

HOPE BLOOMS

EVALUATION REPORT YEAR 1

Written by the Students Commission of Canada

Project Description

Hope Blooms aims to improve relationships within and between cultural communities in marginalized Nova Scotian neighborhoods, including those located in Northern Halifax where Hope Blooms resides. With the help of the Catapult Leadership Society, they run an at-home agriculture program called SEEd where kits containing various agricultural and cultural tools are sent to families.

Hope Blooms ultimately wishes to encourage youth in marginalized Nova Scotian communities to become agents of change that target food insecurity, lack of education, social and cultural exclusion, and the cycle of poverty.

Methodology

Hope Blooms has collaborated with the Students Commission of Canada (SCC) through their Sharing the Stories (StS) program, which offers customizable evaluation for non-profits serving youth. Together, they are working to ensure that Hope Blooms continues to support BIPOC youth in Nova Scotian low-income communities, including that located in Northern Halifax. The purpose of this report was to evaluate the impact of programming on the lives of youth participants. For this evaluation, Hope Blooms used both quantitative tools (surveys) and qualitative tools (staff focus group) to evaluate the impact of programming.

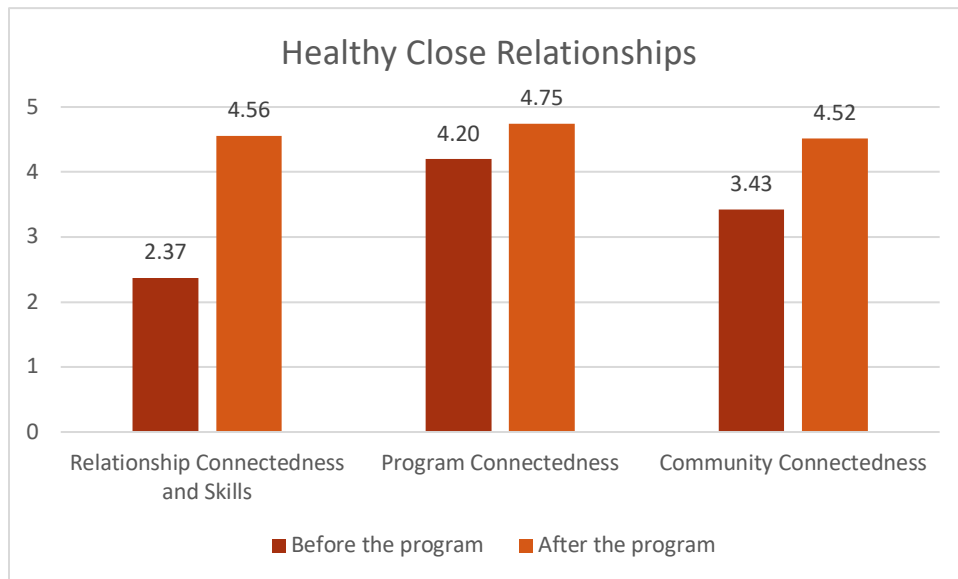
The quantitative results showed that youth felt a greater sense of belonging and community following being enrolled in the program versus before enrolment.

The qualitative results showed that youth were provided with culturally and professionally relevant tools and teachings, as well as valuable connections to others within and outside of their culture.

Overall, the program succeeded in giving marginalized Nova Scotian communities the tools they need via their youth to improve cultural relationships and begin the process of creating agents of positive change in the community.

Healthy Close Relationships

The *Healthy Close Relationships* tool examines youth's general level of social ability and connectedness. Participants respond to a series of questions concerning their social ability and connectedness on a five-point scale (ranging from 1 = Not at all to 5 = Completely). It also examines the extent to which youth feel connected in different ways to individuals in the program and the community as a whole on a five-point scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). Because this was a post-retrospective survey, participants were asked to reflect on how they felt before versus after the program. The following graph illustrates the average scores for youth who participated in the program (n = 15).



Takeaways for Healthy Close Relationships

- The results show that participants felt that they had a noticeably greater level of social ability and sense of belonging following the program versus before the program. Not only did participants feel more supported by, comfortable expressing their opinions with, and connected to their peers, they also became more aware of the prejudices surrounding them (with this difference before versus after the program being the largest). Given that Hope Blooms wishes to create agents of change, recognizing prejudice is important.
- Participants felt highly connected to the individuals involved in the Hope Blooms program both before and after the program, suggesting that they felt immediately welcomed into the program and supported by its staff and members.
- Importantly, participants felt a greater sense of community following the program versus before the program. They felt safer, happier, more connected, and more appreciated by their community after being enrolled in the program, suggesting that they had a more positive outlook on their community overall.

