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A Program Evaluation of a Preadolescent Girls' Youth Development Program

Linda F. Weekley
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Linda Weekley

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

A Program Evaluation of a Preadolescent Girls' Youth Development Program

by

Linda F. Weekley

MA, University of Central Florida, 1994

BS, Ohio University, 1978

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2018

Abstract

Programs that include skills to help girls successfully navigate the difficulties of preadolescence have been shown to be beneficial. One such youth development program in the southeastern part of the United States began in 2014 but has had no formal evaluation completed. The purpose of this qualitative study was to conduct a utilization-focused process evaluation, asking questions that addressed the perceptions of a school leader ($n = 1$) and volunteers of the program ($n = 8$). Their input was solicited concerning successful implementation strategies used, and recommendations for adaptations, recruitment, and volunteer training. Semistructured interviews were conducted using predetermined open-ended, questions. Open coding was used to discover the most common themes. After analyzing the data using VERBI's Software, MAXQDA, the identified themes were (a) successful elements of the program, (b) elements of the program that were not working, (c) suggestions for adaptations to improve the outcomes for participants, and (d) essential points to consider when recruiting new volunteers. Study participants reported that many of the girls participating in the program made positive changes in their behavior, exhibited improved self-esteem, and expanded their support system. Key findings will be discussed with the program administrators to assist them in recruiting and training new volunteers and to suggest administrative adjustments. Positive social change will be facilitated by offering ideas to the administrators that may result in expansion of the program, allowing more girls in the community to participate and experience positive results.

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Dedication

The body of work you see in the following pages represents many more hours than I ever dreamed possible. I would like to dedicate this final product and all that it represents to my husband, Phillip Weekley. I assured him that I could finish my education in a shorter time than estimated, that it “couldn’t possibly take that long!”

Thank you, Phil, for patiently waiting for me to write, “just one more paragraph”; for choosing to participate in activities alone so that I could study; for delaying our long awaited “travel years” until this goal was reached. You have been my constant rock and voice of sanity. I love you and thank God every day for the gift you are to me. Now, let’s travel!

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Several years ago, when asked if I had ever thought of getting a doctorate, my immediate response was an emphatic NO! Thank you, Pastor Mark Evans, for planting the seed that turned into a desire! Thank you, Dr. Crystal Evans, for encouraging me through the years of reading and writing, always believing that I could accomplish this goal. I will forever be grateful to you, Pastor Peter Brunton for your advice, wisdom, nonjudgmental assessments, and believing enough in me to continue to provide financial support. None of this would have been possible without the love, understanding, and encouragement of my Northwest Church family.

My family has patiently waited and continually supported the decision to continue my education. Thank you, Phil, for the many hours of editing you have offered over the last few years. Thank you for helping me see what is truly important in life, and for always being there when I needed to vent. Joshua, your patience is unbelievable. Thank you for believing that this “old lady” could actually get another degree!

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Dr. Lynne Orr. I could not have asked for a more perfect match as an advisor. You have pushed just the right amount, always encouraged with your kind words, and helped me believe in myself. Dr. Elizabeth Bruch, thank you for adding your expert advice along the way. Dr. Jeanne Sorrell, as my URR, you have given excellent advice and encouragement. Thank you! Dr. Robert Hogan, thank you for sharing your expertise in formatting challenges and providing support over the last year. Obtaining this degree has truly been a project for “the village,” and I appreciate each member who has contributed.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

A youth development program was formally initiated in 2014 when a group of four volunteers were invited to spend an hour each Monday evening at a local residential treatment facility for girls ages 12-18 years (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, April 10, 2015). This facility is in a large urban city situated in the southeastern part of the United States. Each week, during that time, the volunteers taught lessons covering life skills and established relationships while volunteering to mentor the girls in the facility (Coordinator of the Youth Development Program at the residential treatment facility, personal communication, May 17, 2015). The goal of the Youth Development Program is to "empower girls by providing tools, education and peer mentorship" (the Youth Development Program's mission, 2018, para. 1), that will enable them to live purposeful, productive lives as they mature. The Youth Development Program has grown from the one group held weekly at the residential treatment center to an additional four groups that meet each week in public or private schools (Coordinator of volunteers for the Youth Development Program, personal communication, June 30, 2016). A problem existed in that the Youth Development Program had been in operation for more than three years, yet the administrators were unsure of the appropriateness of the curriculum and instructional strategies implemented. An additional concern was that they were unsure of suggestions for continued success with curriculum implementation, recruitment, training, and support for new volunteers.

Program evaluations are used to determine the merit or worth of a program and to evaluate the impact made by the interventions (Liket, Rey-Garcia, & Maas, 2014; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; Scriven, 1999; Spaulding, 2014). Program evaluations are often requested by funding agencies or by the owner of a program to improve the quality of services provided (Chyung, 2015; Spaulding, 2014). The founder/director of the Youth Development Program requested that I conduct a program evaluation, as the organization had now been offering groups each week since 2014 with no formal assessment measures in place (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, June 27, 2016). A concern expressed by the director of the Youth Development Program was that there had been requests from administrators in six additional settings to offer weekly groups sponsored by the Youth Development Program in their facility. At present, the volunteers to coordinate other weekly groups do not exist, prohibiting the number of requests for expansion that can be granted (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, June 30, 2016).

