

Agents of Change Impact Report



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Agents of Change 2012 Report of Participant Interviews

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Introduction

Agents of Change (AOC) is an educational program which equips youth with tools to change the world. Participants are guided through the curriculum which helps them discover techniques for more effective problem-solving and critical thinking. It is designed to develop these skills through “thought-provoking dialogue” and aims to increase “their capacity for in-depth synthesis”. The curriculum promotes fun learning about leadership, social entrepreneurship, innovation and business. Since its inception in 2012, AOC has reached 38 students, 34 educators and worked with 5 camp counselors. The AOC vacation camp targets young people between ages 15-20.

The AOC 2012 camp was held from 23 July to 3 August at Bishop’s Centenary College, Port of Spain. Nineteen (19) young men between ages 15-19, 4 facilitators met for 10 days for the pilot. With the support from kind sponsors, the contribution for the camp, which included facilitation, materials and food, was TT\$1000.

Executive Summary

The AOC 2012 campers were pleased with their experience. Systems thinking tutelage, life-changing stories shared and the supportive environment led to personal development which motivates them to help others. The camp was well-organized and surpassed what it aimed to achieve so the recommendations are few.

Methodology

Impact evaluation is important to determine the effectiveness of the camp and to extract lessons for improvement and future development. Interviews guided by the questionnaire provided in Appendix I were conducted. AOC 2012 campers were contacted via email, telephone and social media. Interviews were conducted on the telephone, face-to-face and via social media messaging. Contact information was received for 15 participants and 9 were successfully contacted and interviewed. Each interview lasted approximately 10 minutes and most were conducted during the afternoon or evening on a weekend.

Findings

All of the respondents liked their AOC 2012 camp experience. A couple were initially concerned about its ability to capture their interest but were relieved that it was exciting and it exposed them to new concepts through fun learning. Some felt that the camp helped them to have a more positive outlook; to examine problems and challenges more critically; to analyse received information and to develop interpersonal relation skills.

They generally enjoyed learning about Systems Thinking. One respondent enthusiastically launched into an explanation of the Iceberg model. Four respondents said that they continue to use what they learnt from causal loops, mental models, the Iceberg model or Systems Thinking in general. It must be noted that all were delighted to learn through play in groups and appreciated being given freedom. The majority of respondents could not identify any challenges, however, two of them mentioned that completing the final assignment and presenting it proved troublesome. One respondent mentioned that identifying 'underlying structures' was difficult.

All respondents said that the camp had a positive impact on them. They are generally more optimistic and now examine problems critically. Some said that they now manage their time better; they respect people's views more and this has improved communication with others and helped them to approach problems differently. A few mentioned that one of the facilitator's life story had a positive impact on their own lives; it encouraged them to focus on academics (See Appendix II). One respondent said that he could not identify any major, personal change.

Many of the respondents said that the camp inspired and equipped them to assist classmates and friends in their respective communities. They share what they learnt; they tutor and assist others with studies. Two respondents mentioned that it has been difficult relating to their peers because of their classmates' negativity and different approach in overcoming challenges. One respondent said that there was no change in how he interacted with classmates and other peers.

The respondents felt that the camp was well-organised and that the facilitators should continue doing the good work. One respondent felt that the camp should be extended to 3 weeks while another felt that, at times, the facilitators could have been more tolerant. The latter respondent felt that since adolescents are not always keen on playing games that seem childish, there should be more patience in trying to engage them. One respondent felt that if funding is available, a few Agents of Change camps should be held throughout Trinidad with the assistance of trained facilitators; he felt that this could foster change among and inspire young people. Two respondents thought that there should be greater gender balance i.e. include young ladies.

All the respondents were inspired to share what they had learnt about Systems Thinking with others. Most of them are now more encouraged to work harder at school and two even mentioned that they have gotten better grades because of this. Some of them continue to share ad-

vice with others in their community. One respondent lamented that even though he would like to share information and advice with others in his community, the crime situation makes him cautious of interacting with them.

Conclusion

The respondents were all pleased to have participated in the AOC 2012 camp and extended congratulations to the team for not only organising it well but also creating a space in which they were respected and allowed certain liberties. They seemed excited about Systems Thinking and how its application can help them to address personal and general problems. Few mentioned their preference for the inclusion of girls. Most have used the knowledge for self-improvement and to assist others in personal development. They have all been motivated to become more focused on academics for further advancement. Additionally, they have been inspired to help schoolmates and peers within their communities.

Recommendations

Impact evaluation for AOC should be done within 8-10 weeks following the sessions, giving campers sufficient time to reflect, to remember the experience and to see personal changes which resulted from it. This also makes it easier to contact the students for interviews since it will not coincide with the beginning of school term. Since these interviews were conducted on year after the camp, there was some difficulty in contacting the campers; some cell phones were numbers were re-assigned and some were not functional. Feedback from each group of campers will inform how the questionnaire is adjusted to maximize use of the qualitative data collected.

Even though it was not a wildly held view that the camp should be co-ed, it should be considered. The responses indicate that the facilitators were able to create a supportive environment for the campers. The corresponding recommendation is that the organisation continues to examine ways to improve upon this for each group. Getting information such as 'What is my home/community/school like' prior to the commencement of the camp may be able to inform how the camp environment is tailored to suit the needs of each group.

Many seemed to focus on the interpersonal relation skills which were developed so this provides an opportunity for greater focus in this area as the curriculum is developed.

Appendix

Questionnaire

1. a) What did you think about AOC?
 b) What did you like about the AOC?
 c) What did you find most challenging about AOC?

2. Has the camp impacted you in any way? If so, how?

3. What has been the most significant change you have seen in yourself since being in the camp?

4. After having attended the camp, how is it interacting with other students who have not been through the program?

5. How has the learning from AOC affected you outside of the classroom?

6. Is there any advice you would like to give to the teachers?

7. Have you been inspired in any way? If yes, how so?

Selected Quotations from Respondents

Respondent 6: I believe (if) I can change anyone can but it just takes time...I'll always remember what Keita told us it always seems impossible until it's done.

Respondent 1: I wanted to meet new girls even though it may have been distracting.

Respondent 2: Keita's story about not doing work help[ed] to change my mind and make me more focus[ed].

Respondent 5: Keita and Anita are role models; they encouraged me to be a better person.