before going participating in CareerLaunch was tied into several variables – particularly, locale, age, and gender. On the pre-survey, teens living in more distressed areas were more likely to pick “sports or movie stars,” as were younger teens and boys. However, by the end of their participation in CareerLaunch, the teens were more inclined to pursue goals that were more attainable. One staff member noted that after a few weeks, “They are now more open-minded and know that it’s possible to get a job.”

CareerLaunch helped the teens think about their future in a way they never had before. A staff member remarked that CareerLaunch “makes them think about the future and what career they want to go into. Now, most of them have no problem saying what they want to do when they are older. Before the program, they weren’t so sure.” A teen talked about the overall importance of CareerLaunch to him: “It’s meaningful because CareerLaunch makes you think not just about getting a job but makes you think about your future.”

This was important particularly for the younger Club members: for them, the prospect of getting a job seemed too remote, and staff reported that it was often a struggle to get them to think about entering the world of work. However, CareerLaunch helped to change that mindset: “They realize they are old enough to start thinking about their future and getting a job.” Although it seemed scary at first, this ultimately convinced the young teens that thinking about a career could be empowering.

*[CareerLaunch] reminds me that my future is and will always be in my hands. Even though I’m still a kid, life comes fast. CareerLaunch teaches us that even though we are kids, we should always have the future in mind.*

### Setting Goals

*CareerLaunch will help you get a job and make your dreams come true.*

*—CareerLaunch participant*

The most important goal-setting objectives in CareerLaunch, as stated by a national staff member, are for the youth to create their own vision of how they want to see their future and what they can do to achieve this:

*Young people need to have some vision about their goals and strengths and their potential. Once they have this vision of staying in high school and graduating and seeing this long-term career and setting up realistic planning. They will then know if they need a 2 or 4 year education or technical school and setting up a plan for a career will keep them on track for their goals.*

One Club director reflected on her goal-setting exercise in this way, and her reflections were echoed in different ways by other directors and staff:

*Some of the older kids didn’t know what they wanted to do, and some wanted to do too much. The goal setting activities were very helpful in this respect: first to graduate from high school, then to get job skills or go to college. It was eye opening to each of them:*



*‘I didn’t know that that was an option for me.’*

#### *Short-term goals: getting a job now*

The overall goals of CareerLaunch were seen as two-fold: helping teens to be successful now and in the future. Usually, the two goals go hand in hand, and most teens realized that to be successful in the future, the time to start is now. Accordingly, getting a job was a critical short-term goal.

While the teens were taught the difference between a job and a career, they were also taught that any job could provide experience that would be helpful in a future career. Thus, staff encouraged those teens who could work to be proactive in finding jobs, and it is here where staff were most helpful. According to one teen: “I’ve learned a lot. Lately I’ve been applying for jobs. I can ask questions from the staff and bring in applications and they will help me.” In addition to helping teens with the application process, CareerLaunch afforded many opportunities for the teens to role-play different interview and work-related scenarios: answering questions on an interview, dealing with difficult people in the workplace, being respectful to everyone from colleagues to the supervisor, asking questions to clarification, and such. One teen said that he knows now “how to handle different job situations” in order to keep a job once he has one. Another said it is helping him succeed when he begins the job search in the future, “Now when I look for a job I’ll do better at interviews.”

In addition to just short- and long-term goal planning, teens are made aware that decisions they make in the short term can get in the way of their long-term goals:

*Employment is key when dealing with gang members, because in a gang they get money and food. But if these former gang members can be gainfully employed then they will come out of gangs or be prevented from joining a gang. For those that have come off the path, CareerLaunch will help them get back on the path.*

*—National staff member*

#### *Long-term goals*

In interviews with the teens, it was evident that many had clear-cut goals lined up for their future. Some teens even had alternative routes planned to their future if their first choice career did not pan out as hoped. One teen described her short-term goal, her ideal long-term goal, and her back-up goal all in one statement: “I want to work here [at the Boys & Girls Club] playing with kids while I go to college. I want to be a marine biologist, but if I can’t finish school because of money, I want to be a cop.” Most teens agreed that CareerLaunch was successful of helping them think about new careers that they never heard of, but also, it was helping them think about viable alternatives.

Some teens were able to comprehend what some of the activities of the CareerLaunch program were meant for and how they would help them in the future. One important skill

addressed in CareerLaunch is organization: helping the participants think through their overall strategies for job searches, gathering references, and thinking about places to which he or she could apply for a part-time job. A young man mentioned how the program might be helpful to his friends: “I have a lot of friends who are unorganized and this program will help them think better about what they want for the future and how to prepare for the future.” Another young man mentioned the team-building skills that were part of CareerLaunch activities and related this to his long-term goals, “I want to be an entrepreneur and I realize that I am going to need that skill [teamwork].”

Also, some of the staff and participants noted how the CareerLaunch career exploration and future planning activities gave the teens more reasonable expectations of working towards their dream job. One young woman spoke of her aspiration laced with a dose of reality but overall hopefulness about the situation: “I’ve been thinking about wanting to become a chef, but now I feel I can really do this. It might be hard but I do feel I can be successful.” CareerLaunch was able to help the participants think about the nuances and varieties within their goals and future career aspirations, as one program director noted:

*If they want to be an engineer, they are thinking about what kind of engineer they want to be. CareerLaunch gets them to think about what they want to be, for example: what kind of doctor, what kind of lawyer.*

CareerLaunch helped participants set practical short- and long-term goals without preventing them from “dreaming big” or hampering the idea of “being whatever they want to be.” Most teens expressed they can aspire to whatever career they want in the future, but the important finding was that these teens understood they may have to explore many different options in order to become successful.

#### *Addressing Barriers*

*I want to succeed in life ahead and I think CareerLaunch will make it easier.*

*—CareerLaunch participant*

To what extent does participation in CareerLaunch change teens’ approaches in dealing with barriers to work and/or the steps leading to work? CareerLaunch explores educational barriers, as well as economic and social barriers, and explains the consequences to the teens. It is up to the youth who participate in the CareerLaunch program which path they need to take to achieve their career and life goals.

*They knew what they wanted to do but didn’t know how to get there. They hadn’t looked deeply before. There are barriers they had to figure out. They think they can just do it but don’t realize that schooling is involved, or what kinds of schooling or experience.*

*—CareerLaunch staff member*

*Educational barriers*

CareerLaunch was able to break down barriers for the teens that sometimes seemed impenetrable. One teen mentioned how nervous he was about the rigors of college life, but CareerLaunch helped him realize that although it may be hard, it will help him get to where he needed to be: “I was always into my dream but I have reservations. CareerLaunch got rid of those reserves, especially about college being too hard. Yeah, life is hard but it is doable and you have to take it as it comes.”

CareerLaunch was able to make the participants fully understand that education was important to achieving their dream career. Many of the staff remarked that often the members had no idea that a college or a technical school degree was required for certain professions, or how much college or what type of coursework was required. As one staff member noted, “It’s great [for the kids] to be able to research and figure out what they want to do in terms of their career. It makes kids think about what they want to do, and how much school they have to do to get to where they want to be.” Often, the staff members themselves could not effectively encourage, through mentoring, their teens to go to college, but once the teens themselves realized that they would have to go in order to obtain their dream career, they became proactive in their efforts to learn about colleges.

Through CareerLaunch, staff could explain to participants that a lack of educational achievement is often a crucial barrier to

success in life. Although educational attainment and going on to college may not have been overarching purpose of CareerLaunch, it is an underlying theme in explaining the importance of career preparation. One teen expressed this theme by saying CareerLaunch “kind of showed me how much I have to study and go to college for what I want to be.” Another teen also mentioned the barriers to getting a job and how education helps ease some of those barriers to entry: “I learned that getting a job is not so easy, that getting grades affect the ability to get a good job and I understand that school is important for a good job.”

*Behavioral and attitudinal barriers*

Participating in risky behaviors presented the most compelling barrier, and CareerLaunch was one of the ways through which teens could make better choices about what they do:

*In terms of healthy life skills such as abstaining from alcohol abuse/drug abuse, CareerLaunch does have an impact on reducing risk behaviors. Seeing the need to go to a 2 year college to get the job that will buy the car and the apartment they will not want something to get in the way by making poor choices like getting pregnant. Money Matters addresses the costs involved in having a child at a young age.*

*–National staff member*

CareerLaunch and other programs offered by the Boys & Girls Clubs, including Money Matters, help teach participants that in

achieving their life and career goals they will face many barriers in their way, but it is their choice of which direction to go.

Many teens thought of personal barriers as any behavioral or attitudinal flaws that might prevent them from getting or keeping a job. When asked to name some of these barriers in an open-ended question on the pre-survey, some teens were actually quite critical of their peers:

*The way they act when they go apply for the job*

*Unprofessional behavior*

*Failure to have good communication skills*

On the post-survey, when teens were asked about the most important thing CareerLaunch taught them about the world of work, a common theme in the responses was that a good attitude and proper behavior were as important skills for dealing with the workplace:

*Behavior that is right for [a job].*

*Do what is asked of me and take responsibility for what I do*

*How to act respectful and responsible towards my boss and co-workers.*

*How to be appropriate on the job.*

*How to handle yourself in a workplace.*

*How to maintain my attitude.*

*How to work with the staff at my*

*job as a team.*

*I need to be professional.*

*Proper work attitude.*

*Showing me how to respect everyone around me.*

In this sense, CareerLaunch was successful in removing these barriers for teens by basically teaching them how to grow up. One director categorized this sense of maturity as an intangible outcome of CareerLaunch: “They ‘get it.’ There are little moments: they are nicer to people, better to people, they are better able to focus. It takes time but it can happen.”

*Awareness of Assets*

*CareerLaunch is preparing me well. It lets me know I can do anything I want to do if I put my mind to it.*

*—CareerLaunch participant*

To what extent does participation in CareerLaunch lead to a greater awareness of teens’ own assets? Does CareerLaunch help teens realize skills and strengths they did not know they had? Both the teens and staff reported how the program challenged the teens to embrace their strengths and confront their weaknesses through lessons about public speaking, leadership development, self-awareness, confidence, and perseverance.



*Strengths and weaknesses*

*It helps me find myself. It helps me know what I'm good at. I've also learned my weaknesses and my strengths.*

*–CareerLaunch participant*

Many of the teens mentioned that CareerLaunch – particularly, the assessment tools available through the website -- helped them not only discover their talents, their strengths and their interests but appreciate them. One teen recalled how he was ashamed of his vast computer literacy and his keen memory to detail – mostly because they made him feel different from his peers -- but due to his participation in CareerLaunch, he realized that the “weaknesses that I thought I had are actually strengths.”

Grappling with weaknesses was something about which many CareerLaunch participants commented during their interviews. Some talked about their nervousness about speaking to adults and especially speaking in groups: “I’m not a good communicator, so with CareerLaunch I learned not to be so nervous.” During one of our observations in which teens used the skills assessment to learn their strengths and weaknesses, the facilitator advised, “Go with your strengths and not your weaknesses. Someone will always find your weaknesses. People are going to hire you for your strengths, so emphasize them.”

Many staff noted that interviewing was a major source of anxiety for their teens, but that the mock interviews went far to make them feel more confident: “It is preparing

me well. I know that I can do this and get an interview done without falling into pieces.” CareerLaunch helped the teens realize some new strengths they had and was able to turn some of their weaknesses into something they can manage and overcome.

*Leadership development*

CareerLaunch helped develop leadership skills among some of the teens. In some Clubs, leadership development was intentionally tied in to CareerLaunch participation. For example, one Club director described his Club’s Teen Leadership Academy and Teen Coordinator programs in terms of a Venn Diagram, with Teen Leadership, Teen Coordinator, and Money Matters as three parts and CareerLaunch serving as the common denominator. One teen, who was serving his Club as a volunteer, explained: “Everyone is here for the same reason. I’m close with a lot of the kids in CareerLaunch who are also volunteers, and they want to be leaders too.” Even in those Clubs with no such programmatic connection, CareerLaunch activities helped teen to connect success in the workplace with the development of leadership skills; according to one teen, one of the most important things that CareerLaunch taught her was that she should not be afraid to “take the leadership role whenever I get the chance” on the job.

Leadership development was part of the Boys and Girls Club culture. In the Clubs we visited, there was not one instance where the teens did not eagerly offer to help one another perform a task. In addition to older teens

helping younger ones, teens who were able to progress at a more rapid pace helped any peer who seemed to be struggling. One Club director recalled that her teens’ “leadership skills increased and they became outgoing.” Another stated that while it was difficult for him to quantify the effects of CareerLaunch on leadership development, the impact was nonetheless tangible:

*This program advances leadership. There are some club members who are usually in the background in other club activities. Inside CareerLaunch these teens stood out and took leadership roles and grew as leaders in three or four weeks.*

One staff member noticed a change in some of the teens: “They are participating in other programs here and at school, Their attitudes have been improving. Some are taking the lead here and when we designate activities some will step up.” Another commented, “They think outside of the box. They don’t mind volunteering for things now or joining new programs.” Another director put it succinctly: “The kids now know what they want to be in the world. Now, instead of being driven by others, they are driven and they are the drivers.”

When asked how he applied the lessons learned in CareerLaunch, an older teen responded:

*I am a CIT [counselor in training] here and I used what I learned in CareerLaunch about interviewing and resume writing to get the job. I also applied what I learned about teamwork in CareerLaunch to with*

*my soccer team. I’m always telling my teammates to ‘play to your strengths.’*

### *Self-Awareness*

Self-awareness is not a mere by-product of CareerLaunch: it is integral to the curriculum. At one of the sessions we observed, the facilitator introduced the skills assessment component by asking the teens, “Why is it important to know yourself?” This was more than a rhetorical or philosophical exercise: it was meant to help the teens hone in on why self-awareness was key to being a good worker.

Repeatedly, teens reported that one of the biggest “take-away” messages was they should find jobs that fit their interests, their strengths, and their likes. This instilled and reinforced the sense of respect that the adults showed the teens: “My likes and dislikes count for something.” This was a very important message: according to a Club director, “Many of the kids believe they have to be engineers or computer scientists. They don’t know that they can do something that they want to do or something different than what they can see.” Another reported that it was a true “eye-opener” for the teens, and that she often heard, “I can do that?” during her sessions. On the online survey, when asked what was the most important lesson they learned when it came to looking for a job, many replied in terms of practical skills (e.g., resume writing, interviewing), but a sizeable number also reported about the importance of self knowledge:

*Knowing oneself as a key to looking for jobs.*

*CareerLaunch helped me find my skills so that it will be easier to find a job.*

*Do something you like and keep an interest in your job.*

*Find a job that best suits you; something you will enjoy.*

*Look for a job that fits me, my interests, and skills so that I will be happy with that job.*

*Where to look for a job that fits my personality.*

Some of the teens interviewed reflected that they could be good workers while – rather, by -- being true to themselves. “I didn’t realize I could be myself at a job, and now I feel more comfortable that I can be who I am at a job and not try to be someone I’m not.” Other teens acknowledged that although being one’s self in a job is important, there are boundaries: “I understand that you can bring your personality into the job but that you also need to be serious, be focused and don’t let yourself get sidetracked.”

### *Confidence*

Apart from the fact that the teens became confident in their resume and cover-letter writing skills, they also became confident in the kinds of social skills necessary for interviewing. According to the directors and facilitators, this feeling of confidence was a direct result of the mock interviewing activity. Some directors took great pains to recruit mock interviewers of importance to

the community (e.g., mayors, commissioners, elected and non-elected officials), local celebrities (one director recruited a former pageant contestant who was currently working with youth), and board members. Most importantly, the members were gaining this confidence while they were still teenagers. One CPO said: “I think what it comes to at the end it is them having confidence and applying and getting a job when they are still in high school.”

For that reason, many directors and facilitators felt that the mock interview component of CareerLaunch was invaluable. In this way, teens built confidence in themselves, which was mentioned by every director and facilitator in one form or another, bar none. One director spoke of developing confidence as an intentional outcome for her teens: “They will need it through life.” A teen from a different Club stated that one of the lessons he learned in CareerLaunch was to “Have confidence in anything that you do.”