During this project study, I conducted a formative program evaluation focusing on the curriculum and implementation strategies employed by the volunteers of the Youth Development Program. Suggestions were elicited for changes that may foster success in the future, both with implementing the curriculum and with training and support of prospective volunteers. Informal discussions of preliminary findings have been held throughout the data analysis process. However, a complete summary of the findings will be provided to the director and the core leadership team in the presentation: Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program, using a PowerPoint format. In addition to

an assessment of past activities, recommendations for strategies which encourage successful recruitment and training of volunteers, will be discussed. Expanding the number of volunteers available and equipping them with skills to teach will provide the opportunity for the leadership team of the Youth Development Program to accommodate requests made by administrators, encouraging expansion into new locales.

Rationale

The purpose of this study was to conduct a program evaluation of the Youth Development Program. The focus was to evaluate the curriculum and implementation strategies used during weekly groups. The findings from the evaluation provided suggestions for continued success with curriculum implementation, recruitment, training, and support of volunteers. Two of the five locations were assessed while conducting the evaluation. I interviewed volunteers with the Youth Development Program, members of the leadership team of the Youth Development Program, and a school leader at one of the sites sponsoring a weekly group. The director of the Youth Development Program requested a program evaluation to determine successful practices currently being utilized and to solicit suggestions for improvement. One of the areas of concern mentioned by the director of the Youth Development Program is that the number of requests for expansion of the weekly programs is more numerous than available volunteers (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, June 30, 2016). Offering information on how to recruit and train new volunteers should provide some assistance in alleviating this concern.

Definition of Terms

At-risk students: Students are considered at-risk when they are from a low socioeconomic environment, live in a community that exposes them to stressful situations regarding health and safety, and they have few supports available. They are often identified as minorities (McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2015).

Cross-aged volunteering: Pairing students of different ages together to allow the older students to volunteer the younger students (Besnoy & McDaniel, 2016).

Curriculum: Taba (1962) describes curriculum as a plan for learning. Hall-Kenyon and Smith (2013) expanded that definition to include materials and activities to help students accomplish objectives in the plan for learning. The Youth Development Program has a 12-week curriculum including four lessons on value, four lessons on voice, and four lessons on valor. There is also an eight-week curriculum to address bullying in the schools (Coordinator of volunteers for the Youth Development Program, personal communication, October 21, 2016).

Curriculum implementation: How teachers present material specified in the published curriculum using the goals and principles stated by the authors of the curriculum. Curriculum implementation includes activities used to accomplish the goals (Penuel, Phillips, & Harris, 2014).

Education to empower girls: Teaching girls how to respond to challenges and stand up for themselves, how to see themselves, how to dream and set goals, and how to make healthy decisions (Whittington & Budbill, 2013).

Empowering girls: Instilling hope that they can improve their current situation. Developing self-confidence in girls is one strategy to empower them (Galeotti, 2015).

Recruiting volunteers: Attracting persons with interest in the organization who can perform the needed functions (Devaney et al., 2015).

Residential treatment facility: A treatment center that offers intensive multidisciplinary treatment for individuals experiencing severe behavioral and/or emotional challenges. Treatment may include medication, multiple therapies as needed, social work, and educational components (Mallett & Boitel, 2016).

School leader: For this study, school leader may include, but is not limited to administrators, social workers, teachers, or guidance counselors who have assisted in some way with helping to establish or coordinate the Youth Development Program in each of the locations.

Socioeconomic background: Economic and educational background of the family being considered (McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2015).

Stakeholders: Individuals who have a vested interest in the findings of the evaluation (Patton, 2012).

Support for volunteers: Volunteering adolescent girls is difficult, and support is important. Support can be as simple as a short time each week for volunteers to share stories and suggestions with other volunteers. Volunteers who have support from peers exhibit more self-confidence than those who have no interaction with others (Marshall, Lawrence, & Peugh, 2013).

Tools to help empower girls: Lessons and relationships that help to encourage wise personal choices, help to develop leadership capabilities, build the girls' self-worth, and encourage healthy living (Galeotti, 2015).

Training volunteers: The act of preparing volunteers for the service, which they will provide. Training often includes general rules such as dress code, how to interact with clients, the level of interaction expected while in the volunteer position, and specific instructions for the job they will be performing (Gracyalny-Krauss, 2014).

Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE): An evaluation that is guided by the individuals who are going to be using the information gained from the evaluation. The evaluator is a facilitator who designs the evaluation to include information gathered from key stakeholders. Final reports will meet the needs of those who will be making decisions about the program (Patton, 2012).

Volunteer: A person who helps provide services for an organization, but does not receive pay (Carvalho & Sampaio, 2017).