Staff Focus Group

Hope Blooms held a focus group with a program lead in order to gain insight on their experiences and the impact of programming on participants. The following qualitative analysis illustrates the key themes which arose, the number of times each theme was mentioned, and quotes taken from the staff member. Although this report focuses on the at-home SEEd program, the lead discussed their experiences with Hope Bloom's in-person programs as well, since the transition back to in-person occurred during this time.

Connection to Community (7)

The lead emphasized the various cultural tools and teachings that the Hope Blooms programs provided to youth in order to strengthen their sense of community and their connection to their own and to others' cultures:

So basically, the SEEd Program is like a combination of all the little components of Hope Blooms. ... So that includes culinary arts, ... [and] culturally relevant arts, like African textiles, or Syrian food, or just like little things that kind of belong to getting the community to like their cultures.

It's for BIPOC. ... So having a space where these kids see a lot of faces and other kids that look similar to them. It's very important, especially because they are a minority in their schools here in Halifax.

We are approaching what they see at home, like we're cooking the food that their moms are, creating art that they might have on their walls. They feel seen, they feel a sense of belonging with it.

New Skills and Knowledge (7)

The lead described a variety of different new, useful, and transferable skills and knowledge that the youth gained as a result of the program:

They are learning a lot about nutrition, and they are learning a lot about growing food.

They are learning about climate resiliency without knowing they're learning about climate resiliency, because they are learning about composting, they are doing seed libraries after their harvest this time is on. So, they are learning all these things without really putting a name on it. But these things are necessary for us to fight climate change.

There was a lot of ... intergenerational learning and knowledge sharing.

Academic and Professional Opportunities (7)

The lead spoke on the various academic and professional opportunities that the Hope Blooms program provides to these disadvantaged youth, given one of the premises of their program is entrepreneurship:

We went to Dragon's Den, and nine years ago, we won \$40,000 for the greenhouse. So we'd show the little ones the Dragon's Den pitch, and they all have to make little groups. And they have to create a Dragon's Den pitch and sell a product. And after they sell the product, we give them money, they buy the things, they make it, and then we have a market. That happened with the SEEd program this year.



100% of the Hope Blooms kids have graduated high school and gone to university. And most of them, probably like 80% of them or more, are the first in their family to even graduate high school because of their families having been traumatized for so long.

Personal Growth (6)

The lead described the many ways in which youth were encouraged and inspired to grow:

Honestly, I never seen kids so responsible in my life. ... They see Hope Blooms as their job, and they take it so seriously. ... [If they] have an event that is at 8am, which happened this weekend, they will be there so early.

This is so, so far beyond what the curriculum is actually. ... Their life experience and their sense of responsibility and empowerment. They feel like they can do it. And they're confident that they can do it because we give them the space to do it.

Positive Program Experiences and Qualities (6)

The lead spoke on the various positive aspects of the program, which stands out because it is lead by the older youth participants themselves. This includes its engaging and accessible nature:

The SEEd program was our first program that allowed us to go all over Nova Scotia because we could do it virtually and in-person.

The most important part [was that] they kept coming back every week, virtually and in-person. And I feel like that's the easiest way to measure success. In the summer, they don't have to be there. They could be anywhere else. And they were always there.

I think that's what makes it so successful, that kids don't get bored. They respect the 15-year-olds a lot, because they are cool. Sometimes it's different when you have a facilitator that can connect with the kids.

Social Skills and Knowledge (3)

The lead summarized how the youth gained valuable social skills and knowledge as a result of their enrolment in the program:

It's of course not perfect because it's made by kids. But I think there is some kind of perfection in that. I really love how mistakes are not mistakes. They're just opportunities for more learning.



Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, Hope Blooms has had a positive impact on the lives of youth by providing them with the tools that they need to engage in a variety of sustainable, culturally relevant, and entrepreneurial ventures, including growing their own food at home.

The report overall showed that participants' sense of culture and belonging was greatly improved as a result of the program. The program emphasizes having youth lead other youth from similar backgrounds. It also emphasizes introducing culturally relevant and sustainable activities to their curricula.

The quantitative results showed that participants felt more connected to their peers and to their community following enrolment in the program.

The qualitative results showed that youth gained culturally and professionally significant resources and knowledge, as well as a sense of purpose through their commitment to the program.

Throughout this report, it is evident that Hope Blooms succeeded in beginning the process of creating positive agents of change for disadvantaged Nova Scotian communities. Youth voice gathered in this baseline report can help to better understand the reality of these youth, the impact of such a program, and can help to develop and improve similar programs that are beneficial for youth. Our recommendation is to discuss the present results with youth in the community to see if this data portrays what they are experiencing.