Another area in which teens gained confidence was in public speaking. One staff member observed: “This program helps them come out of their shell... They voice their opinions more than before.” One facilitator used the Boys & Girls Club slogan – “a safe place for kids” – to explain how the members didn’t have to be afraid to speak up or even look foolish, because respect was deeply embedded into the culture of every Club. In CareerLaunch, there were many opportunities to speak out during the sessions, or “share,” from the ice-breaking sessions where everyone introduced himself or herself, to the discussions towards

the end in which the teens talked about their mock interview experiences. Another staff member echoed this sentiment: “Some of the quiet ones were taking initiative in teams. I can see that they are beginning to have more confidence in themselves.” A young teen who described herself as shy and shy and afraid of public speaking discovered that public speaking was actually “one my assets and talents now.”

#### *Perseverance*

Perseverance is key in dealing with the various barriers connected to school and work. When asked what CareerLaunch taught them about overcoming barriers on the online survey, the teens spoke more about the need to persevere than to develop any particular skill sets that

would enable them to do so. A sampling of the responses:

*You need to be able to get over disappointments and things that slow you down.*

*Have faith and stay strong to get through whatever comes my way.*

*How to stay focused when things seem to get to hard.*

*If I just try my best and don't give up I will succeed*

*Work hard and learn from your mistakes.*

*Try Try Try!*





IV. Club Outcomes:  
**Best Practices and  
Partnerships**

Boys & Girls Club of America thought of programmatic outcomes in terms of the development and application of best practices among the Clubs, and the kinds of partnerships that facilitated the implementation of CareerLaunch therein.

### Best Practices

One of the primary goals of the evaluation was to learn about best practices and how they might be disseminated and diffused among the Clubs. Specifically, we wanted to answer the question, “Considering the vast differences in Clubs, what best practices can be shared with clubs in various settings?” Initially, “settings” was defined in terms of Club size, budget, and location (e.g., rural, urban) While we found few differences in implementation based on size, what we learned required that “settings” needed to be restructured in the following way:

- *Locale*, rural or urban but also by unemployment, poverty, and high-school drop-out rates
- *Teen population* served in terms of age (young teen, older teen)
- *Teen programming* strategies, defined not only in terms of the number of programs but in the capacity to synergize CareerLaunch with other teen programs and leverage the resources of all of the programs to create a comprehensive program for teens

- *Leadership*, which pertains not only to tenure but the ability to leverage the resources of the Club to implement CareerLaunch

An important caveat should be noted at this juncture. The implementation of CareerLaunch was atypical for many Clubs because it was during the summer, and, more importantly, it was for the purpose of this evaluation. As will be discussed shortly, summer implementation was not optimal because recruitment was typically difficult. In addition, the CareerLaunch activities were combined with some of the evaluation data collection activities: for example, the Career Assessment, ordinarily a paper and pencil questionnaire was embedded in a larger online survey. Also, the time frame with which some Clubs could implement the program created a real constraint on what directors could do: at least two directors who ordinarily would implement Levels 2 or 3 wound up implementing Level 1 because that was all they could manage within the short time period allotted.

#### *Locale*

As a rule, Boys & Girls Clubs are located in areas of high poverty and unemployment,

and serve teens at risk of dropping out of high school, teen pregnancy, delinquency, and substance abuse. When asked about the needs that teens bring with them to CareerLaunch, the directors mentioned all of the above but also added low literacy rates and single-parent households. They felt that the CareerLaunch experience was valuable for their teens in that it helped to sharpen their reading skills by reading job advertisements (among other materials), and writing skills by completing job applications.

On the online survey, teens who lived in areas with high drop-out rates were more likely than those who lived in areas with higher school completion rates to say that a barrier to school success was not being able to see how education was key to a good future. Generally, Clubs in the more distressed communities placed a greater emphasis on addressing the educational barriers to jobs and careers than those in more affluent areas. A director in a relatively distressed area with high drop-out rates said:

*We know their issues and challenges at home and at school. So we use CareerLaunch to help some of these kids meet their challenges. For example, one kid is doing very poorly in school, so we made a pact with him and his parents: if he comes to CareerLaunch and improves his grades, we'll give him a job at the Club.*

Clubs used the CareerLaunch activities to address locale-based educational barriers. The resume builder was used as much as

a literacy-promoting device as well as a tool to teach teens how to prepare a resume. Some sites used worksheets—either copied from the Staff Resource Guide or materials that the facilitators prepared on their own—in this way as well; in one of the sites AED visited, the facilitator used some of the key words in the worksheet as a vocabulary lesson. (When asked how the program could be improved, this facilitator suggested more worksheets that would improve reading and writing skills, as well as to build critical thinking skills.) The facilitators and directors were intentional in using the mock interviews to improve the kinds of verbal skills that were not being taught in school.

Some Clubs were quite creative in addressing the locale-driven challenges. For example, the facilitators in high unemployment areas used the skills assessment as a tool for teens to think beyond the economic landscape of their communities. One of the directors used her CareerLaunch program in her community (a mid-sized town in the South) in a very interesting way to serve a larger need:

*The main goals were to provide job and life skills and to unify teens in the unit. It was a diverse group, and there were underlying tensions among teens from different groups and backgrounds that carried over from school. The goal was to pull them out of their element to be in CareerLaunch without their peers from school, and to interact with kids from different groups and cultural backgrounds.*

She structured her CareerLaunch program so that the teens had many opportunities to share ideas and thoughts with one another, as well as help one another. She placed great emphasis on the skills assessment as a first means for teens open up: “It was exciting for them as a group to share their goals with one another. There were some surprises: ‘I didn’t know you wanted to do that!’” This was very difficult at first, but the process of interaction and learning through the skills assessment, and later through the resume building exercises and the preparation for the mock interviews through which the teens helped one another, built a level of trust and community among the teens in the group.

Less affluent and rural sites were also more inclined to use, or try to use, transportation aids to get the teens to the Clubs for CareerLaunch as well as for their other programs. One Club issued mass transit vouchers, and another used vans to drive the teens back and forth. The latter, however, was very labor intensive and based on the availability of drivers—who were also directors and facilitators—and vehicles. In these sites, transportation loomed large because the only parent in the home was most likely using the car to get to and from work, and the streets were not particularly bicycle-friendly.

However, two CareerLaunch programs in our evaluation operated in communities that did not fit this demographic. The directors made it clear they needed to retool their implementation to serve the needs of their more affluent teens and to modify their

approach to CareerLaunch. One director described her teens in this way and why she felt that CareerLaunch would be good for them:

*My participants are coming from homes with working parents and at least basic necessities. Some of the participants do not realize how much they don’t know about the world of work. They have a sense of entitlement to post high school education, luxury items, and a future. They do not realize that some of the basics may apply to them if their parents lose their jobs or tragedy befalls their family. Planning for the future is more of a parent job! The teens plan for immediate needs gratification.*

Also, she stated that her teens knew the basics of job searching because they learned it in school; as a result, she focused her energies on the web component of the program and let her teens use the program on their own (for the most part). In interviews and in her online survey responses, she strongly stated that CareerLaunch, if implemented fully, was more appropriate for teens from economically and socially disadvantaged areas.

The other director also focused most of her energy on the web component but took less of a “hands-off” approach. Since her teens were college-oriented already, they were more interested in getting internships through CareerLaunch by honing their resume and interviewing skills. The skills assessment and the goal-setting exercises were “childish” for them. Therefore, this director retooled

her program to emphasize resume writing, writing cover letters (using skills that the teens could use on their college applications), and interviewing. The biggest draw, however, was the use of the internship because teens could include the experience on their college applications.

Nonetheless, this is not to say that CareerLaunch lessons did not resonate with these teens. In assessing the open-ended responses to the most important lessons learned from CareerLaunch, it was impossible to distinguish the responses of the more affluent from those from the less affluent teens. The biggest take-away lessons for all of the teens were the same: learn how to prepare a resume, present a professional appearance, and practice interviewing skills. They also learned about addressing barriers: one girl from an affluent community wrote that “Women can have high paying and successful careers!” This provides evidence that the Clubs were very successful in adapting their CareerLaunch implementation based on the needs of the teens in their own communities. Regardless of the degree of distress in a community, teens knew that they could benefit from CareerLaunch and get advice about their goals and their futures from Club staff because they “met them where they lived” in a very literal sense.

#### *Teen Population (Age)*

In terms of the program’s overall usefulness to teens, the staff and leaders were very mixed in their opinions regarding the age of participants. On the online survey, one half

felt that it was appropriate for all teens, while the other half was almost evenly divided over whether it was better for younger or older teens. There was no real consensus. All the same, the directors and facilitators adjusted their outreach strategies and programs to make them relevant to the particular population of teens. A CPO described his target group:

*We’re looking for teens that understand and are mature enough to be in a place so that the information they learn is relevant and they can apply it. We were very specific when we chose the age level of kids for this program. We thought seniors were almost too late because they already took most of their high school classes and we didn’t want to start with 8th grade because we thought it wouldn’t be relevant for a few more years. 9th to about 11th grade was our target range for the program.*

For those who felt that CareerLaunch was appropriate for younger teens, the rationale was that although they could not apply to jobs quite yet, they could be introduced to the world of work and to the lessons on goal setting, attitude, and the importance of first impressions. Plus, some staff and even some members felt that CareerLaunch was redundant for older teens:

*CareerLaunch is a meaningful tool for my younger members. Over 15, they have pretty much covered the same material in the high school.*

—Director

*I would recommend it to people who have difficulties learning what others know or to younger kids. But I wouldn't recommend it to anyone my age or older because it is too easy and boring at times.*

—CareerLaunch participant

Staff who felt that CareerLaunch was good for older teens had the experience of using it with younger teens and found it wanting. One facilitator felt that the language in the teen tips booklet was too advanced for younger teens: “The wording of some the activities confused the teens. Being a little more specific would help in some activities.” A director said, “There are possibilities for younger kids (11-12)—they are really interested in working and volunteering but lack knowledge and maturity level. However, I think that that CareerLaunch is most beneficial to older teens.”

In one Club, in which the teens were very young, the facilitator taught her group about different jobs not by leading them through the guide or by having the teens read CareerLaunch materials, but by playing a game that resembled “20 Questions” in which participants needed to come up with the occupation by asking a series of questions. This particular facilitator had a degree in social work, and as such was well-trained to create activities that were engaging and fun and contributed to her young teens’ social, personal, and academic development.

For those directors who felt that CareerLaunch was good for all teens, their preferred strategy

was the scaffolded approach (to be described in greater detail in the next section)). Level 1, many felt, was a good introduction for the younger teens, because it included the goal-setting and skills assessment exercises. Levels 2 and 3 were good for fine tuning.

### *Teen Programming*

One of the main strategies employed by some of the Clubs was a deliberate tie-in to other teen programming. Earlier, we presented the example of the Club that required CareerLaunch and Money Matters for teens participating in its Teen Leadership Academy and Teen Coordinator programs. This same Club structures its teen programming to encourage participation in multiple programs: every year, members must take at least three of the Club’s 47 offerings, which are introduced through program fairs at the Club, in which CareerLaunch is heavily marketed. To maintain membership, teens must complete 70% of the offerings for which they signed up. In another Club, participation in CareerLaunch was required of anyone who participated in the Keystone Club; in another, only teens who had completed Money Matters could participate in CareerLaunch.

Apart from requiring teens to participate in other programs, directors and facilitators used considerable discretion in interweaving lessons from those programs into CareerLaunch. The most common practice was to embed Money Matters lessons into CareerLaunch sessions: as one director liked to

tell her teens, “Now that you’re making money, you need to know how to manage it.” Another informally sprinkled her CareerLaunch sessions on how to conduct oneself in the workplace with lessons from Smart Moves.

The other practice was to require CareerLaunch participation to be eligible for a job at the Club, either through the Junior Staff program or as a regular counselor. In the case of one of the military bases we visited, the Navy regulations for teens working at the Club included participation in CareerLaunch, Money Matters, and Job Readiness. The same applied to those Clubs that were able to offer internships. At one Club, the promise of an internship and \$250 was contingent on not only putting in 60 hours at the internship but also participating in CareerLaunch. (The director of this Club did note that the internship was more of a draw than the money, because \$250 was not a lot of money in her community.)

As mentioned above, a very common approach used by Clubs that tied participation to employment was to adopt a scaffolded strategy based on the age of the member. The following program progression was typical: Level 1 was offered to 13- and 14-year-olds; Level 2 was given to 15-year-olds; at 16, members were eligible to apply for Club positions but needed to take Level 3 if they did so. Some Clubs started even earlier: in one Club, they introduced their fourth and fifth graders to the world of work by bringing in guest speakers to the programs geared towards younger kids.

The rationale was not so much to use employment as a “carrot” for participation in the program, but rather to use CareerLaunch to develop the kinds of employees that would be best for the Club. In fact, one CareerLaunch teen was working as a recreational assistant at her Club, and another used her CareerLaunch skills to apply for a job at her Club.

### *Leadership*

Another factor contributing to a Club’s best practices concerned leadership, primarily in relation to the skills and experience of the Club, Area, Unit, or Teen program director who was directly responsible for CareerLaunch. Some were deliberate in bringing their own talents and resources to the job. On the online survey, the vast majority of the staff (over 85%) indicated that it was practical experience alone or a combination of CareerLaunch training and their own personal experience that guided and facilitated the implementation of the program at their Clubs. One teen director was very clear about the need to bring one’s own experience to the job: “You need to bring in the kind of personal experience that makes this [program] jump off the page.”

Tenure in their positions as directors was important in leveraging resources: the more experienced directors were better able to forge relationships in their communities that could help them implement CareerLaunch. This was especially true for those leaders with relationships already established going into their jobs. Some of the more seasoned leaders

had been in the field—either at Boys & Girls Clubs or in a similar organization that dealt with youth development—and had cultivated relationships over the years. One director, for example, worked with her city’s juvenile justice system and recruited her former colleagues as speakers and mock interviewers; she also had existing connections with her county’s workforce development agency. Another director worked closely with her development officer who once worked for the city’s mayor (who was also a Club member in his youth). Leaders such as these tended to be keener to the political sensitivities of their communities and excelled at forming the necessary partnerships that might result in internships, jobs, shadowing opportunities for the teens, and/or volunteer recruitment.

One CPO had years of experience in not-for-profit fundraising, a skill that he brought to his job in full measure. Specifically, he was skilled in the area of using CareerLaunch as a means to bring money to the whole Club. One strategy he used was to bring CareerLaunch participants or alumni to Club fundraising events. Another was to market CareerLaunch as the Club’s vehicle to improve academic outcomes for teens in his locale, which suffered from high rates of unemployment and high school drop-out, knowing that these pitches would resonate with his circle of funders: “Funders like that, programs that gets kids to think about college and work, and brings the kids in.” He also used CareerLaunch as a means to build Club membership:

*I tell them that CareerLaunch is my biggest draw for teens. I get kids by going into schools at assembly and saying, ‘Who wants to go to college?’ Of course, everyone raises their hands. I tell the kids about CareerLaunch and that’s a sell.*

The ability to raise the visibility of the Clubs and their members was a strong leadership trait. A director in a large urban area noted that his Club was used whenever the state or even national office needed some visibility. Visibility, he noted, facilitated fundraising: “Now I have more grants than ever before.” For Clubs in similar locales, this was no small feat, because large cities are served by other well-known organizations that serve youth and that also compete for public and private funds. Such leaders tend to also work strategically with the national BGCA and state Boys & Girls Clubs, which were the biggest sources of funding. This same director spoke of the CPO of his Club as being extremely effective in generating resources from both the national and state offices. He said, “The leadership of any organization will affect the link between [the] national and local [offices].”