Significance of the Study

The needs of preadolescent girls in our society are many. As girls begin to mature, self-esteem often decreases, and depression increases (Diseth, Meland, & Bredablik, 2014; Hyde, 2014). Many programs have been designed to address these needs especially from a prevention standpoint (Thomason & Kuperminc, 2014). Research has been conducted on programs that work mostly with at-risk girls, with the results ranging from moderate success to highly successful outcomes (Bean, Kendellen, Halsall, & Forneris, 2015; Brown & Fry, 2014; Mann, 2013). Four of the five facilities

in which the Youth Development Program currently offer weekly groups serve primarily students who are considered at-risk due to behavioral, academic, or emotional challenges (Coordinator of volunteers for the Youth Development Program, personal communication, June 30, 2016). One of the key factors in the success of a program is the dependability with which the program is conducted (Bean et al., 2015). It was important to verify that implementation of the program is occurring as originally intended by the designers.

Through the information gained from this utilization-focused program evaluation, the administrators of the Youth Development Program have a better understanding of the appropriateness of the curriculum used by the volunteers. Instructional strategies utilized were also examined and will be discussed during the final presentation. Although there is much disagreement on the components to be included when developing a youth development program, most researchers agree on three essential factors (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). These factors are opportunities to develop relationships with caring adults, participation in challenging experiences when given adequate support, and skill-building exercises which include life skills development (Bean et al., 2015; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016; Thomason & Kuperminc, 2014). Many authors link the formation of positive relationships with volunteers to an improved self-concept in girls. An increase in self-concept gives hope for a future, and limits risky behavior (Jackman & MacPhee, 2017; Thomason & Kuperminc, 2014). Presenting the curriculum in such a way as to hold the interest of the girls involved is crucial (Bean et al., 2015). The data from this program evaluation were used to confirm that the quality of the curriculum and implementation

strategies used are approaches that have been shown to be successful with preadolescent and adolescent girls, providing an opportunity for greater success.

One of the deliverables for the administrators of the Youth Development Program was a plan to help with recruiting, training, and support of new volunteers. When working with volunteers in an environment that may not be familiar to them, it is essential that proper training is conducted (Brown & Fry, 2014; McDaniel, Yarbrough, & Besnoy, 2015). Typically, volunteers for such programs as the Youth Development Program, have no formal training in education (Wootton, 2017). Instructing volunteers on best practices in teaching techniques and classroom management will better prepare them for the weekly sessions and assist in maintaining the integrity of the program (Mann, 2013; McDaniel et al., 2015). Recruiting and training new volunteers for the Youth Development Program will provide an opportunity for the founder/director to accommodate the requests made by six additional school administrators to offer the Youth Development Program at their schools (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, June 30, 2016). The possibility of positively affecting the lives of more girls will multiply with the refining of the program and subsequent expansion of the Youth Development Program.

Research Questions

The administrators of the Youth Development Program were unsure of the appropriateness of the curriculum, and instructional strategies applied. They were uncertain of suggestions for continued success with curriculum implementation, recruitment, support, and training of volunteers (Director of the Youth Development

Program, personal communication, June 27, 2016). Patton (2012) emphasized that when using a utilization-focused evaluation framework, the primary intended users should formulate the research questions which will yield answers and possible actions to address any needs. The following questions were offered as possible areas of interest that were important to know as I coordinated the program evaluation for the Youth Development Program.

Research Question 1: What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of the Youth Development Program's implementation of the curriculum and program in general?

Research Question 2: What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of challenges, and adaptations that could be made to the Youth Development Program to produce program improvements?

Research Question 3: What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of the most important points to consider for the recruitment, training, and support of new volunteers?

Review of the Literature

This literature review included several topics: the conceptual framework, the need for programs such as the Youth Development Program, exploration of data obtained from programs like the Youth Development Program, and research containing information on the expansion of the volunteer base in nonprofit settings. I found peer-reviewed journal articles and books utilized for this study in the Walden University Library's electronic databases. Databases used were Education Source, Education Resources Information

Center (ERIC), Education Research Complete, Sage Journals, and Thoreau. Key search terms included: *program evaluation, afterschool programs, youth development programs, self-esteem, life skills, volunteers, and nonprofit organizations*. The information contained in this literature review substantiated the need for the program evaluation of the Youth Development Program.

Conceptual Framework

The framework that guided this project study was a utilization-focused evaluation using a process driven format (Chyung, 2015; Patton, 2012). When the results of evaluations are used to change behavior or thinking of individuals, the culture of a group, or organizational procedures, they are considered process oriented (Chyung, 2015; Patton, 2014; Polastro, 2014). The program evaluation of the Youth Development Program was a formative evaluation which offered details on the program's strengths and weaknesses, from the perspective of the volunteers participating weekly and the school leader who worked with these volunteers on a regular basis (Chyung, 2015). Researchers may collect data during utilization-focused evaluations that are pertinent to the primary intended users, for improving the services provided (Liket et al., 2014; Ofek, 2016). The information obtained from the volunteers and the school leader was informally passed on to the director of the Youth Development Program and will be presented in a formal presentation to the remainder of those who make decisions for the Youth Development Program (Patton, 2012).

Evaluation process. Research has shown that information gained from evaluations is more willingly utilized when stakeholders collaborate with the evaluator

during the evaluation process (Adams, Nnawulezi, & Vandenberg, 2015; Brandon & Fukunaga, 2013; Liket et al., 2014). The utilization-focused evaluation is a participatory approach which involves stakeholders in every step of the evaluation (Gill, Kuwahara, & Wilce, 2016; Patton, 2012). Many nonprofit organizations such as the Youth Development Program have found participatory evaluations to produce results, which further the efficiency and growth of the program (Adams et al., 2015; Bean et al., 2015; Liket et al., 2014). The first step in conducting a UFE is to identify the primary stakeholders and involve them in meaningful ways from the beginning to the final report (Chyung, 2015; Gill et al., 2016). Their involvement cannot be superficial but must serve a meaningful role (Adams et al., 2015).

I chose a utilization-focused framework for this program evaluation after carefully looking at the needs of the Youth Development Program and the apparent willingness of the leaders to seek information which would help the program grow and improve (Ofek, 2016). Patton (2014) suggested that a willingness on the part of the individuals in the organization to learn and change is necessary when conducting formative evaluations. The founder/director of the Youth Development Program requested a program evaluation (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, June 27, 2016), indicating a desire to seek feedback that would lead to growth for the Youth Development Program. Some evaluations are performed to offer accountability, providing an account of accomplishments to the organization(s) supplying oversight or providing grants (Liket et al., 2014). Although the Youth Development Program is a nonprofit organization, it is in the unique position of having no governing establishments

which are requesting an evaluation for accountability purposes. The primary intended users are afforded the flexibility to determine the most useful type of evaluation and the data collected (Adams et al., 2015; Chyung, 2015; Ofek, 2016). Therefore, the information gathered was for the sole purpose of improving current practices and celebrating successes thus far (Chyung, 2015; Liket et al., 2014; Ofek, 2016).

Challenges Faced by Preadolescent Girls

As girls begin to mature from childhood to adolescence, there are many challenges they face. Self-esteem often decreases (Arens, Yeung, Craven, Watermann, & Hasselhorn, 2013). Depression often becomes apparent during early adolescent years (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.b). Body dissatisfaction is prevalent as girls begin to mature and compare themselves to the norms presented by media or to peers (Ferguson, Munoz, Garza, & Galindo, 2014; Rodgers, McLean, & Paxton, 2015). Disordered eating has become a concern in many households over the past several years (Hains, 2012; Tafa et al., 2017). Some girls resort to deliberate self-harm (Favazza, 2011; Sakhat, 2017) and risky sexual behaviors to fill a void or compensate for internal or external risk factors (Bedi, Muller, & Classen, 2014). Many of these challenges carry some severe concerns for the health and well-being of girls (National Institute of Mental Health, 2014).

The onset of depression at an early age is a strong predictor of the recurrence of depression throughout a woman's lifetime (Costello et al., 2002; Saluja et al., 2004). The National Institute of Mental Health reported in 2015 that 12.5 % of the adolescents in America (aged 12-17) suffered from depression, with 2.1 million experiencing episodes

that caused severe impairments (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.b). At its worse, depression can be fatal. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017) reported that in 2015, suicide was the third leading cause of death for girls ages 10-14. Body dissatisfaction has been shown to affect eating and exercise habits (Murray, Rieger, & Byrne, 2013). Reported cases of severe eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa have been identified in about 2.7% of the population of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.a). Stories of women dying because of unhealthy eating habits are often not enough to dissuade young girls from frequenting many of the 400 websites promoting eating disordered behaviors (Pater, Haimson, Andalibi, & Mynatt, 2016; Perloff, 2014; Yom-Tov & Boyd, 2014).

Families often contribute to the perceptions about the importance of weight or participate in emotional communication related to food (Arroyo & Segrin, 2013; Ashbury & Woszidlo, 2016). Some reports have indicated that girls as young as three to five years old describe thinner characters in a more positive manner (Harriger, 2015). Arroyo and Segrin (2013) stated that “families instill the values, behaviors, and attitudes necessary for the development of healthy and unhealthy self-perceptions and coping strategies” (p. 418). Many young girls do not have a strong support system at home to instill healthy perceptions concerning weight and eating habits, so the girls learn about navigating those challenges from friends or the media. When the messages heard from friends or media are internalized, self-esteem suffers (Arroyo & Segrin, 2013; Cribb & Haase, 2015).