An additional asset was the ability of the leaders to motivate their staff to be creative when it came to implementing CareerLaunch, or, in the case of the small Clubs where the leaders are the facilitators, being creative themselves. The Club with the exceptional post-CareerLaunch employment rate, which also had the greatest increases in pre-to-post knowledge, described her approach:



*We operate under a ‘drill and kill’ philosophy. We have lunchtime sessions where we have games and a CareerLaunch rendition of Jeopardy in which we take questions from the pre-test and the book and other places of relevance. Our teens get bombarded with the stuff but in a fun way.*

In this Club, the director kept each session to only 35 minutes, knowing that the attention span of her teens, especially during the summer, was very short. In another Club, the Unit Director conducted an activity called, “The Letter to Future Self.” For this activity, the teens were asked to write a letter detailing their career goals. In four years, the letter will be sent to the home addresses of each teen in order for them to see if they have accomplished what they set out to.

Another important asset that the most successful directors possessed was passion for the job. One director, who had been at the helm of her Club for over 10 years and who had been with the Boys & Girls Club system for almost 20 years, exuded, “I love my job! I’m not going to make the most money, but we’re about family here.” Another director said something similar, “I’m not going to get rich doing this. If you’re in it for the money, I’ll show you the door because you won’t last a week.” Akin to the importance of the experience, talents, and passion of the director is that of the staff hired to implement CareerLaunch, which will be discussed in the following section.

### Cross-cutting Best Practices

There were two cross-cutting best practices that were found across all of the Clubs that were vital to the success of their CareerLaunch implementation: incentives and staffing practices.

#### *Incentives*

Incentives were both tangible as well as intangible.<sup>1</sup> Directors and facilitators needed to be creative in thinking about which incentives would work for their teens. Apart from the “carrots” of Club jobs and internships, there were the things that teens liked to do: eat snacks, have pizza, go to games and amusement parks, participate in prize drawings, and other activities. One director worked with local shops (typically, the Gap and Old Navy) to offer her teens work-appropriate clothing.

*Some incentives included games and fun activities. Some of the games were mentioned previously: the versions of “What Not to Wear,” “Jeopardy,” and the variant of “20 Questions.” However, as important as incentives were, they did not replace the value of the program: one staff person noted, “We used a reward system to get them in--snacks, a drawing for something fun – but the program itself kept them in.”*

<sup>1</sup> Clubs were offered incentives of a \$20 gift certificate if their teens completed their online surveys by a certain date. While some directors referred to this incentive in their interviews, it was directly tied to the evaluation and therefore will not be discussed.

### *Staffing Practices*

Depending on the size of the Club, the staffing for CareerLaunch could range from the sole teen programming director to a staff of facilitators and volunteers. Among the Clubs in the evaluation, the largest number of staff and volunteers was 35, but on average, Clubs used three full-time, three part-time, and three volunteers to implement the program. As discussed earlier, the full-time employees did not devote 100% of their time to the program; as per the online surveys, the majority of the full-time staff spent between 11% and 25% of their time on CareerLaunch. On the leader survey, most of the respondents indicated that they required facilitators to have up to two years of experience working with teens.

Staff retention was a concern, but perhaps directors considered it a given at the Clubs. (When asked to name the qualifications sought in a CareerLaunch employee, not one mentioned anything to the effect of “Willing stay for at least a year.”) The main reason was financial: a development officer at one of the Clubs, located in a distressed rust-belt area, said, “How are you going to get someone to work for only \$7.50 an hour? You might get someone, but that person won’t be quality and he’ll stay about six months if you’re lucky.”

When it came to the kinds of people directors looked for in a CareerLaunch facilitator, as well as what the teens themselves looked for, two main themes emerged: that they had to like and respect teens, and they had to know how to present the material.

### *1. Likes and respects teens:*

*They have to be open-minded, willing and able to listen to and deal well with teens and members as well as direct them with good advice, and never forget the kids have good advice as well.*

–CPO

*They are a little more tolerant—because we are teens—while other adults snap quicker. That’s probably because they are not that much older than us whereas other adults tend to forget what it’s like to be a teen.”*

–CareerLaunch participant

*They respect us so much that we return the favor and respect them and one another.*

–CareerLaunch participant

*They treat us with respect and I guess it kind of rubs off on us.*

–CareerLaunch participant

### *2. Knows how to present the material:*

*Someone who has been trained. All staff and volunteers must go through training, policies, procedures, tips with working with teens.*

–Director

*They have to be firm and possess some type of experience in the field. They should be strong with good ethics and social skills.*

–Director

*Knows how to be creative.*

–Director

*Someone who “thinks outside the box.”*

–Director

*Has a “get it done” mindset.*

–Director

*A good teacher who can let each teen work at his own pace and work with each teen.*

–CPO

*Knows the material and the world of work.*

–Director

*A good facilitator is a must. the person must explain the global economy to the kids and understand it. They must strengthen the link to colleges and train the kids to talk to college counselors.*

–CPO

### CareerLaunch Collaborations and Partnerships

BGCA posed the following question: “Given the multiple entities involved in the implementation of CareerLaunch including BGCA, Gap Foundation, volunteers, Club staff, and Club members, what impact does this collaborative effort have on the program delivered to Club members ?”

Overall, the extent of the collaboration varied by Club. As noted in the discussion about Club leadership, the more successful leaders, the ones who reported the fewest barriers to implementing CareerLaunch, had an infrastructure of relationships inside and outside the Clubs. Foremost, these included Club staff who worked to implement multiple

programs for teens (one Club was deliberate in bringing in non-CareerLaunch staff to facilitate implementation); this was critical in those Clubs in which CareerLaunch was linked to other programming.

Discussed below are the relationships among the Clubs, BGCA (or “national”) and the Regional Teen Advisory Committees; relationships with CareerLaunch’s primary funder; Gap Foundation; funding; relationships with other local organizations; and adult and member engagement in the implementation of CareerLaunch.

#### *Club Relationships with BGCA and the Regional Teen Advisory Committees*

BGCA, the national office, tries to strike a balance between a hands-on and hands-off approach, leaning more towards the latter. According to the BGCA teen services director: “Autonomy puts us in a position where we lead our Clubs and not mandate. The message that comes across to the Clubs is that national is there to help and assist, but only if they need these resources.” In addition, there are no protocols in place to measure the quality of individual Clubs’ implementation of BGCA-designed programs. However, the thinking around this is beginning to change: BGCA as an organization would like to at least be assured of some measure of fidelity of implementation in order to feel comfortable with putting the Boys & Girls Club imprimatur on the program.

In the interviews, we asked about the roles played by the Regional Teen Advisory Committee (RTAC) and the national office. Because the Clubs were so autonomous, we

did not come away with the sense that the relationships were strong or that they had a great impact on the implementation of the program (apart from the fact that the national office created the program and supplied the materials, and, of course, provided most of the funding). Some staff attended the trainings, others attended a meeting or two, but apart from that, the link to the national office was weak. At the end of February 2008, Realize (a research organization) conducted a series of focus groups that included several CareerLaunch staff; they spoke to the inconsistent way in which the program was being implemented and the tensions that led to within the Clubs. Realize found that Club sites were looking for more direction from the national office in this respect.

That said, the directors who talked about having relationships with the national office and/or the Regional Teen Advisory committees tended to be proactive in their implementation of CareerLaunch in the Clubs. The CPO who started his career as a fundraiser noted that he uses his relationships with the national office well: “You only get what you ask for,” meaning that it is incumbent upon the CPO and/or directors to be take the initiative in seeking assistance from the national office. Another CPO stated that he attends the meetings and takes copious notes, which he will refer to if a situation warrants it. “Mostly it shapes my view of how I look at things at my own club,” he said. Others discussed going to BGCA meetings, calling for materials, and either going to trainings or sending staff to trainings. One director described how conferences held

by her Regional Teen Advisory Committee served as an invaluable resource for learning and networking:

*There are classes that you can take when the teens are in sessions, and you can work with other advisors from other clubs that have done programs for several years. You get to meet your regional advisors that you may not have known. You may not realize there’s a whole committee.*

During the CareerLaunch pilot, a teen director recalled attending a RTAC meeting: “It was nice to network with other people who were piloting the program. I got the opportunity to bounce ideas off of other directors.”

#### *CareerLaunch and Gap Foundation*

In 1999, as CareerLaunch was evolving into a product that could be of great use to teens, BGCA and GAP Foundation entered into a partnership that shaped the program going forward. The foundation believed there was a natural connection between the Clubs and the Gap stores (the Gap, Old Navy, and Banana Republic) and an environment to foster a good working relationship, and thus fostered a partnership with BGCA to provide funding for a career readiness program for youth. In its professional development, the Gap focused on job readiness for first-time workers, which was a natural tie-in to CareerLaunch. In addition, what made CareerLaunch attractive for Gap Foundation was that there was a ready-made infrastructure that facilitated partnerships between local Clubs and local stores, creating a multiplier effect which in turn could

facilitate Club programming, particularly in terms of benefiting from an influx of volunteers from the family of Gap stores.

Practically speaking, the partnership (apart from funding) involved mutual website linkages and local volunteering by Gap employees in the Clubs. In 2000, the director of teen services at BGCA at the time described the plans: “They have committed to doing a training component that not only involves local Clubs but also involves local Gap stores. Gap employees will be able to come to the Clubs for a training session in the computer program alongside the B&GC staff and this will facilitate the relationship with the Clubs. They will be trained in the use of the website and also trained in how to facilitate a relationship between the local Gap sites and the Clubs.”

In 2005, Gap Foundation undertook a strategic planning effort in which all of their funding relationships were assessed. The main question was, “What can we do that is different and allows us to leverage other assets?” The answer for Gap Foundation rested in the “time, talent, skills, and knowledge of the over 150,000 employees around the country.” They commissioned a study by the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University to guide their thinking as to how they could more effectively and strategically use those resources. Based on the study, Gap Foundation decided to focus on youth, assets, and commitment, with a focus on older youth. Many existing relationships were severed, but BGCA and

CareerLaunch in particular remained because their missions were consistent with the renewed focus generated by the strategic planning effort.

The lion’s share of the funding for CareerLaunch continues to come from Gap Foundation. The foundation has no role in determining program content but has played an active role in expanding and assessing the program. For example, Gap introduced BGCA to Teen Research Unlimited (TRU), which conducted a satisfaction survey of the teens, as well as Realize, another research organization, to determine how BGCA might scale-up CareerLaunch even more and to measure the quality of the CareerLaunch experience for teens. It is clear that Gap Foundation is fully committed to CareerLaunch, and both organizations enjoy the mutually beneficial relationship.

#### *Community engagement*

Do local Clubs engage other community organizations and local businesses to employ CareerLaunch participants? Are there other ways in which local Clubs engage other community organizations and local businesses? Strong relationships with the community and local business often are an artifact of strong Club leadership, as noted earlier. In practice, outside entities such as community organizations, local business, and public agencies are tapped into for support, but they are used more for shadowing opportunities, internships, and volunteers. Also, a common use of outsiders is to serve as mock interviewers. This is one way in which

directors try to get CareerLaunch on the radar screen of local businesses, and development officers hope to use these mock interview efforts to expand their network of funders.

While bringing in individuals from the community for mock interviews is good for visibility, the directors were more inclined to speak of the practice as directly beneficial for their teens. One director of a Club in a rural area recruited the mayor and several other officials to conduct mock interviews; as he described it, “This was a major confidence builder – if my kids could get through an interview with the mayor, they could do anything!” Using individuals from outside organizations and agencies as guest speakers was also very common; Club board members were most often used for this purpose.

One Club was particularly intentional with respect to building partnerships as a means of building its resources and gaining visibility. This Club has a program services team charged with finding community partners in alignment with its core areas of education and career development. The partners send volunteers to teach the staff and teens in these core areas. This, the director noted, was invaluable because these individuals were active in their fields.

When it comes to engaging the community to hire the teens, the Club directors felt that it was something that could be stronger. But, in the more distressed communities, recruiting local businesses to hire CareerLaunch participants is close to impossible; according

to one director serving a Club in an area with a 6.2% unemployment rate (two percentage points higher than the national average in 2008) and a poverty rate of 27%:

*It didn't used to be so hard for a high school student to get a job. Now, with the economy, the college graduates are taking the jobs that the undergrads used to get, and the undergrads are taking the jobs that the high school graduates used to get, and the high school graduates are getting the jobs that the high school students used to get.*

This does not mean that the directors were not proactive in seeking community and local business support to generate jobs for the teens. But there were difficulties in placing teens. A CPO described his efforts to go to large employers such as Tyco and PNC Bank, only to learn that in many cases, businesses did not want to hire teenagers in general.

Some Clubs used members of the local community as volunteers. One Club had a partnership with its state's Workforce Investment Program, which provided its employees as CareerLaunch volunteers in the summer. Another Club partnered with the police, fire, and juvenile justice systems to bring in volunteers to give talks on some key CareerLaunch components: education, goal setting, and careers. Another CPO described working with his area's chamber of commerce as a source of volunteers and services:

*We've looked more to leverage resources, working with the chamber of commerce.*

*They basically took in and created a package for volunteers for implementing the program. They prepare transparencies and slides for presentations. They provide us with white paper, magazines, scissors, glue, and other things to complete the program. They donated or solicited for this stuff as well.*

This has actually facilitated this CPO's capacity to generate jobs for his CareerLaunch teens: he uses his CareerLaunch volunteers as conduits to approach their employers about finding jobs for the members.

For some Clubs, "community engagement" meant that the Clubs were proactive in serving their communities, and not the other way around. Although not directly connected to CareerLaunch, some directors spoke of food and clothing drives, and other altruistic activities. Most of these were connected to the Keystone Club, which, as noted earlier, many CareerLaunch participants had been a part of either concurrently or in the past.

#### *Engagement of Adults in the Community*

By far, the most important adult-teen relationship was between the teens and the Club staff. Integral to the culture and the workings of the Club is a strong mentoring relationship to each teen. Many of the teens have been at the Club for many years, and many of the Club staff who have been there as long know the programs each teen has participated in. At one Club, in which we observed a session on resume building, one Club director told a member, "You were in

Keystone – put that on your resume." At another Club we visited, the director of one of the larger Clubs knew the name of every child and teen he saw.

Parents played a minor role, if any, in the program. One director remarked, "Sometimes I think we replace the parents too much." Another stated, "I would like to get parents involved to connect home with school. Some parents don't see the importance of having these skills." However, in one Club, parents participated in CareerLaunch alongside their teens to see what they were learning; this was more the exception than the rule. As noted earlier, in many of the sites, the teens came from single-parent homes.

With respect to volunteers, AED saw no evidence of engagement: in fact, the researchers did not even meet any volunteers, nor did any volunteer respond to the online survey. We would have liked to meet volunteers in those Clubs that actively recruited them to be mentors. In the interviews with the teens, no one mentioned volunteers or adults other than the Club staff. This might have been an artifact of a "bad draw," in that these particular Clubs may or may not have been atypical with respect to volunteer recruitment and engagement.

#### *Funding and Fundraising Strategies*

On the online survey, directors were asked about funding sources outside of BGCA. Of those who responded, slightly over half sought funding outside of the national or state Boys

& Girls Clubs. Those who did seek funding outside of the Clubs went to federal and private sources. The most common source of federal funding was through the Gang Prevention Grant Program of the US Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs (OJJDP). In exchange for funds, Clubs agree to serve non-member teens in the community who have been targeted by the local OJJDP office as “at risk” for gang involvement. At one of the sites we visited, several teens from this program were participating in CareerLaunch. Another common source of federal funding was through the US Department of Labor; others included Workforce Investment and State Alliance. Private sources were the second most commonly used, and the one source mentioned the most was United Way. In the interviews, directors and CPOs who were closest to their Clubs’ fundraising efforts spoke of receiving funds from national sources such as Bank of America, Verizon, Toyota, Prudential, Charles Schwab, and Allstate.

The larger cities were able to receive funding from their city governments. State governments also contributed to Club activities, specifically the state’s Department of Labor office. But, the CPO who was active in fundraising spoke of the challenges of raising money for teen programs from state sources: “Teens hardest to fund. A lot of state funding stops at age 13.”