Results of prior research have indicated that peers begin holding a position of prominence in a girl’s life during the adolescent years (Williams & Anthony, 2015;

Yavuzer, Karatas, Civilidag, & Gundogdu, 2014). Sometime between the ages of 10 and 14 girls' bodies change from the thin, straight, athletic body into a fuller, curvy body, and many have no idea how to handle that change (Voelker, Reel, & Greenleaf, 2015). Some girls may experience a decrease in self-esteem and become dissatisfied with their body during this time (Voelker et al., 2015). Girls who develop at a different rate than their peers may experience teasing or face victimization by others (Ferguson et al., 2014). Vulnerability to depressive symptoms often surfaces when young ladies feel victimized by their peers and experience body dissatisfaction (Hamlat et al., 2015). With access readily available to social media and the availability of Photoshop images, those comparisons are not entirely accurate, leading many girls to become dissatisfied with their bodies (Chrisler, Fung, Lopez, & Gorman, 2013; Perloff, 2014; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Body dissatisfaction has been believed to be one factor in the chain that leads to disordered eating for many young girls (Murray et al., 2013).

The media portrays thin girls as being attractive and appealing (Veldhuis, Konijn, & Seidell, 2014). More than half of the ads in magazines depict unrealistically thin women as desirable, happy, and sexy (Owen & Laurel-Seller, 2000). Internet usage has increased in recent years, with 92% of teens reporting that they are on the web daily, and 24% stating that they are online almost constantly (Lenhart, 2015). While on most websites, pop-up ads inundate users with images and videos that portray women as objects to be viewed, used, or envied (Projansky, 2014). Internet exposure, especially interaction on social sites such as Facebook, has been linked to body surveillance and the drive for thinness in adolescent girls (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). With the

overemphasis on the importance of being extremely thin and the glamorization of women's bodies in the media, self-confidence lowers, and girls often turn to unhealthy eating habits (Hains, 2012; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).

Addressing Teen Challenges

Results of a study conducted by Murray et al. (2013) indicated that stress predicted a reduction in self-esteem and predicted an increase in body dissatisfaction. Many programs that address eating disorders incorporate stress reduction into life skills modules (Levine & Smolak, 2006; Sakhat, 2017). A basic tenet of confirmation theory is that a person's self-esteem and self-identity builds upon accepting the person where he/she is (showing positive regard and being attentive to their interactions) and challenging him/her to achieve a little more (Dailey, Richards, & Romo, 2010). In contrast to confirming, Banet-Weiser (2015) proposed, many programs formed to empower girls are just as guilty of objectifying girls as the media. It is important when building a program such as the Youth Development Program that the key stakeholders are consciously using methods that assist young women in growing, rather than focusing on changing the girls to meet the standards of society (Banet-Weiser, 2015). Stress reduction techniques, activities to build self-esteem, and education on body satisfaction are important topics to address when building programs for girls (Murray et al., 2013).

No one disputes the fact that media plays a significant role in the lives of adolescents today. Volunteers, counselors, and parents may find that discussing the subtlety and prevalence of media influence concerning body image, can help young girls discern reality and learn to love the bodies they have (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013; Yager,

Diedrichs, Ricciardelli, & Halliwell, 2013). Social acceptance is also important to adolescent girls. If girls feel accepted by their peers, they are less likely to succumb to the thinness ideal (Sakhat, 2017). Those who feel socially supported by their peers and family experience higher levels of self-esteem (Cribb & Haase, 2015; Marshall, Parker, Ciarrochi, & Heaven, 2014). Since depression has been linked to peer victimization, especially in connection to body esteem, programs that address both body esteem and educate young girls about peer victimization may prove to be successful in combating depressive symptoms (Hamlat et al., 2015; Ralph & Epkins, 2015).

Women who have experienced challenges and overcome them can more easily speak into the lives of struggling adolescents (Perloff, 2014). When volunteers can relate to girls by sharing stories of struggle and ultimate victory, the teens can see hope for their situation (Perloff, 2014). Early adolescence is a vulnerable time for youth as they begin forming ideas concerning their bodies (Voelker et al., 2015). Helping young ladies develop positive attitudes about themselves during the preadolescent years may prevent problems associated with body dissatisfaction later in life (Ross, Paxton, & Rodgers, 2013).

Programs for Young Girls

There have been many programs that have been successful in helping with different aspects of challenges faced by young girls (Brown & Fry, 2014; Jones & Deutsch, 2013; Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson, 2015; Thomason & Kuperminc, 2014). The developers of the Strong Girls physical activity and life skills program attempted to build young girls' self-worth by strengthening competencies in one or more of the

following areas (a) academic, (b) behavioral, (c) social, (d) appearance, and/or (e) social competence (Brown & Fry, 2014). Studies have recognized group volunteering to be successful in improving social skills and relationships with peers (Kuperminc & Thomason, 2013; Mann et al., 2015). The Young Women's Leaders' Program (YWLP) offered a combination of group volunteering and one-on-one volunteering to encourage connectedness with both peers and trustworthy adults (Deutsch, Reitz-Krueger, Henneberger, Futch Ehrlich, & Lawrence, 2016).

The "Cool Girls" program. The curriculum of the "Cool Girls" Program also tried to help young girls build social capital (Thomason & Kuperminc, 2014). The authors of this multicomponent program attempted to address the expansion of social capital through teaching life skills, providing academic support, and offering one-on-one volunteering (Cool Girls, Inc., 2008). The results of the study indicated that girls who participated in Cool Girls Club experienced an increase in self-concept because of growth in social capital (Thomason & Kuperminc, 2014).

Powerful Voices. Ann Munro (2014) introduced a program offered by Powerful Voices, a Seattle-based nonprofit organization, which joined girl specific programming with youth development practices. The results indicated that girls adopted higher expectations for themselves; they developed attitudes and skills that assisted in combatting negative outlooks toward academic progress; and the program provided a positive girl culture in which the young women could flourish (Munro, 2014).

The Y's Girl program: Young Women's Christian Association. *Y's Girl* is a curriculum developed by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in 2010

for preadolescent girls to address body image (Ross et al., 2013). The *Y's Girl's* curriculum was written in such a manner as to be readily implemented by classroom teachers and it targeted risk factors associated with poor body image. Ross et al. (2013) concluded that body image improved, self-esteem was increased, internalization of thin-ideal and body comparison decreased in the girls participating in *Y's Girl* curriculum. Many of the programs reviewed, included a component including an activity to the lessons (Bean et al., 2015; Brown & Fry, 2014; Iachini, Bell, Lohmann, Beets, & Reynolds, 2016; Ullrich-French, Cole, & Montgomery, 2016). Most girls reported an increase in self-worth and confidence but no increase in their desire to maintain the physical activities (Ullrich-French, McDonough, & Smith, 2012). The common theme that ran through all the literature reviewed was the need for programs that helped girls build character, feel connected, build their emotional resilience, and learn of their self-worth (Brown & Fry, 2014; McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2015; Ullrich-French et al., 2016).

Expanding the Volunteer Base in Nonprofit Organizations

The Youth Development Program is operated exclusively by volunteers (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, June 30, 2016). The founder/director of the Youth Development Program expressed a desire to expand weekly programs into new locations, which would mean recruiting and training additional volunteers since human resources are limited. Running an organization utilizing volunteers requires some special considerations. Not everyone that wishes to volunteer would be an asset when working with students (Bowers, Rosch, & Collier, 2016).

Quality volunteers for youth possess good interpersonal skills, have professional work ethics, hold positive character traits, and youth find them credible (Bowers et al., 2016).

Volunteers in afterschool programs are seldom trained as teachers and may doubt their skills and abilities (Malcolm, 2015). Therefore, the training offered may need to include the demographics and specific characteristics of the girls with which the volunteers will work (Brown & Fry, 2014). Facilitation skills which would include scaffolding of lessons, conflict resolution, active listening, and redirection should also be included (Deutsch, Wiggins, Henneberger, & Lawrence, 2013). Leaders of many nonprofit organizations offer training during which volunteers learn about the program and are given expectations for implementation of the curriculum (Bean et al., 2015). Often tips on how to adapt the curriculum for the size of the group and interest levels of the girls involved are shared (Iachini, Beets, Ball, & Lohmann, 2014). Jones and Deutsch (2013) pointed out the importance of matching activities and lessons to the developmental stages of the girls involved in afterschool programs.

Administrators of programs must be vigilant about monitoring needs of volunteers, being ready to provide targeted professional development as needs arise (Iachini et al., 2014). Providing ongoing support by utilizing peer volunteers is also a best practice (Bean et al., 2015; Higley, Walker, Bishop, & Fritz, 2016; Marshall et al., 2013). Perhaps suggestions from the literature reviewed can help the administrators of the Youth Development Program decide the best course of action to maintain and expand a quality program for young girls.

Implications

Girls face many difficulties as they mature (Rodgers et al., 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Programs for preadolescent girls which address self-image, empowerment, and assist in helping the girls build a positive support system have proven to be a successful way to address some of the most challenging issues faced (Brown & Fry, 2014; Deutsch et al., 2016; Leventhal et al., 2015). This program evaluation was conducted to assist the key stakeholders of the Youth Development Program in identifying the appropriateness of the curriculum and implementation strategies currently being used. The analysis of the data collected indicated suggestions to ensure the continued success of the Youth Development Program. Recommendations for recruitment, training, and support of volunteers have been informally discussed with the director of the Youth Development Program. The outcome of the program evaluation will be presented in Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program, which summarizes the findings of the study. Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program will be presented to the primary intended users with an offer of an exit meeting to discuss the outcomes further (Patton, 2012). Offering the most effective program possible will allow maximum benefit to the girls being taught each week through the Youth Development Program.

Summary

The needs of young girls today are many. The Youth Development Program is an organization that began in 2014. Volunteers from the Youth Development Program partner with five schools in a large urban city in the southeastern United States to offer

weekly groups to girls which address some of these problems. Since no formal evaluation had been completed, a utilization-focused process evaluation was conducted in two of the sites, to determine the appropriateness of the curriculum and instructional strategies used during weekly groups. I investigated suggestions for continued success with curriculum implementation, recruitment, training, and support for new volunteers. I will formally present the findings to the administrators of the Youth Development Program. Details of the research design and method, the choice of participants, the plan for data collection and analysis, and possible limitations will be discussed in Section 2.