#### *Club Members as CareerLaunch Partners*

Given the importance of building the leadership capacity of the youth served by Clubs, and particularly given what was gained

in terms of leadership development (discussed earlier), to what extent were Club members (the teens themselves) engaged as part of this collaboration of partners? Or, were they only considered “clients” who use a service?

Club members served CareerLaunch mainly as recruiters, but there was no deliberate strategy or protocol for the most part. “They tell their friends, their friends tell their friends, and so on.” Plus, as stated earlier, many of the Club’s Junior Staff were CareerLaunch alumni, and many of those assisted in facilitating the program. And, as discussed above, some aspired to graduate into Club positions. They were clearly not merely clients who used a service, but rather were young people who were growing, developing, and grappling with impending adulthood.

#### Reflections on best practices

It was clear that the common denominator among the Clubs was that leaders and staff enjoyed what they did and liked implementing CareerLaunch. This CPO said it best:

*We’re excited to implement the program. We think it’s a great program. We just wish we had more time to dedicate to the program. Teens have a cramped agenda with sports and have other things on their minds, or they are working already. I think it’s a great curriculum. We’re going to do it again in the fall and as often as we can. We serve over 100 kids in a session that will implement the program. Kids will know me*



*around town as “CareerLaunch guy” and we know we’re inspiring kids about getting jobs and getting started on their careers.*

The most important resource a Club had in implementing CareerLaunch was the fact that it was being held at a Boys & Girls Club or in a place with a comprehensive youth development program. Boys & Girls Clubs operate within a culture that is designed to serve the whole child or teen. While the program elements might have been transferable to venues that did not have a youth-centered environment or culture, the

implementation of the sessions and the outcomes for the teens would have been very different. Because of the strong emphasis on mentoring at Boys & Girls Clubs, the safe and nurturing environment was an almost ideal backdrop for implementing a career preparation program. In short, CareerLaunch works because it is a Boys & Girls Club program. Rather than calling this learning about how to improve one’s skills and change one’s attitudes about finding and keeping a job a “best practice,” it is part and parcel of every Boys & Girls Club and was one of the key common denominators among the Clubs.



## V. Case Studies

Five of the 20 Boys & Girls Club sites were selected for case studies as part of a more intensive qualitative data collection. As noted earlier, they were selected for their diversity with respect to locale.

Responses to the pre-survey also played a role in the selection – for example, one Club had fostered a strong relationship with its teens, another served younger teens, and another Club overwhelmingly selected “teen pregnancy” as a barrier to success in school and beyond. Since the case studies were written by the individual members of the evaluation team, they reflect each authors own approach to describing what was seen and heard. The visits and interviews were invaluable in deepening our understanding of CareerLaunch and of the Boys & Girls Club culture in which it operated. They are presented in this section in no particular order of importance or chronology (i.e., point at which the research team made the visit).

### A City in Transition

The Boys & Girls Club was located in what can be described as an up-and-coming city in transition. After decades of stagnant poverty rates, declining student achievement, high crime rates and rising juvenile delinquency, this city in recent years experienced renaissance of sorts. This was spurred in part by the city’s participation in the Federal Empowerment Zone and Enterprise

Community program, which provided tax incentives for business development and job creation, as well as community block grants designed for community revitalization. Another area of improvement was in the reduction of the murder rate, which had been one of the highest in the country prior to 2008. However, there was still much to be done: over 25% of children aged 5-17 were living in poverty in 2008, and there were signs of increased gang activity. Needless to say, the Boys & Girls Club in general, and CareerLaunch in particular, was a safe refuge for this city’s teens.

### *First Impressions*

Located in the midst of transition and stagnation, the building is brightly painted in colors that are welcoming to youth. The neatly manicured garden and creative jungle gym outside the building complement its brightly colored interior spaces, which include various table-top games, an impressive assortment of technology (e.g., laptops, desktop computers, and high definition flat screen televisions), and a range of seating areas and classroom-like spaces. Walking through the halls and interacting with staff and Club members alike, one was overwhelmed by the level of passion, engagement, and commitment shared by all.

### *Teen Leadership Development and CareerLaunch*

CareerLaunch was incorporated into and implemented within a three-pronged leadership development structure at this Club, encompassing Money Matters, the teen coordinator program, and the teen leadership program. Common to many Clubs that incorporated CareerLaunch in this way, the Club used a scaffolded approach that was based upon age: Level 1 was offered to 13- and 14-year-olds; Level 2 was given to 15-year-olds; at 16, members were eligible to apply for Club positions or Junior Staff but needed to take Level 3 if they did so. In all, CareerLaunch was conceptualized as the “common denominator,” in the words of the director, among all of the teen offerings.

The CareerLaunch session observed by AED staff took place in a large room occupied by the 42-inch flat screen high definition television, an assortment of laptops and computers, and the Club members. Participants ranged in age from 13 to 17 and included a mixture of males and females, African-Americans and Latinos, regular Club members, and “at risk” youth from a gang prevention program. Facilitated by the director, a Latino man in his late-30s to early 40s with a commanding presence, and an African American female youth counselor in her mid-to late 20s, this Level 2 session was designed to improve the teens’ personal, social, and cognitive skills. Other key activities included give-and-take sessions designed to enhance the teens’ ability to deal with difficult people in the workforce setting and to follow rules, and

foster their ability to identify employment that bolsters and complements their personal strengths. With the CareerLaunch Quick Guide as a supplement, and switching from active to passive to participatory modes of communicating with the teens, the session facilitators used activities, games, and icebreakers that were engaging, creative, educational, and in the words of one of the youth interviewees, “fun.” At the same time, the session was conducted in an orderly, organized fashion. The facilitators mixed praise and critique – on the one hand, a member was commended for his creativity and resourcefulness during an ice-breaker in which the teens were to communicate their birthdates without using words; on the other hand, the facilitators carefully and gently criticized attitudes and approaches that were self-defeating to sustained employment, as in the case where a member said she would quit her job if her boss yelled at her for no reason.

After allocating ample time for the teens to complete a handout on career exploration, the facilitators, using examples from their own experience, conducted a question and answer session in which each teen was encouraged to share his or her responses to the worksheet items.

In response to the entertaining yet controlled style of the instructors and the activities and icebreakers, the youth responded with engagement, camaraderie, enthusiasm, and enjoyment. The warm and, for the most part, respectful, teen-centered atmosphere of the CareerLaunch session seemed to resonate

with the members. In their exchanges among themselves, they were quick to encourage and coach one another. In fact, in response to one young man's declaration that he "wants to be president of the United States," another teen, after playfully and affectionately teasing him, supported him by affirming that "he could do that."

The facilitators created a seamless connection among the worksheet activities, icebreakers, and the "real world" work arena. In fact, this connection was so seamless that the director turned the participants' late arrival from a lunch break into a teaching moment on time management in the workforce.

#### *Staff and Teen Perspectives*

Based on interviews with staff members, most of the Club members live in the surrounding low-income neighborhood. They are "honest, energetic, easygoing" and in need of academically and emotionally supportive positive role models. "Shy at first," such teens are "interested in learning new things" and are "more likely to take initiative as [their] time [in the program] progresses." They were also "adaptive [and] work well in teams." As to the particular benefits of CareerLaunch, a staff member noted that, "CareerLaunch uncovers a lot of hidden talents," as many of the teens discover leadership qualities that would have lain dormant otherwise. CareerLaunch, according to the same staff member, provides a "different positive world" that counterbalances the world of gangs and low familial support.

Based on the interviews with the teen participants, many members attended the Club approximately every day that the Club was open. In addition to CareerLaunch, they were involved in a range of activities such as Money Matters, Keystone, Smart Moves, Healthy Habits, My Access, the local news cast, and the tech department. Children and youth joined the Club for a variety of reasons. Some joined out of necessity and/or borderline coercion (e.g., "my dad works here," "my mom had to work and couldn't afford a babysitter," "my mom forced me to come"), yet others were motivated by their own desire and search for excitement (e.g., "I wanted to have fun and adventure"). Notwithstanding the teens' various rationales for joining the Club, they all continued participation because the Club is a "fun" space where they can just "be a teen" and establish meaningful and healthy friendships with other teenagers and adults. One teen admitted, "For the first and only time, my mom forced me to do something and I don't regret it."

With respect to the teens' rationales for choosing to participate in CareerLaunch, their goals were to prepare themselves for future careers, receive opportunities to gain employment as a youth, and have fun. In fact, all of the teens interviewed reported that, as a result of their participation in the program, they are more hopeful about their future career (e.g., "I want to be president now;" "I want be a chef," etc.).

They also became more aware of their assets and talents. For instance, admitting that he was once embarrassed because he was very knowledgeable about technology, one teenage interviewee noted that CareerLaunch enabled him to realize what he once took for weaknesses were really strengths all along. Whether in the form of learning how to set short- and long-term goals, use resume and interview skills to obtain employment as a youth counselor at the Club, or imparting the CareerLaunch philosophy to “play to your strengths,” all of the participants reported that they applied the skills that they learned in CareerLaunch to the work arena and also to other areas of life, such as school and other recreational activities.

#### *Director Interview*

After being around the director at this Club, AED staff gained the impression that he exuded enormous passion for the job, was completely committed to his charges (both staff and youth)—and that he didn’t suffer fools gladly. All were qualities that were indispensable to the workings of a Club in city that was so large, diverse, and evolving. Unlike any of the other directors, he dressed in a suit and tie on a hot summer day. He said this was deliberate, noting the importance of demonstrating how an adult should act and present himself. “They see me wearing a suit and tie, and it makes an impression on them.”

The director had been working with young people for almost 30 years: first for 14 years as a tennis instructor for young people in

a neighboring city, and then with the Boys & Girls Clubs for 15 years. As such, he brought to the job a depth of experience in working with young people. Because of this, the conversation centered more about the Club in general because it was important to understand the context in which CareerLaunch operated.

For example, when asked what sort of person he wanted to facilitate CareerLaunch, he said he looked for the same qualities in all staff who worked with teens: “They must want to work with teens. They need to be efficient, professional, good communicators, fun and vibrant, and excited to work with teens. They need to ‘stay real,’ and be willing to think outside the box.”

The mentoring component to the Club was critical, as illustrated by this story:

*One day, I saw a 6 year old kid come in, standing off to the side, not talking to anyone. He was lost. But, someone at the Club started to look out for him, see how he was doing in school, check up on him. The kid realized that there was someone who cared. I want to make every kid feel as if they are that 6 year old.*

He went on to describe how his Club evolved in its teen programming. The current CPO had made it a priority to focus on teen programming in the Club. He helped to pilot the Club’s Tech Center and write some of the grants. He also cultivated a good relationship with the national office by working closely

with it on teen programming efforts. Along these lines, the director talked about the process of grant writing as a means of building relationships that are beneficial to the Club: “We apply for everything. Now we have more grants than ever before and we’ve built great relationships. This city is a tough political environment, but we can work with it.” The dilemma was, however, how could he link funding to results?

As it turns out, this Club was working on a strategy to do just that. Every program had an outcome model, with a target age group, target activities, and outputs (days per week). The Club created a 30-page guide to measure outcomes. They also created a model that mapped the relationship between staff and a Club member and the ways in which aspects of that relationship can cause positive behavior changes. They tested the model by examining behaviors during physical fitness activities. First, they defined “at risk” behaviors—didn’t respect rules, trouble competing, poor sportsmanship, never formed a game, shy, etc.—and identified members who exhibited those behaviors. Then, they started to measure changes in the at-risk behaviors over time to determine which physical fitness activities affected those changes. These tests helped the Club staff develop step-wise protocols that could allow them to rate the teens, link them to the appropriate program, and then rate the results.

The Club was in the process of expanding the model to CareerLaunch, which would map out the program and type of activity to specific outcomes, including (but not limited to) applying oneself, developing interview skills, and job readiness. The director envisioned creating a measurement toolkit that would incorporate the model. However, it was a long way off, and he admitted that it was very hard work—but worth it.

### *Summary*

On the basis of interviews with teens and staff, we found that CareerLaunch, as run at this Club, was a much needed resource to nurture teens’ development within the difficult yet evolving sociopolitical context of the city it serves. In fact, for the teens, CareerLaunch was seen as a strategy that could move them out of poverty, underemployment, and the seductions of gang life to a life of hope, courage, confidence, and competence. It was a safe space with adults that cared about them. For the Club itself, its efforts to articulate and codify their activities and purported outcomes in a model suggested two things: first, it was important to show to funders and others what was working, and, second, this Club was very serious and strategic about using data towards continuous improvement.

## A Naval Military Base

At most military sites with Boys & Girls Clubs, participation in CareerLaunch is mandatory for teens who wish to secure employment on the base. Therefore, we included a military site (a Navy munitions plant) to see how this program was implemented in such an environment. In setting up the visit time and date, the director warned that on arrival our car would be searched, the registration checked, and that we would need to show identification. But the director, who sounded warm and exuberant over the telephone, ended the conversation with, “We’re military, but we’re very friendly!”

### *First Impressions*

The base is located in a rural section of the state (located in the Mid-Atlantic region), close to farms. It is a remote area, about seven miles from a popular shore community. As we arrived at the entrance, we were greeted by a huge tank behind the sign with the name of the base. As expected, the car was searched, the registration was checked, and the IDs of the team were collected and registered in a log. The environment, however, was professional and courteous.

The director, an African American woman who was likely in her late 30s-early 40s, introduced the AED research team to the facilitator, a white woman in her mid-20s, who handed us copies of the handouts she was going to use for the day’s session, so that we could follow along. The session was to

cover several topics: cover letter writing, filling out job applications, obtaining references, handling tardiness, hygiene and grooming, and following directions.

### *Teaching Job Skills using CareerLaunch*

The director introduced the AED research team to the facilitator, who handed us copies of the handouts she was going to use for the day’s session, so that we could follow along. The session was to cover several topics: cover letter writing, filling out job applications, obtaining references, handling tardiness, hygiene and grooming, and following directions.

This CareerLaunch session was run very much like a classroom. (We later learned that the facilitator was a former grade school teacher.) With the CareerLaunch Teen Tips guide largely driving the session, the facilitator read the contents of the guide while the Club members passively listened, followed along, or carried out the facilitator’s directions. For the most part, the staff member’s pedagogical method of implementing the CareerLaunch curriculum was disengaging. (In fact, in the words of one of the teens interviewed, such an approach seemed to “underestimate the [teenage Club members’] potential,” especially that of the older members.)

For example, during a portion of the session intended to foster the ability to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate rationales for absenteeism, the facilitator distributed an activity for the teens to complete individually after she read a couple of paragraphs from



the CareerLaunch Teen Tips guide to them. While she read, many of the participants seemed to lose attention, in spite of their efforts to appear interested. In fact, one of the participants, an older teenager who appeared to be attentive, initially responded with “huh” and page flipping at one of the facilitators’ questions about something the instructor had read aloud just moments ago. Nevertheless, the Club members completed the assignment and presented their answers to the larger group. During the session, there was very little interaction among the teens; only when there was hands-on work did the participants chat with one another.

The facilitator was able to re-engage the teens on her own only when she used anecdotes to relate the curriculum to her personal experiences (e.g., she told a story about a person she knew who was caught lying on his resume); or when she would use discussions generated by the participants to transition from one subject to another (e.g., during the topic on tardiness, one teenager spoke about men “sagging their pants and dressing sloppy” and the instructor transitioned to the topic on hygiene and grooming); or when she joked in ways that applied to the lesson. The Club members also seemed to appreciate the instructor’s receptiveness to the teens’ alternative explanations for the worksheet activities (e.g., in response to two groups coming up with two different, equally valid/possible conclusions, the instructor said, “this can be interpreted in two separate ways”).

The session lasted two hours, after which the group, including AED staff, broke for a lunch of pizza and soda. This was followed by opportunities for the teens to create or edit their resumes via CareerLaunch.net on the computers in the room. The AED team took this opportunity to interview the facilitator and director, as well as six teens.

#### *Staff and Teen Perspectives*

The facilitator had spent seven years as a summer volunteer at the Club and then worked outside the Club as a teacher for three years. This was her first experience with CareerLaunch. When asked what went really well so far in CareerLaunch, she said, “I used personal experiences with them. I explained my student teaching and career barriers and told stories that actually happened to me.” From what we had observed, this strategy worked best with the teens.

She noted that most of the teens “didn’t have a clue” about what it took to get a job when they started CareerLaunch, or, worse, relied upon incorrect information from their friends. When asked to talk about what constituted success, she said, “When they take my advice, I’ll give it to them and they use it. It shows that they are listening to me.”

The teens we interviewed were no older or more mature than the ones we had met to date, but underscoring their comments was the feeling that while they enjoyed CareerLaunch and were getting a lot out of the program, many felt that the program materials were too basic. “The vocabulary is pretty simple; could use

more advanced vocabulary;” “I don’t like the little worksheets. It’s redundant. It is probably helpful to younger children but I already know most of that stuff already.” “At times I don’t feel challenged doing some of the activities and worksheets.” “I wouldn’t recommend it to anyone my age or older because it is too easy and boring at times.”

At the same time, they acknowledged that CareerLaunch was very useful for young people. When asked why he went to CareerLaunch, a member responded, “Because I needed guidance in what to do. Young people don’t know.” In addition, they did feel that they were learning important life skills that would help them later on, as well as practical skills—resume writing, cover letter writing, interviewing, etc.—that they did not have before. One teen thought that she knew about finding a job but quickly learned how much she didn’t know, and was therefore grateful for CareerLaunch: “Now I realize the mistakes I’ve made when I applied to jobs. I’ve learned I could have done a much better job. I feel more prepared now to apply for a job.”

Contrary to our impressions of the session—that it was run like a classroom—the teens did not seem to feel that way at all. “CareerLaunch is laid back. The typical student-teacher relationship does not exist here. It is not so strict like school.” “School is more constricted—tight schedule. And I’m not treated like an adult there.”

#### *Director Interview*

The director was a seasoned youth program professional, with almost two decades of experience at youth organizations, including the Boys & Girls Club. She knew what worked for young people. Asked what kind of person she wanted for CareerLaunch, she said it was important to recruit the younger teens—“get them early”—because they are on the cusp of goal setting. Most of the teens who participated were eager to earn money on their own.

The Club in general enjoyed the financial support of the Navy base, which was responsible for funding. Thus, this Club was not as concerned with fundraising as much as the other Clubs because there was a steady stream of funding to supplement monies from the national office. In return, the Navy required any teen who wanted a job at the Club to go through CareerLaunch. (The Navy also required teens to complete Money Matters and the Keystone Club.) The director had no issues with these requirements. She also noted that CareerLaunch alumni made for better job seekers and workers: recalling the time when she received a resume written in pencil from someone who had not been in CareerLaunch, she felt strongly that CareerLaunch was a good way for teens to learn the correct way to find and keep jobs.

The director had very high praise for her facilitator and felt she was good at keeping the teens engaged. When asked what advice

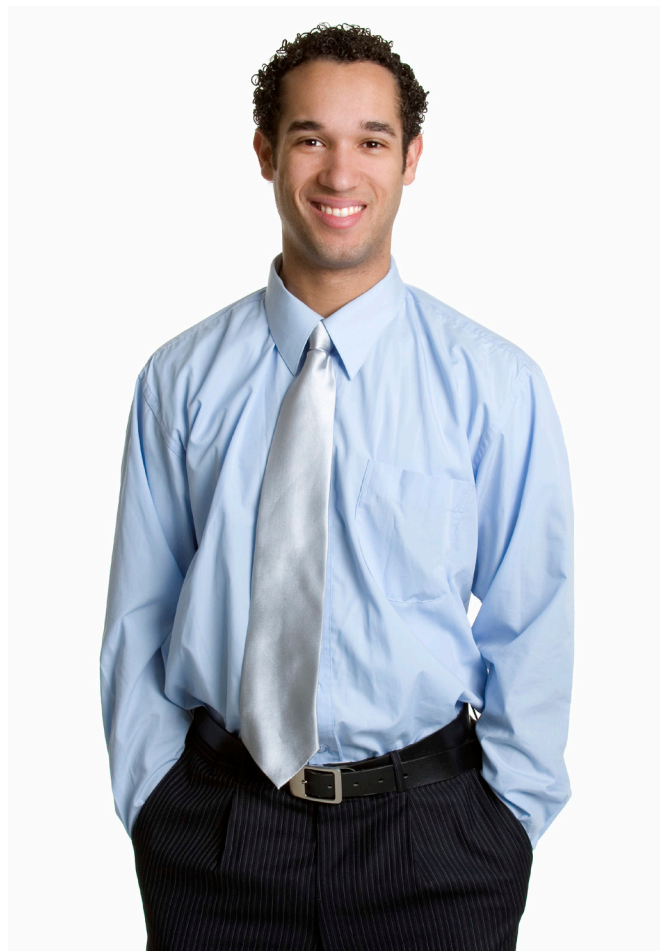
she would give to someone implementing CareerLaunch for the first time, she cited the usual (one should like to work with teens, know the material, etc.), but she ended with one that no one else had mentioned: debrief with your teens at the end. In this way, the implementation improves because it reflects participant input.

### *Summary*

Despite our initial impressions of the session, with the reliance on the Teen Tips booklet and the periodic disengagement of the teens, we came away with positive conclusions,—especially after the teen interviews, which put our initial impressions in context. Recalling the director’s advice to seek the teens’ feedback at the end of CareerLaunch, we concluded that

what saw was what the teens really wanted after all. In addition, the teens did not feel that the sessions were run like a classroom, and they felt they were absorbing the lessons just as much as the teens attending more interactive CareerLaunch sessions. From what we saw, the adults excelled in building strong relationships with their participants. The Club director and the facilitator communicated very effectively with the participants, and they knew when to be humorous and when to be firm.

As our visit ended, we needed to be escorted to the entrance. But, apart from the security around the Club, it seemed like any other Boys & Girls Club—warm, supportive, and full of learning.



### A Midwestern City in the Heart of the Rust Belt

The visit to this Club located in the Midwestern United States in the Rust Belt revealed a city experiencing considerable economic decline. In the downtown area, there were some restaurants and businesses open alongside other offices and businesses that were boarded and closed. Similarly, the Boys & Girls Club was flanked by both an impoverished neighborhood and a commercial strip filled with mega-malls. At the time of our visit, this city, which was predominantly white, was experiencing a rise in the number of residents who had lost their manufacturing jobs and remained unemployed.

#### *First Impressions*

The Club facade reflected the city's economic condition. Although there had been some attempt at making the interior vibrant and youth-friendly (posters and graffiti-like lettering), the facilities were dark, outmoded, and in need of repair. The large classroom/computer lab did appear to have an adequate number of functional computers, but the reference materials were extremely outdated and the library lacked current, age-appropriate books and magazines. The cafeteria and the gym needed revitalization.

However, as we toured the facility, we observed that physical environment did not betray the

interactions between the teens and staff. Club teens appeared to be very comfortable with the staff, addressing them by first name and in a friendly manner. The staff knew each of teens' names and made it a point to provide a personal assessment about each teen as he or she was introduced to the research team: "she's a really good artist" or "he's our star baseball player." Demonstrating familiarity and comfort, the teens and staff greeted one another with high fives. There was a marked and almost familial closeness between the staff and the teens. There was a mix of young and older teens; almost all of the teens, as well as the staff, were white.

#### *Building Confidence through CareerLaunch: the Mock Interview*

On the day of our visit, the scheduled CareerLaunch activity was the mock interview session. The director had arranged for a human resources representative from the Club to be the mock interviewer. In this way, the teens would be interviewed by a professional who was knowledgeable in the employment field but not someone they knew, thus replicating as realistically as possible a true interviewing experience. Because the teens' anxiety was exacerbated by the presence of the AED researcher team, we made the decision to observe the mock interviews from the back of the room.

During the interview we observed, the human resources representative was very supportive with the youth he was interviewing; he was friendly and helped the participant feel relaxed by his light-hearted manner. After the interview, he provided feedback to the teen pointing out which responses were strong and which could be made stronger for an actual interview. At first, the teen was nervous, but by the end of the mock interview he left appearing more confident. From our observations, we gathered that most of the interviews most likely proceeded in this manner.

#### *Staff and Director Perspectives*

Interviews and informal conversations with both the director of operations and some of the staff members demonstrated that the staff knew these teens intimately; they were aware of their teens' issues and challenges at home and at school. All of the teens experienced one or more risk factors: single parent families, abuse, drugs, gangs, academic underachievement, and problems with literacy. The staff used the CareerLaunch program to help some of these teens meet their challenges: they were encouraged to stay in school, stay off drugs, and stay out of gangs. For example, one participant was doing very poorly in school; the director made a pact that if he improved his grades and went to CareerLaunch, he could get a job at the Club. Since the participant was a faithful attendee who treated the Club as a second home, the prospect of having a Club job was an incentive to improve his grades.

The director, an experienced Boys & Girls Club leader, liked CareerLaunch because of its adaptability. She was impressed by what the program could do for her population of teens: "We train them for the next step," which was important in an area with seemingly few career options. In her opinion, it was important to know a Club's resources and work within them in implementing CareerLaunch: "Don't think that you can do more than you can do. Stick to your timeline." It was important to get the teens in the door in the first place. This was accomplished through the synergy of this Club's teen programming: CareerLaunch was interwoven with Keystone, Smart Moves, lifestyle and fitness activities, drug prevention, and even late-night hoops activities.

Because of the area's distressed economy, the Club faced special challenges in finding incentives for the teens to engage in career preparation. Thus, the director and her staff needed to be particularly creative in building relationships in the community. For example, this Club enjoyed a good relationship with the school districts. The local credit union implemented a version of Money Matters, and its staff served as mock interviewers for CareerLaunch at times. The Club had partnerships with the police, fire, and juvenile justice systems, and engaged these systems with some of the CareerLaunch components, especially in the areas of goal setting and career exploration. When it came to recruitment, the Club staff members were very strategic in contacting the teens' parents.

Running her Club and CareerLaunch was challenging but very rewarding for this director: she made sure that the AED interviewer noted how much she loved her job despite the fact that she did not make a lot of money. This was quite clear by the enthusiasm she conveyed as she spoke of her staff and the teens they served. It was like “family.”

#### *Teen Perspectives*

The teens who were interviewed reported they had gained valuable information and skills going through the CareerLaunch program. They indicated they had learned practical skills like how to fill out job applications and how to dress for job interviews. A couple of teens spoke about having learned about the extent of additional schooling and training they would need to achieve their professional goals: one aspired to be a marine biologist and the other wanted to become a veterinarian. Both teens expressed they were grateful to be better informed about the steps they would need to take to reach their goals. From their point of view, “mapping out their career steps” made their aspirations more attainable and realistic.

However, both also talked about their inability to pay for college and graduate school as potential barriers to fulfilling their goals. One participant noted she had not been able to go to the Club for a few days because her mother didn’t have enough gas money to drive her, and she lived too far to walk. The economic crisis of this city, according to the Club director, “has had a direct impact on all our clubs.”

#### *Summary*

Lasting impressions of this Boys & Girls Club were that they have developed solid relationships with their teens and that CareerLaunch is one of the many kinds of approaches they use to help the teens become successful young adults. Interviews with the teens and staff revealed large financial concerns. Many of the CareerLaunch participants were on scholarship because, as minimal as the fee was (\$15 a month), some participants’ families just could not afford it. Participants wanted to work, but apart from the Club, there were not many employment opportunities for teenagers in the area. Transportation was also an issue since public transportation is minimal. The Club was struggling with finding even part-time employment for teens in this economically depressed city. However, this did not subtract from the strong, palpable “family” environment at this Club, which served as a critical lifeline for the teens.



## A State Capital

The northeastern metropolitan city in which this Boys & Girls Club was located was a study in contrasts. The downtown area was a conglomerate of business and government skyscrapers. The Boys & Girls Club was located a few minutes away from this corporate complex in an area that was more residential and more distressed. The economic implications of living in this state's capital were described by the CPO of the Club:

*There are very few jobs for youth. The biggest employer is the state, and our kids don't qualify for those jobs. We are trying to get local businesses to come to the club and get to know our kids so they can employ them in the commercial center, but that hasn't happened yet.*

### First Impressions

The Club had the look and feel of an old, well-worn and used lodge. The lounge area was large and set up with several table games. The gym, though functional, was in need of sprucing up. However, what struck the AED evaluation team was the almost electric vitality of this Club, which, on the day of our visit, was hustling and bustling with young people. The lounge was filled with the glee and banter that came from youth playing such games as table tennis and table soccer, and the gym was alive with a game of basketball. Teens and staff greeted one another warmly and with familiarity. On two separate occasions, Club

members came up to the strangers from AED with a friendly, "Hi -- good morning!"

### Tailoring CareerLaunch to the Teens

The room used for the CareerLaunch sessions appeared to have been renovated and was nicely laid out with 10 computers. The room, which was the Club's computer lab, was bright and cheery but lacking air conditioning. There was a large display check from a local bank for \$60,000. The rules for the lab were posted prominently: "Bad attitudes are not acceptable;" "Instructions are not negotiable."

The instructor was a woman who appeared to be in her mid-twenties and had a warm rapport with the young teens who ranged in age from 13 to 15. Both the instructor and the teens were African American. The teens asked questions without any hesitation, and when there was agreement among them the instructor used a high five to celebrate their shared understanding.

On the day of the Club visit, the CareerLaunch session revolved around identifying and overcoming barriers to employment. The instructor facilitated a discussion about barriers to employment but also helped guide her teens towards workable solutions to address those barriers. For example, when a participant said "not having your own transportation" as a barrier to employment, the instructor asked the rest of the class to think of possible solutions. The class came up with "asking a friend, a neighbor or a family member for a ride." During the session, the

facilitator needed to make many corrections on the teens' spelling and vocabulary; in fact, there was an impromptu vocabulary lesson on the word "interviewing."

Following that discussion, the instructor organized a "name that occupation" activity. This was an activity in which an occupation was taped on a piece of Post-it paper to each of the teens' backs. They then had to guess what vocation they had by asking each other questions about what they did at the job, where they worked, how they trained for the job, and such.. The teens truly enjoyed this activity and they gained valuable knowledge by having to think about the skills required by different occupations. The facilitator creatively facilitated the session in ways that were engaging, fun, and supportive of the youths' overall growth and development.

#### *Staff and Director Perspectives*

AED staff interviewed the Chief Professional Officer as well as the facilitator. These interviews revealed a great sense of urgency and concern for their teens. The CPO, a white male who was most likely in his forties, described how CareerLaunch helps their teens make the connection between school and their future – no small task in a city with a 40% drop-out rate. He explained the systematic method through which children were primed for a program like CareerLaunch. Targeting begins as early as the fourth grade, during which speakers are brought into the Club to introduce the children to careers and talk about the link between a good education and a good job. By the time the children reach

their teens and join CareerLaunch, the link is re-emphasized and becomes real:

*When kids do the Career Interest Survey, it's like a reality check. They become aware of all the different careers out there and then they make the link to schooling.*

The CPO spoke with great enthusiasm and optimism about his Club and the strategies he employed to link his teen programming and raise enough funds to support it all. This CPO had a wealth of development experience and brought that expertise to his job at this Boys & Girls Club. He indicated that his overall goal was to work on funding programs that help strengthen the Club's focus on keeping students in schools while finding them part-time employment. At the time of our visit, he was working on securing funding to create a job, college, and trade school career center. He was skilled at using CareerLaunch to generate outside interest in the Club, and he was able to do so because it was a quality program: "CareerLaunch is our anchor and our beacon."