Section 2: The Methodology

The administrators of the Youth Development Program were uncertain of the appropriateness of the curriculum and instructional strategies used while teaching groups each week. They were also unsure of suggestions for continued success with curriculum implementation, recruitment, training, and support of volunteers. The purpose of conducting this utilization-focused program evaluation was to determine the curriculum and implementation strategies used by the volunteers of the Youth Development Program. Suggestions for continued success with curriculum implementation, recruitment, training, and support of volunteers were gathered. I will describe the research design and approach, along with justification for the chosen design in this section. Selection of participants, ethical considerations, and limitations will be explained. To conclude this section, I will share the data collection and analysis procedures which were utilized.

Research Design and Approach

Researchers choose a research design by examining the problem being investigated by the study and determining how the research questions can best be answered (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2014). The research questions for this study are:

Research Question 1: What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of the Youth Development Program's implementation of the curriculum and program in general?

Research Question 2: What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of challenges and adaptations that could be made to the Youth Development Program to produce program improvements?

Research Question 3: What are volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of the most important points to consider for the recruitment, training, and support of new volunteers?

After looking carefully at all research design options from which to choose, I decided a utilization-focused program evaluation would yield the most usable and thorough information for the stakeholders. While executing this qualitative study, I collected thick, rich descriptions of perceptions of the program. The purpose of this study was to determine the appropriateness of the curriculum for the Youth Development Program and to discover how the volunteers were implementing the curriculum in the groups. Ideas for future success and growth incorporated thoughts on needed changes in curriculum and implementation, along with recruitment strategies, and training and support needs, to select and prepare additional volunteers.

There were three types of research design available as the process of attempting to answer given research questions was initiated. The designs included quantitative research, qualitative research, or mixed methods research. Quantitative research tends to be used to test theories, using experimental or survey research (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2014). Data analysis of quantitative research utilizes statistical measures to determine if results indicate significant changes when variables are introduced (Chyung, 2015; Creswell, 2009). Results of quantitative research are shared using numbers, often

presented in charts or tables (Leko, 2014; Lodico et al., 2010). The quantitative research design was not chosen for this study as the research questions could not be answered thoroughly by analyzing results of surveys or by comparing scores from two or more groups.

The second type of research design to be considered was qualitative research. Qualitative research is used to seek answers to questions that are broader in nature, often focusing on discovery or gaining insight from those involved in the topic being studied (Leko, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Research is gathered in the form of interviews, focus groups, observations, photographs, or historical documents (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014; Lodico et al., 2010). Data collected produces rich, thick descriptions of perceptions held by the participants in the study and researchers often present the findings in narrative reports.

There are several types of studies, which gather qualitative data including ethnographic research, phenomenological research, narrative research, and case studies (Creswell, 2009; Leko, 2014; Lodico et al., 2010). Ethnographic research is generally used to look at the culture of society including everyday experiences and the way a person or group of people respond to and think about those experiences (Merriam, 2009). Narrative research is generally used to analyze stories, often historical accounts (Patton, 2012). Ethnographic, phenomenological, and narrative research were considered for the program evaluation of the Youth Development Program but determined to be inappropriate due to the research questions being investigated.

The third form of research design to be considered was a mixed methods approach, which combines both quantitative and qualitative research. This design was considered, but not chosen to be the most appropriate form of research for this evaluation. To conduct a mixed methods study, I would want to use survey data from the students participating in the Youth Development Program and collect information from school records concerning academic, behavioral, and attendance performance for the girls involved. Since the girls participating in the Youth Development Program are minors, I chose not to include quantitative data, to protect their rights. Thus, using a mixed methods approach for this study was not appropriate.

Based on the purpose of this study and the research questions posed, case studies were conducted in two different settings, which was then used to perform a program evaluation. Case studies are often used to investigate small group behavior or to examine organizational processes. In-depth descriptions were used to describe how or why something works (Yin, 2014). A qualitative case study involves gathering in-depth descriptive information on a phenomenon occurring within a group, sometimes called a bounded system (Merriam, 2009; Ofek, 2016).

There must be clearly defined borders or boundaries to qualify as a bounded system of study. The bounded system, in this case, is the Youth Development Program, which currently has weekly groups operating in five locations. The Youth Development Program is an organization designed to empower young girls and is unique to one urban area in the southeastern United States. Often researchers choose to study multiple cases to add to the validity of the findings (Merriam, 2009; Ofek, 2016). I gathered detailed

information from the volunteers and a school leader in two separate schools in which the Youth Development Program operates for this program evaluation. The case studies were conducted in one elementary school and one middle school, offering thorough information from the participants serving students from two different age groups.

Program evaluations are performed to determine the level of success of a program and to make decisions concerning that program (Lodico et al., 2010; Patton, 2012; Spaulding, 2014). In June of 2016, the director of the Youth Development Program requested that an evaluation be performed on the program since no formal assessment had been conducted to date (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, June 30, 2016). A utilization-focused program evaluation was chosen as the most useful evaluation for the needs of the Youth Development Program, as it involved the stakeholders in every step of the assessment (Gill et al., 2016; Patton, 2012). The stakeholders were the ones that decided the information about which they are most interested in receiving, and their recommendations guided the data collected.