The facilitator said that the overwhelming needs of the teens centered on academics. "They read below grade level, they write below grade level and they spell below grade level." This was clear to us as we observed the session, and as we saw how the facilitator included lessons in spelling and vocabulary. She empathized with the challenges the teens faced, and incorporated personal experiences into the CareerLaunch lessons: "I have an internal drive. I let the teens know that I had barriers too. This encourages them



to be resilient.” The instructor recalled an experience with her first CareerLaunch group:

*I asked the participants what are their goals, one girl responded by saying, I don't have any goals. This girl never participated in class, but in the last class during graduation she said, 'I want to do what you do—go to college and work with kids.'*

### Teen Perspectives

The participants in the CareerLaunch session were very comfortable with one another; they shared experiences regarding barriers to work, but at the same time they encouraged one another. When one student said she didn't think she could get a job because she's too shy, another teen offered to help talk her through an interview. When they played the name-the-occupation game, there was healthy competition among the groups. When one teen couldn't spell the career he wanted, the teens didn't shout out the spelling; instead they helped him arrive at the answer. It was clear that these teens have bonded as a group and that they are being exposed to a world of work and careers. For example, one of the occupations teens had to describe was “electrical engineer.” One teen asked the other, “What does an electrical engineer do?” His friend replied, “Work with wires.” When this clue was given to the teen who had to guess his occupation, his response was, “I'm the cable guy?” These are the types of activities that opened the world of careers for these teens. As one of the teens interviewed stated:

*I thought that it was interesting and it will help me with what I want to do with the rest of my life. I've been trying to search about different careers that I learned on the survey on careerlaunch.net. I'm trying to decide now between being a lawyer or an actress.*

### Summary

Lasting impressions of this Boys & Girls Club was that the CPO and staff were engaged in a daunting struggle to keep their teens in school, as well as involved or possibly employed at the Club or through their connections in the community. They fully understood that this involvement would help make the difference in the lives of their teens.

The CPO and staff were aware that they were fighting an uphill battle in a city with such a high percentage of drop-outs and very limited opportunities to employ youth. The aforementioned career center was but one means to build the infrastructure to address this problem, but more was needed. In the meantime, through multiple programs, including CareerLaunch and recreation, the staff made sure that their teens were kept safe and sound inside this well-worn lodge so that they could help them develop into successful young adults.



### A Small Town and Rural Community

The Boys & Girls Club in this area, a rural community on the west coast, serves over 4,000 children and youth and operates through eight sites. AED researchers visited two of those sites: one was in the main administration building in a small town, and the other was at a Club in a more rural area. What made our visit to this area particularly poignant was the fact that less than a month earlier, this was one of the areas ravaged by the California wildfires that began in the spring of 2008 and continued through the summer. This was also a distressed community, with high rates of unemployment, poverty, and school dropouts. When we arrived at the main Boys & Girls Club location, we were warmly greeted by the area director, a white male who was likely in his early 30s, who anticipated our visit with considerable excitement. He showed great pride in the sites within the Club and especially of the CareerLaunch program, and was delighted that we had picked his Club for our observations. He drove us to the first of the two sites on our itinerary, in the rural community.

During the drive, the director pointed out places of interest along the road, including up-and-coming neighborhoods. When we got closer to the Club, he showed us the areas that were destroyed by the wildfires. Most of the surrounding wooded area was charred, and the air appeared somewhat smoky when looking towards the horizon. At the time of our visit, the county was still issuing air quality

alerts. The fires directly affected some of the sites: a few weeks earlier, the Club to which we were headed had to be evacuated due to the smoky conditions. However, the director proudly added that the Clubs pulled together and held a food drive for the fire victims in the community as part of their Keystone activities.

The area in which the first Club was located was rural with small pockets of suburbanization, such as newly built neighborhoods separated far apart from one another but close to the main road. There were no signs of public transportation. The road circled along the cliff over a canyon as we approached the Club. The Club was located off the main road and there were several other one- to two-story commercial buildings surrounding the Club building.

#### *First Impressions of the First Club*

After being introduced to several staff members, we met the teen center director of the Club, a Latino male in his thirties, who was helpful in describing the Club, the activities, the youth who go there, and what was currently going on at the Club. We also met the young Latina female who was the CareerLaunch facilitator. Teenagers were gathering in the Club room, waiting for the CareerLaunch session to begin.

Our first overall impression was that the staff was trying to make the best of the resources they were provided. The Club building was fairly old and cramped: the entire space was not much more than four or five rooms, some smaller and used as offices, and one large

room used as a lounge area with old couches, partially divided into a space with a long table where the CareerLaunch session was held. One of the smaller rooms was a computer lab where an environmental Club was meeting.

Although the Club was dark and somewhat run down, the room where the CareerLaunch session was held was bright and colorful, with inspirational posters on the walls and pictures of the Boys & Girls Club “Scholar of the Month” members. This part of the room was set up like a classroom but had a “kid-friendly” feel and plenty of computers and board games, making it a pleasant, comfortable space. The long table where all the CareerLaunch participants sat brought the teens together in a family atmosphere. There were enough resources such as books and materials for the teens to use, and although with seven computers available, there were not enough for all the teens to be on the computer at the same time, but the CareerLaunch facilitator made it work.

#### *Reaching Young Teens through CareerLaunch*

The CareerLaunch session began soon after we arrived at the Club. There were eight participants, six girls and two boys, all white and almost all in middle school. The facilitator introduced the session by saying that she was going to review an assignment that was covered at the previous session but which she thought the teens did not understand very well. The session was about resumes: understanding what they are, writing them, and filling out the resume model on the CareerLaunch website. The goal of the session

was for the teens to understand the resume questions, the phrasing, vocabulary terms, and their job objective.

Most of the session consisted of the teens discussing work that they’d done in the past in the community or for family members. The teens thought because they were not “formal” paid jobs, they should not include them on their resumes. The facilitator informed them that such jobs were still work experience and appropriate to put on their resumes. For example, she helped them realize that volunteer work, community service, and certain Club activities could be included on their resumes. The facilitator asked if any of the teens had ever babysat or done yard work, and when a couple of teens replied “yes,” the facilitator affirmed that those jobs counted as work experiences. This realization was an eye opener for the teens, who then had a flood of questions such as, “I did computer work for my father’s company, can I put that down?”; “I volunteered to man a table at the chocolate festival, does that count?”

Although the facilitator was responsible for coordinating the session, three other staff members helped out from time to time, including the area director and the teen center director. Most of the conversation between staff and participants were initiated by staff, with the participants asking questions. These exchanges were pleasant, and the staff members were thoughtful and helpful about what qualified as appropriate to put on a resume. The exchanges between the participants were mostly friendly; they mocked

one another from time to time, but not one child was singled out over another. The participants helped one another by spelling words or answering questions.

Regarding the approach used, the facilitator led the session as if it were an informal classroom. She taught the lesson but allowed the teens to interrupt her by speaking out of turn or asking questions. This made the atmosphere more relaxed than a regular classroom; it appeared that the teens liked this arrangement. She maintained the teens' attention by walking around and helping them as they filled out their resumes. The majority of the children seemed engaged and excited about the session. Two teens sitting at the end of the table did not seem as engaged, but the facilitator made sure to come over to help them and see that they were handling the assignment. After the teens finished filling out their resumes in the CareerLaunch materials booklet, they each went on a computer to fill out their resumes in the online format on the CareerLaunch website. During this time, many of the other staff members walked over to the teens and helped them with the resumes when they had questions. Because there were more teens than computers, the teens were not allowed to stay on the computers for too long. In total, the session lasted about one hour.

#### *Staff and Teen Perspectives*

The staff at this location seemed comfortable to be interviewed by the AED researchers. They were relatively open about describing the needs of the teens who come to the Boys & Girls Clubs and about the local community.

When discussing the needs of the teens who come to the Clubs and the challenges they face implementing the program at this Club, the director described the economic situation in this town as bleak: “[There are] no opportunities for the kids—no sidewalks, no streetlights, [and there are] drugs and alcohol... the town is 98% white and small-minded.” One staff member said the local economy is the biggest challenge in implementing CareerLaunch in the Club. Another described the youth who come to the CareerLaunch program as mostly “low-income and don’t have the motivation.” Also, many of the teens are “raised by their grandparents because of absentee parents.”

As bleak as the local economic situation of the community was portrayed, the staff seemed impressed with the CareerLaunch program and believed that it had a positive effect on the participants.

*They are participating in other programs here and at school and their attitudes have been improving. Some are taking the lead here and when we designate activities some will step up and encourage members to come to the program.*

The biggest successes of the program so far have been the “application of lessons.” One staff member was pleasantly surprised to find the teens taking notes of the lessons and putting them in their pockets to take with them “just in case” for when they go on interviews.

Staff felt that CareerLaunch had really “built confidence in these kids” and led them to believe in themselves when they go out into the world of work. Staff reported that the teens were now changing their future plans because of CareerLaunch activities: “After a field trip to the local State college, they were amazed. Many are now applying to college.” Asked about best practices for other Clubs interested in implementing CareerLaunch, staff noted that they “must have a good facilitator. The person must have resume and interview skills... and have patience.” Overall, this Club seemed satisfied with the CareerLaunch curriculum and program and believed that it was having a positive impact on their members.

The teens who participated in the CareerLaunch program at this Club had a similar positive opinion of the program. When asked why they first came to the Club, the teens said they came mostly because their friends were here. They also came because of the staff. One teen said, “I started because I knew that [this facilitator] was going to be the leader.” This echoed the comments made by the staff members that for the program to be a success you must have a good facilitator. When asked how this program differed from school, one teen said the program is “more forgiving and more concerned about us than the school system.” They liked the casual atmosphere of the program: “We are free to talk as long as we are respectful.”

What was most important to the teens about CareerLaunch were the skills and knowledge they were learning during the program. The

most important was the overall confidence they gained and the feeling that it is possible to get a job:

*Now I know what type of job to look for and what things to say at a job interview.*

*I feel it will be much easier to find a job after school. It feels less complicated because I know what to do now.*

Hopefulness about the future was a new feeling for the teens after participating in CareerLaunch:

*I want to succeed in life ahead and I think CareerLaunch will make it easier.*

*Yes, I know a lot more about the talents I could have.*

*[CareerLaunch is] preparing me really well because before I didn't have the slightest idea and now I understand it.*

### Summary

Overall, our observation of this session and the Club as a whole went well. The staff was helpful and inviting to the Club visitors. The teens seemed a bit nervous at first by our presence: the facilitator mentioned the teens were not acting normally and seemed distracted, and he guessed it was because there were outsiders in the room.

In fact, it became clear that this Club was not used to evaluators. Some staff kept a close watch on us. It is unclear whether they were wary of our presence or if they were

just interested in what we were doing, but they did not leave the room when we were observing the session. We had informed all staff members about what we were doing and that information would be kept confidential (in fact, this Club was the first to have their active consent forms completed), but perhaps they were still a bit concerned and wanted to make sure they were present at all times. In addition, the area director asked if he could sit with the teens as they were being interviewed, but the AED principal investigator explained why that might not be appropriate, and the director gladly obliged. It was clear that it was important to him and the rest of the staff that the researchers came away with a positive impression.

#### *First Impressions of the Second Club*

After the hour-long visit at the first Club, the area director drove the AED team to the other Club, which was located in a more suburban area with a small-town atmosphere. The neighborhood was a mix of commercial and residential, with single-family homes dotting the side streets. It appeared much more populated than the area of the first Club, with people walking on the streets and more cars, although, as was the case in the previous Club, no public transportation was apparent.

In contrast to the first Club, this Club had a large, spacious, and well-kept campus. The campus consisted of a youth center and a teen center, connected by a quadrangle and outdoor recreation spaces. The director explained this was a newly built facility with money raised by the city. He further stated that the street where

the Club was located was blocked off to create a safe space for the teens to walk back and forth between the youth center and the teen center. We received a tour of both the youth center and the teen center, both of which were housed in large, bright buildings providing age-appropriate settings. Teens were playing table tennis and enjoying themselves in the large recreation room in the teen center when we arrived.

We were directed to the computer lab where the CareerLaunch session was to be held. The setting of the computer room was not as warm as other parts of the Club or the first Club's "classroom" where CareerLaunch sessions were held. Although there were inspirational posters on the walls with themes of character and leadership development, there were also many posters with rules and restrictions for Internet usage, and the color of the room was muted.

#### *CareerLaunch and Resume Fine-Tuning*

The two staff running the session included a white male and a Latina female, both in their mid-to late-twenties. The teens included two boys and four girls, four white, two black, and two Latino, and they were somewhat older than the teens in the first Club's Club. As the teens began entering the room for the session, each sat down at a computer and seemed to know what he or she was going to do for the day. The session was on writing a resume; the staff explained what certain areas of the resume meant and helped the participants with what they should write. The staff had already logged each teen onto the

CareerLaunch website so that they could get started when they were ready. At this session some of the technical issues with the website became apparent when some of the teens were prevented from filling out their resumes as they might have liked: for example, the website did not allow for concurrent jobs or positions.

Throughout the session, the staff communicated with the participants in a friendly way, helping them with bullet points to put on their resumes and joking around with them; the exchanges were pleasant and helpful to the teens. The participants worked quietly and were engaged in filling out their resumes for most of the session. They were also helpful and respectful to one another and had pleasant side conversations that remained on-topic for the most part. At the end of the hour-long session, the staff set up a schedule for mock interviews which were going to be held the next week. The teens whose parents had signed consent forms and the staff remained after the session to be interviewed.

#### *Staff and Area Director Perspectives*

According to interviews with the program staff, “participation” was the biggest challenge to implementing CareerLaunch at their Club. The program is “more educational than other, more ‘fun’ programs at the Club.” Another staff member said “they are busy all the time and the program needs structured timing and there are transportation issues. Older kids are often babysitting younger ones.” Also, “minimum wage is too high for employers to consider teen workers.” The staff described the teens that come to the CareerLaunch

program as “more motivated kids looking for jobs” and as “lower-end [income] kids who don’t normally have access to a computer or printer to build resumes.” The biggest need the teens bring to CareerLaunch is “to stay out of trouble.” The recommendation of best practices to other Clubs interested in implementing CareerLaunch would be to have incentives, particularly in the form of jobs, because they “lead to motivation” for the teens. “I’m seeing that more kids are motivated and more kids are coming to us saying, ‘Hey we want to get a job.’”

One staff person suggested that CareerLaunch would be stronger “if it would focus more on college instead of skipping that and going straight to the career.” Another noted that the Club is proactive about bringing in outside people to enhance the CareerLaunch program: “volunteers from the local State college come to the Boys & Girls Club here and share knowledge with the teens. The teens go on college tours and the unemployment office in town is a huge help.” After participating in the program, the teens “are now more open-minded and know that it’s possible to get a job.” Overall, the staff was satisfied with the CareerLaunch program and its curriculum and would recommend this to other Clubs.

The area director exuded a quiet passion and dedication to the teens and youth he served in this troubled area, and it was clear that he was eager to show off the fruits of his labor. We had opportunities to talk to him during the rides to and from the second Club, as well as in a subsequent telephone interview.

During the ride from the main Club to the first observation Club, he described the social and economic environment of the general area. The main administration building was in an area known as a “college town” because of the State University campus located there. However, he described the surrounding areas where many of the teens who come to the Club live as “not very progressive.” There was a good deal of racism in the community, he noted, but the Boys & Girls Club tried their hardest to break down stereotypes. He described the economic structure and the difficulty of finding a decent job in the area for residents with less education. Individuals who were fortunate to find work were often overqualified for their jobs: due to the economic situation, college graduates were settling for jobs that undergraduates would have taken in the past; they in turn were taking jobs usually held by high school graduates. He added that transportation was a major concern. Often, the Club staff used their vans to transport Club members from place to place.

In his view, the Boys & Girls Club needed to compensate for what the members lacked at home and in school. He described his charges as basically good kids who were future oriented but at the same time liked being kids. They were aware of the issues around them and had a healthy sense of self-esteem. That said, some of the youth were at risk of alcohol abuse, but at-risk youth who become members are “saved” by the Club. Most members had been with the Club for many years, and the mentoring component was critical.

Of CareerLaunch itself, while the Internet component was nice, it was nothing compared to having a teen in a room with his or her peers and watched over by a caring adult who cared.

In a subsequent telephone conversation, he spoke of the challenges in gathering community resources. Despite the poverty of the area, some solid community resources did exist: the local State University campus, elected and appointed officials, and local businesses. In fact, the director noted that there were some community resources and partnerships that could be of additional use, and the payoffs in cultivating them were immeasurable: his teens ““become even more inspired and excited about the work of work and learning during job shadowing activities, or visits to the local campus.”

#### *Teen Perspectives*

The teens at the second Club were very well behaved, perhaps because they were older and more serious about getting a job than at the first Club. But like the teens at the first Club, they also spoke positively about the CareerLaunch program. One of the teens spoke especially highly about the CareerLaunch program staff. “They are like friends and you can talk to them about anything, but you can also look up to them for advice.” The general feeling after observing the CareerLaunch session was the staff had set behavioral standards from the beginning of each teen’s time at the Boys & Girls Club, and the members were trying their hardest to live up to these standards due to their deep respect



and love for the staff. When asked if the staff treat them differently from other adults, one teen said, “Yes, but in a good way. They have higher expectations of us and know what we’re capable of. Other adults don’t, really.”

Talking about what they have learned since participating in the CareerLaunch program, the teens were very positive about the program and the staff:

*I’ve learned the ‘dos and don’ts’ of an interview; I’ve learned how to prepare for an interview and how to write a resume. I had never written a resume before.*

*I’ve learned what kind of jobs are good for me and match my personality.*

*I’ve learned more about the different kinds of jobs that are out there.*

*It’s helpful to know what your likes and dislikes about a job are and to know what kind of a job you would be good at.*

### Summary

Although both of the sites we visited were under the same umbrella Club, they seemed like two very different places. The first was much more rural, and the second, which was

only 16 miles away, had more of a small-town feel. The teens at the first Club were much less diverse than the teens at the second. The staff at the second Club were less suspicious of the research team.

Regarding the approach used, the setting in the second Club session was much more informal, and the teens were self-motivated in their work, whereas the session in the first Club was more of a classroom and teaching situation. Most likely, this was directly related to the fact that the teens at the first Club were much younger than the teens at the second, which shows that the sessions were tailored to the population of the teens they served.

But there were also important similarities. Both sites were trying very hard to fight forces in the community, not the least of which were the recent wildfires. The teens seemed to know that the Club was truly a safe place for them and that the staff cared about them. Starting from the area director on down, the leadership cared deeply about the teens and were passionate about their work, and these attitudes were embraced by everyone in the Clubs.

VI. Conclusion:  
**Careerlaunch's Role In Healthy  
Youth Development**

The goal in evaluating CareerLaunch was to find out if teens were experiencing a quality program. What constitutes a “quality program?” In the context of CareerLaunch, it is certainly greater skills and knowledge about finding a job, which are among the stated outcomes of CareerLaunch. However, a quality program demands more in terms of outcomes—and, for young people, a quality program is conducive to healthy youth development. Many young people, particularly in low-income communities, rely on youth development programs to help them make a safe, healthy transition to adulthood. Given the time and resources that have been devoted to CareerLaunch, it is clear that the developers and funders of this program want to know if their program truly impacted the teens.

### CareerLaunch and Youth Development

Through the conversations with teens and adults, and in the examination of the quantitative survey data, AED found that the youth-focused culture of the Boys & Girls Clubs (or the youth program in which a CareerLaunch program was being implemented) greatly facilitated the capacity of CareerLaunch to promote positive youth development (see Arbreton et al., 2009; Deutsch & Jones, 2008; Hirsch, 2005; and Rhodes, 2004). This begs the question, “What are the key elements of a program that can most effectively help a young person make that transition into adulthood, and how might CareerLaunch measure against them?” Eccles and Gootman (2002) provide a useful framework – consisting of eight core elements – through which the youth development-

promoting capacities of CareerLaunch can be assessed (see Table VI-1 for definitions of each element):

1. Physical and psychological safety
2. Appropriate structure
3. Supportive relationships
4. Opportunities to belong
5. Positive social norms
6. Support for efficacy and mattering
7. Opportunities for skill building
8. Integration of family, school, and community efforts

#### 1. Physical and psychological safety

In the Clubs we visited, we observed that most of the physical areas were bright and inviting and that all of the sites were safe for children and teens to walk through and play in.

Table VI-1: Core Elements of Youth Programs and Their Definitions

Element	Descriptors
1. Physical and Psychological Safety	Safe and health-promoting facilities; and practices that increase safe peer group interaction and decrease unsafe or confrontational peer interactions.
2. Appropriate Structure	Limit setting; clear and consistent rules and expectations; firm-enough control; continuity and predictability; clear boundaries; and age-appropriate monitoring.
3. Supportive Relationships	Warmth; closeness; connectedness; good communication; caring; support; guidance; secure attachment; and responsiveness.
4. Opportunities to Belong	Opportunities for meaningful inclusion, regardless of one's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disabilities; social inclusion, social engagement, and integration; opportunities for sociocultural identity formation; and support for cultural and bicultural competence.
5. Positive Social Norms	Rules of behavior; expectations; injunctions; ways of doing things; values and morals; and obligations for service.
6. Support for Efficacy and Mattering	Youth-based; empowerment practices that support autonomy; making a real difference in one's community; and being taken seriously. Practice that includes enabling, responsibility granting, and meaningful challenge. Practices that focus on improvement rather than on relative current performance levels.
7. Opportunities for Skill Building	Opportunities to learn physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social skills; exposure to intentional learning experiences; opportunities to learn cultural literacies, media literacy, communication skills, and good habits of mind; preparation for adult employment; and opportunities to develop social and cultural capital.
8. Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts	Concordance; coordination; and synergy among family, school, and community.

Source: Eccles & Gootman (2002), *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, pp. 90-91.

Moreover, the CareerLaunch sessions fostered a sense of psychological safety among the teens such that they could make mistakes and not be yelled at or made fun of by either the adults or their peers.

At one of the Clubs, we noted that in response to the pedagogical style of the facilitator and the generally “warm” atmosphere, the teenagers responded with engagement, respect, and amity. The group of five girls and two boys, ages 13 and 14, seemed to have great rapport with the session facilitator, who incorporated her personal experiences, which were similar to that of many of the youth who attend CareerLaunch, into the lessons. In return, the teenagers seemed to have had

fun during the session, learning together and teaching one another.

At another Club, when asked to describe the environment, a facilitator responded that “it’s a safe place.” Here, it was clear that the teens themselves were key in promoting and sustaining that environment. When a couple of members began to giggle at the response of another to a question posed by the facilitator during a CareerLaunch session, a teen boy quickly and firmly admonished them, “Don’t laugh!” One director who used CareerLaunch as a diversity-building tool took great pains to create a place where the her teens were safe to express their opinions without fear of reprisal or ridicule. At another Club, the director said, “These kids have to show a tough front outside of the Club. Here, they can let their hair down.” When asked to compare the

adults at his Club to his teachers at school, an older teen replied that it came down to respect: mainly, that the Club staff were respectful and teachers were not.

In general, the teens knew that even if they made a mistake, it won’t reflect poorly on them. As a matter of fact, in some cases, some of the teens seemed to be harder on themselves than the facilitator was. But overall, for both the teens and adults, making errors and learning how to accept and correct them outside of the Club environment (i.e., in the workplace) were part and parcel to the learning process. On the online survey, a teen wrote, “Even Presidents make mistakes in their lives. You just have to overcome them.”

## 2. Appropriate structure

It was clear that the facilitators had a firm control of the sessions at all times, or, when they did not, they were very quick to bring their teens back on point. Even during some of the more boisterous games that we saw as part of our site visits, there was still some semblance of order in the room. Directors and facilitators were intentional in setting this tone. When asked what advice he would give to a fellow Club director contemplating about implementing CareerLaunch, this director was blunt: “Make sure that you group the kids so that you don’t have a clown in the class that distracts what you are trying to accomplish.” The coupling of fun with discipline was never lost on the teens, who were more likely to speak to this aspect of CareerLaunch than the adults:

*Every adult in this club treats participants the same, fairly, but they discipline us when we need to be.*

*They know we are teenagers and that we are going to act out, but they also let us know when we need to be serious.*

The CareerLaunch activities that promoted interaction but also strong direction from the facilitator were key to fostering a sense of structure to the activities. This even applied to the resume building activities, where teens were allowed to work on their own at computers. In addition, even in cases where the facilitators needed to deviate in order to tailor the activities to the age group present, typically in the case of young teens, the sense of order remained and served as a common bond.

### **3. Supportive relationships**

The supportive relationships in CareerLaunch derived from the overall Boys and Girls Clubs culture and practice of mentoring. CareerLaunch was described on the website as a “mentoring” program, but based on our interviews with adults and teens, it was clear that in most cases the supportive mentoring relationships both shaped CareerLaunch and resulted from CareerLaunch.

One director described his approach this way:

*These kids need lots of mentoring. Boys really need male role models and father figures. Kids need someone to show them the way and advocate for them, and say, ‘I’ll do it for*

*you.’ They need structure and discipline, too.*

A teen boy from this director’s Club described his entry into CareerLaunch in this way:

*[The Club director] was my mentor and use to tell me about the program. One day I heard and saw him in action [in a CareerLaunch class],and thought it was amazing. An opportunity to get a job now and prepare yourself for the future and have fun? I mean, come on!*

At this particular Club, when the teens were asked to name three adults to turn for advice when it came to their futures, every teen selected “An adult at Boys & Girls Club” on both the pre-and post-surveys. In addition, we observed that this director knew the name of every child and teen who walked through the door; this was no small feat as this Club served hundreds of members. But, regardless of the size of the Club, knowing all of the members by name was rule rather than the exception..

A director spoke of another kind of mentoring relationship that grew indirectly out of a young teen’s participation with CareerLaunch:

*We have a young boy that moved here from North Carolina and he has friends here, but he jumps around from group to group. He’s only 13 years old and he did amazingly well in the [mock] interview and we gave out prizes for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place and he won 3rd place. He really opened up and told me a lot of things that he never told other staff, and he felt comfortable enough to open up*

*to other kids in the class. This had nothing really do with CareerLaunch activities or the materials directly, but more indirectly.*

This director went on to say that CareerLaunch strengthened her relationships with her teens: “I really got to know them better than before. We got more time to get to know the kids because we spend so much time together.” At one site, we observed how close the teens were to one another and to their facilitator; the teens asked questions without hesitation, and when there was agreement among the participants the facilitator used a “high five” to validate their consensus. At every site we visited, we saw even more evidence of the strong relationships between the teens in CareerLaunch and the staff. We also noticed that although many staff members were close in age to the teens, the adult-child relationship was maintained. According to one teen, “They are like friends and you can talk to them about anything but you can also look up to them for advice.”

One director provided the most compelling evidence of how relationships with staff can affect participation in CareerLaunch:

*The former youth director here brought in more troubled and at-risk youth because he had a great rapport with that population. They also went through CareerLaunch without a hitch, because they connected with that staff member and felt no different when they were in our building.*

#### **4. Opportunities to belong**

As we observed the sessions, it was clear that the teens seemed to get along well with each other. We had assumed that it was because the teens had known each other for some time (having been Club members since childhood), but two instances proved otherwise. The first, described earlier in the case studies, was a visit to one site in which CareerLaunch had been in session for two weeks. About 45 minutes into the session, a group of teens recruited for CareerLaunch through the Gang Prevention Grant joined the group. They sat outside the circle of participants. Almost immediately, the director said, “We have some new people here. Let’s do one of our ice breakers so that we can know each other’s names.” It did not take long for the new participants to feel welcome and included.

The second was a conversation with a director of a Club we did not visit, who said she intentionally used CareerLaunch to foster unity in diversity in her Club. She said of her teens: “They learned a lot about job applications, etc., but the main benefit was unity of the teen group: to work as a team, to accomplish their goals, to help each other.” Thus, while it is true that many of the members had “grown up” together, so to speak, Clubs were strategic in using CareerLaunch activities to create and sustain a welcoming environment.

*I like the fact that the program is done with*

*a group of kids that I know and not with strangers. It's easier to speak in front of other kids I know.*

*I like that my friends and me take this class together.*

*I like that we get to hear other teens' thoughts and opinions. And we get to learn about what they want to do with their lives.*

*They [the facilitators] encourage us to help each other so that we don't we don't have problems.*

*I mean, we joke on each other but it's all love. We are like family. We are around each other longer than we are around our real families. We have the older more mature guys but then we have the youngest annoying guy but everyone still loves him*

*I like that we get to hear other teens' thoughts and opinions. And we get to learn about what they want to do with their lives.*

## 5. Positive social norms

In the interviews, we asked the teens whether there were any rules in CareerLaunch. We wanted to know if the facilitators set any standards of behavior for the teens, and how the teens responded. We learned (and observed) that there were indeed rules, and that the teens had no problems with them:

*They are pretty basic rules—don't talk when someone else is talking—don't make fun of*

*someone if they make a mistake.*

*They are good rules. You can't have a bunch of kids and not have rules. You can't have craziness.*

*We have to respect each other, listen, participate, listen to others' ideas—the general rule of etiquette.*

As shown by the last quote, what underscored all of the rules was “respect”:

*We have to respect one another. We don't interrupt each other. We don't make fun of anybody.*

*I think they are good rules because it helps us become better people in life. We need to respect each other.*

*We are free to talk as long as we are respectful.*

## 6. Support for efficacy and mattering

Part to the future-orientation focus of CareerLaunch is that teens know they can play a part in something that is beyond themselves. The process of building the kinds of skills that will allow them to be self-sufficient, and knowing that they can perform those skills—particularly through mock interviewing and taking the first steps towards getting a job—plays an important role. “I can do this” is something that we heard repeatedly from the teens, and with this confidence, combined with a greater awareness of their own personal



assets, comes a sense of efficacy. They know that they can do something that produces results, and that they have the ability to shape their futures. Even if not stated in the Quick Reference Guide, the sense of efficacy is an implicit outcome of the program because all of the activities are designed to cultivate and nurture this in the participants. With efficacy comes the sense that teens matter in the world:

*[CareerLaunch] reminds me that my future is and will always be in my hands. Even though I'm still a kid, life comes fast. CareerLaunch teaches us that Even though we are kids, we should always have the future in mind. Other programs don't do that... Everyone is born with the ability to learn, but society messes people up. CareerLaunch motivates and teaches and equalizes.*

*I will become what I want to become. I know how to carry myself in the world.*

## 7. Opportunities for skill building

As this is the raison d'être of CareerLaunch, it is clear from previous discussions that the program builds the skills of participants. At minimum, participants learn job seeking skills. According to one staff interview:

*They now know what a resume is. They learned what to do at a job interview and that they should make eye contact. They learned how to look for a job. It's rewarding to see teens learn about stuff that they will do in the future. It's empowering to*

*see them grow.*

## 8. Integration of family, school, and community efforts

Integrating family and outside efforts is an area that some CareerLaunch directors felt could become stronger, particularly with respect to linkages with schools and communities.

*We have to do a better job at bringing in more local businesses and community entities to expose our kids to the variety of careers that are out there. Our kids get an opportunity to do job shadowing once a year and they love it. They come back so excited. We have to get better at community linkages.*

*We could have used some more community programs and new people, who might have come with greater resources.*

Other Clubs that benefitted from strong community and school partnerships felt that those partnerships were invaluable to CareerLaunch (and, ultimately, to the teens). There was no one systematic way in which all Clubs cultivated partnerships, but examples included bringing in important people for mock interviews; working with local businesses to recruit volunteers; and bringing in speakers. Overall, however, the integration of family, school, and community efforts took place through the Clubs as a whole rather than as part of CareerLaunch in particular.

### CareerLaunch and Transitions to Adulthood

AED approached the evaluation of CareerLaunch from a youth development perspective because it was consistent with the vision of BGCA, particularly in light of its ongoing efforts to broaden and deepen its teen programming. In addition, data from BGCA on the Clubs that implemented an early version of CareerLaunch showed that 70% of the Clubs with CareerLaunch also had teens in Power Hour, Smart Moves, Smart Girls, Youth Unity, Daily Challenges, and Healthy Habits: programs that were less focused on skill development and more focused on developing as a healthy and engaged adult.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of the evaluation, BGCA was in its first year of a five-year strategic plan entitled Impact 2012. This initiative was strengthen BGCA's advocacy and programming surrounding three key outcome areas for children and youth to move towards healthy and productive adulthood: academic success, good character and citizenship, and healthy lifestyles.

When asked on the online surveys about the extent to which they felt that CareerLaunch could affect the Impact 2012 outcome areas, staff felt that CareerLaunch could have an impact (Table VI-2):

<sup>1</sup> These data were part of an excel spreadsheet provided to AED in November 2010, that contained data on the CareerLaunch pilot Clubs' teen programming portfolio.

**Table VI-1: CareerLaunch and Impact 2012 – Staff Perceptions**

Impact 2012 aims to improve the lives of children and teens in three areas: (1) academic success, (2) good character and citizenship, and (3) healthy lifestyles.				
To what extent do you think that a program such as CareerLaunch might impact on these areas?				
	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	To a minimal extent	To no extent at all
Academic Success	66.7%	25.0%	8.3%	0.0%
Good character and citizenship	62.5%	33.3%	4.2%	0.0%
Healthy Lifestyles	45.8%	33.3%	20.8%	0.0%

Given the skills and competencies that the staff tried to foster in their teens through CareerLaunch, the synergies with other teen programming (intentional or not), and the ways in which staff interacted with the members on a day-to-day basis, these findings were not surprising. CareerLaunch reminded teens that academic success was critical to career success. In learning how to negotiate an interview, treat potential employers, and behave on the job, teens were learning good character, and, more importantly, maturity. The connection to healthy lifestyles was weaker, but the lessons on good grooming and appearances, as well as the linkages with teen programs that did emphasize healthy lifestyles (such as SMART Moves), made CareerLaunch a vehicle for outcomes in that area as well.

These skills and competencies can be mapped against what research has shown as those positive assets that young people need to

transition into adulthood. In the last several decades, there have been many attempts to boil down a wide variety of assets to a few common indicators (for a good synthesis of these efforts, see Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Chapter 3). A very useful framework was developed in 2004 by the Social Development Research Group and Search Institute for the Gates Foundation entitled, “Dimensions and Indicators of Young Adult Success,” which contains 50 indicators grouped into 8 domains (Table VI-3 contains both the domains and the indicators):

1. Physical health
2. Psychological and emotional well-being
3. Life skills
4. Ethical behavior
5. Healthy family and social relationships
6. Educational attainment
7. Constructive engagement
8. Civic engagement

**Table VI-3: Dimensions and Indicators of Young Adult Success**

Element	Descriptors
1. Physical health	Good nutrition, regular exercise, no substance abuse or dependence, safe sexual behavior, avoiding violence, no drinking and driving
2. Psychological and emotional well-being	Positive self identity, life satisfaction, positive outlook, sense of purpose, pro-social orientation
3. Life skills	Decision-making, emotional self regulation, interpersonal skills, self-efficacy, financial responsibility

Element	Descriptors
<b>4. Ethical behavior</b>	Telling the truth, keeping promises, avoiding crime, obeying the law, calling in sick only when really sick, demonstrating care and concern for others, taking responsibility for oneself
<b>5. Healthy family and social relationships</b>	Bonding and frequent interactions with a parent, an intimate partner, and with peer(s); involvement in groups such as community sports teams, church groups, music groups, dance classes
<b>6. Educational attainment</b>	High-school completion, completion of post-secondary degree or occupational certification
<b>7. Constructive engagement</b>	Over 35 hours per week in school, employment, or homemaking
<b>8. Civic engagement</b>	Volunteer work, political participation, charitable giving

Source: Eccles & Gootman (2002), *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, pp. 90-91.

As we have shown, CareerLaunch was instrumental in fostering an environment that helped teens cultivate these assets. However, more research is needed to estimate the relationship between participation in CareerLaunch and the development of the assets that define healthy and productive adulthood, and to isolate the mediating variables that shape this relationship. We

expect and hope that additional research can answer the following two questions:

- 1. What are the longer-term impacts of CareerLaunch? Do the teens retain what they've learned?*
- 2. How do teens that participate in CareerLaunch fare against those who do not, with respect to educational attainment and employment?*

### The Last Word

A teen in one of the Clubs we visited told us that CareerLaunch helped him develop a healthy and realistic sense of self. CareerLaunch taught him general social skills, which he knew were crucial for general success. “It teaches me how to deal with people in general; how to think about make decisions in everyday life.” In his opinion, the most important skill he learned was teamwork: “I used to want to do everything by myself. CareerLaunch taught me healthy dependency.” He explained how a solid grounding in this one skill would ultimately help him achieve his dreams:

*I plan to use teamwork a lot. I like working in teams but I'm not as good as I would like to be. I know team work is good because*

*it allows everyone to cover each others' strengths and weaknesses. I want to be an entrepreneur and I realize that I am going to need that skill. I want a tech company and I want to do entertainment. And then before I die I want to buy Disney.*

When asked about that last goal, he paraphrased Walt Disney: “*It's kind of fun to do the impossible.*”



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# Technical Appendix



This section contains a fuller description of the evaluation, its data sources, and the research methodology.

### *Background*

The evaluation was designed to provide Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) with a holistic picture of the effectiveness of CareerLaunch in increasing job readiness for young people. It combined quantitative and qualitative methods drawing on multiple data sources: youth pre- and post-survey data; pre- and post-surveys of CareerLaunch staff and volunteers; interviews with selected CareerLaunch staff, members, and volunteers, as well as with selected Gap Foundation and BGCA staff; in-person observations of sessions; and document review. Most importantly, it addressed the major research questions posed by BGCA in their Request for Proposals (RFP):

- Does participation in CareerLaunch produce attitude and/or behavior change in participants? What factors contribute to such changes?
- Does participation in CareerLaunch produce knowledge gains in BCGA participants? What factors contribute to such gains?
- Considering the vast differences in BCGA Clubs, what best practices can be shared with Clubs in various settings?

- Given the multiple entities involved in the implementation of CareerLaunch --including BGCA, Gap Foundation, volunteers, Club staff and Club members -- what impact does this collaborative have on the program delivered to Club members?<sup>1</sup>

### *Site Selection*

BGCA was responsible for the selection of the Clubs (or sites) to participate in the evaluation, which varied by the number of years implementing CareerLaunch: some had been using the program for several years, while others were using it for the first time. There was also an effort to mix Clubs by geography (i.e., rural, urban), size, and type (traditional, traditional/school, military). In the late spring of 2008, BGCA negotiated Letters of Agreement (LOA) with 20 Clubs that would receive \$6,000 in funding for CareerLaunch in exchange for participating in the evaluation.

Once the sites were selected and the CareerLaunch sessions commenced, all of the teen members were given an active parental consent form for their parents or guardians

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<sup>1</sup> The original wording of this item was as follows: “There are multiple entities involved in the implementation of CareerLaunch, including BGCA, Gap Foundation, volunteers, BCGA staff and members. What impact does this collaborative effort have on the program delivered to Club members and how can it improve?”

to read and sign. The forms explained the evaluation and the surveys, and noted the possibility that AED would visit their child's site and interview their child. The forms were sent to all sites prior to the selection of the intensive study sites.

In July 2008, five sites were selected by AED to serve as intensive study sites. Selection was based on several criteria: geographic and socio-economic diversity; responsiveness to the online pre-survey (sites with excellent response rates were eligible to be selected); and any pre-survey response patterns that made the site worthy of study. In one site, teen pregnancy was noted as the top reason why teens do not succeed in school; this site had one of the highest rates of births to teens of the 20 sites. At another site, every teen who completed the survey selected "An adult at Boys & Girls Club" as one of the people to whom s/he looked for advice about the future. At yet another site, the teen population was very young and very pessimistic about the future. AED believed that taking these criteria into account would make for a richer and more nuanced report, because these sites would present CareerLaunch implementation in a variety of environments.

#### *Data Sources*

AED collected data from a variety of sources using a variety of tools. Where possible, we used existing measures to minimize costs and to increase the reliability and validity of the measures. The data collection instruments contained a combination of established measures accepted in the fields of youth

development and labor-force-attachment research (or items within established measures), and customized measures to meet the specific needs of BGCA will be recommended. All measures were reviewed with BGCA staff during the design period of the evaluation.

#### **The data sources included:**

##### **Youth participant baseline/follow-up online surveys:**

To obtain in-depth data on individual youth outcomes, AED conducted two online surveys of participants—a baseline and follow-up survey. The surveys explored the extent of participation in the program, knowledge of the program, knowledge of how to find and keep a job, and any steps youth have taken towards finding a job. Surveys also captured educational attainment, career and educational aspirations, and attitudes toward work and school. Embedded in the surveys was the CareerLaunch Career Assessment Questionnaire, which measured knowledge about the job seeking process. The teen data from the pre-and post-surveys were linked by the Club user name. Overall, the surveys captured responses from 300 teens, broken down in this way:<sup>2</sup> pre- and post-survey: 170; pre-survey only: 108; and post-survey only: 22.

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<sup>2</sup> In three sites, the facilitators erroneously instructed the teens to complete the pre-survey twice instead of filling out a pre-and a post-survey. Any teens that appeared twice on the pre-survey file were assessed; most of them were able to be linked and are counted among the pre-and post-survey group. For the analyses, this was not a "fatal" error because many of the questions on both surveys were identical. In many cases, AED staff conducted manual checks and matches of the data in the file cleaning efforts

The survey data file was linked to a file containing demographics characteristics of the city or county. For all of the demographic items, there were no statistically significant differences between the teens at the pre-and post-survey points.

#### **Staff/volunteer baseline/follow-up online surveys.**

These surveys coincided with the online surveys for the youth participants, above. The surveys for staff captured activities they have conducted, how they work with program participants, knowledge of program components and objectives, level of training, the successes and challenges of implementing CareerLaunch, and their opinions about the effectiveness of program components. There were separate questions for volunteers; however, no volunteer worked with CareerLaunch at any of the evaluation sites. Between the pre-and post-surveys, responses were obtained from 36 individuals from all 20 sites: 15 pre-survey only, 7 post-survey only, 14 pre-and-post survey.

#### **Club leadership online survey.**

The Club leadership survey was conducted at the onset of the evaluation, and was designed to capture an overall view of the environment in which CareerLaunch operated within the participating Clubs. Fourteen Club leaders responded; the reason why the number was lower than expected was because some of the leaders completed the staff survey (above) in error; however, the in-person/telephone interview (below) filled in any blanks.

#### **Observations (onsite).**

AED conducted one observation of CareerLaunch sessions in the five intensive study sites, using a standard observational protocol. The protocol captured the impressions of the surrounding area, the staff, the members, the session taught, and the extent to which healthy youth development was evident.

#### **Document review.**

AED's evaluation conducted a review of materials and literature related to the CareerLaunch, including past evaluations, information on staff and volunteer recruitment, and training materials.

#### **Staff/ local BGCA Club director interviews.**

In the intensive study sites, AED staff interviewed CareerLaunch facilitators, as well as the individuals in director positions (i.e., teen, area, CPO) with direct responsibility for CareerLaunch. AED conducted additional telephone interviews with those directors who were not in the intensive study sites. The interview questions for the directors focused on planning and managing the program, recruiting staff and volunteers, as well as on the factors that facilitate or hinder implementation of the program in their sites. They were also given the opportunity to reflect on how the program affected the teens they served. The questions for the facilitators focused on the benefits and challenges of running CareerLaunch, their reflections on the teens they served, and how they viewed CareerLaunch itself.

**Member interviews.**

In the intensive study sites, AED conducted interviews with teens selected by BGCA staff. Prior to the interview, the selected teens submitted a signed active parental consent form, which granted AED permission to interview them. Teens were asked about their opinions about CareerLaunch, what they learned, their opinions about the staff and their peers, and recommendations for improvement.

**BCGA and sponsor/partner interviews.**

AED conducted telephone interviews with national BGCA staff responsible for the overall direction and oversight for the program and

with a senior-level representative from Gap Foundation. Interview data provided insights into sustainability from the perspective of external support, institutional support from a financial and political perspective, staffing configuration, collaboration across institutions to implement the program, and long-term ownership of the work by BGCA and its sponsors.

**Public use data.**

AED pulled public use data from the world-wide web for socio-economic information about the 20 evaluation sites and the nation as a whole.

*The sources were:*

Data	Source
<b>Poverty</b>	US Census, Small Area Poverty Estimates (2005) <a href="http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/saipe/saipe.html">http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/saipe/saipe.html</a>
<b>Unemployment</b>	US Department of Labor, Local Area Estimates (2007) <a href="http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/dsrv?la">http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/dsrv?la</a>
<b>Percent 25 or older with at least a high school diploma</b>	US Census, State and County Quickfacts (2000) <a href="http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/">http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/</a>

## Quantitative Analyses of the Surveys

The majority of the quantitative analysis efforts focused on the member surveys, due to the larger sample size. Where appropriate, tests for statistical significance between the pre-and-post surveys or for other variable (for example, gender) were confined to these surveys. Due to the small respondent pool for the staff and leader surveys, the analyses centered around frequencies only, with no tests for statistical significance for any outcome of interest.

The focus of the quantitative analysis was to measure behavioral and knowledge changes in teens as a result of participating in CareerLaunch. By adding additional factors, such as relevant demographics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, area unemployment), we were able to estimate the impact of these factors on the outcome of interest as well as look at interactions of interest.

The primary statistical tests for significance included two-tailed t-tests based on independent samples of means or paired samples, and chi-square tests. Other analyses included Pearson bivariate correlations, particularly to determine which teen or environment characteristic had the greatest impact on attitudes or knowledge. All of the analyses were conducted in SPSS 13.0.

*Response bias analyses:* To determine if there were any differences between the teens who completed both the pre and post surveys and those who completed only the pre-survey, a series of tests for response bias were conducted. If any serious bias was found, then all of the teens who completed only a pre-survey would have been eliminated from the analysis entirely. (Due to the small respondent count – 22 – no such tests were conducted for the teens that completed the post-survey only.) Through a series of two-tailed t-tests of independent means on selected survey questions, we found that the only bias that existed was in the fact that the pre-only group seemed to believe that they knew more about the job search process than those who completed both the pre- and post-surveys. However, the extent of the bias hovered at statistical significance ( $p = .049$ ); thus, the decision was made to keep them for analyses of those survey items that pertained to the pre-survey only. Analyses of pre-to-post changes were conducted only with the 170 respondents who completed both surveys.

## Qualitative Analysis

The focus of the qualitative analysis is to determine what constitutes “best practices” in each evaluation site, with lessons for program sustainability and replication. The qualitative data gathered from interviews, document reviews, and observations were organized by emerging themes: in this case,

locale, age of the teen population, extent of teen programming, and Club leadership. The qualitative analyses also informed our understanding of how CareerLaunch affected teens, and offered evidence of CareerLaunch as a solid youth development program. In all, the qualitative analyses deepened our understanding of the possible causes or explanations for changes in Club members' attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge. We triangulated the findings of the qualitative and quantitative analyses, looking for explanatory relationships.

### Data Confidentiality

Before commencing study activities, the study protocols were reviewed by AED's Research Integrity Officer, who is responsible for AED's internal Institutional Review Board, which is responsible for ensuring that all research conducted by AED staff follow the appropriate human subjects protection requirements. In addition, AED worked with BGCA to ensure that any files produced for the evaluation were stripped of identifiers. Electronic interview notes were kept on a password-protected drive.