The purpose of this program evaluation was to identify perceptions, of both volunteers and school leaders, about needed improvements to the curriculum, curriculum implementation, recruitment, training, and support for new volunteers. Formative program evaluations are improvement oriented. They can produce information that will lead to changes in practices quite quickly (Lodico et al., 2010; Patton, 2014). For this reason, a formative program evaluation format was chosen. Throughout the data analysis process, informal discussions were held with the director of the Youth Development Program, giving her information as it was examined. The final report will provide

information to all stakeholders of the Youth Development Program that seems most useful to them as they strive to improve and continue to offer weekly groups in various locations.

Participants

Selection of Participants

The Youth Development Program has volunteers that go into organizations on a weekly basis to teach young girls how to recognize their worth, learn to effectively stand for their values, and be brave as they face challenges each day. A curriculum has been provided for the volunteers to use in their weekly meetings. The Youth Development Program currently offers groups in five locations, including three public schools, one private school, and one residential treatment facility. These organizations are in a county situated in the southeastern part of the United States.

Information gathered from a school leader ($n = 1$) and volunteers ($n = 8$) in two of the five locations were the focus of the program evaluation of the Youth Development Program. The number of case studies were limited to the two schools to allow adequate time to gather in-depth information. Spaulding (2014) estimated an interview containing six to eight questions typically takes about an hour to conduct. One school leader and eight volunteers participated in the interviews. The number of participants was limited to gather detailed, rich descriptions of the Youth Development Program and the perceptions of those involved.

It is important to identify cases that will offer data which most thoroughly answer the research questions posed (Yin, 2014). The leaders in an elementary school (Location

A) were the first to partner with the Youth Development Program, inviting a group of volunteers into their school to work with girls on a weekly basis. Elementary schools in the district in which the research is being done serve students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade, although the Youth Development Program only works with girls in grades three through five. School leaders in this elementary school and the middle school (Location B) into which these students' progress were the two groups of individuals invited to participate in this evaluation. I chose Location A because it has partnered with the Youth Development Program for the longest period; two and a half years. The volunteers and school leaders in Location A were the ones who were most familiar with the successes and challenges encountered over an extended time.

I chose Location B because the children in this middle school included a few girls who once attended and participated in the Youth Development Program at Location A, as elementary aged students and some new girls from a slightly higher socioeconomic background. Middle schools in the area serve students in Grades 6-8, with the Youth Development Program offering services to girls in all three grade levels. The Youth Development Program in Location B is a newer program that provided data from a school leader and volunteers who work with older girls, including some from a low socioeconomic background and some from a middle-class background. By investigating responses from volunteers and a school leader in both elementary and middle school settings who work with girls from different socioeconomic backgrounds, the research may apply to a greater number of programs offered by the Youth Development Program.

Both schools participating in this program evaluation are a part of a large, public school district located in the southeastern part of the United States.

The evaluation is a utilization-focused evaluation. Identifying the primary intended users of the evaluation was an important first step. Patton (2012) described those individuals as the stakeholders who work with the evaluator to help focus the direction of the evaluation. For the Youth Development Program, the primary intended users were the founder/director of the Youth Development Program and three key leadership team members. These four women are the decision makers if changes in curriculum need to occur and the ones responsible when planning activities for recruitment, training, and support of volunteers. A meeting was scheduled with the founder/director to assemble the primary intended users into one meeting place, during which time we discussed their goals and expectations for this program evaluation.

Purposeful Sampling

Data were collected from individuals who were purposefully chosen from each of the schools being evaluated. Purposeful sampling allows extensive and detailed input from those that are closest to the program and can explain the way it is presented (Patton, 1990). School leaders from both locations who have been most involved in the weekly operation of the Youth Development Program and have worked most closely with the volunteers were invited to participate in a focus group at their location. Focus groups were chosen as the data collection method to create an opportunity for discussion among the school leaders present. Because these leaders were not as intimately involved in the Youth Development Program and its implementation as the volunteers, I believed that

they would be likely to freely share information with no hesitation or concern of causing offense by something said during the focus group.

The assistant principal of Location A suggested that I invite the third, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers to participate in the focus group since they were the ones that would be familiar with changes seen in the girls who took part in the Youth Development Program each week. An initial invitation was emailed to thirteen school personnel from Location A. After allowing two weeks for a response yet receiving none; I resent the invitation. Due to many factors, there was only one school leader that could offer her time for an interview, and she requested to complete the interview via email.

Upon receiving permission from the IRB to interview via email rather than conduct a focus group, a consent form was sent to the school leader who made this request. No response was received, so I resent the request for a signature on the consent form. After several attempts at reaching the administrator, I was unable to send the questions, as no further communication with the school leader was received. Over the two-month period during which this communication took place, the area was heavily impacted by two hurricanes, causing damage to the schools and initiating many counseling needs for the students attending the schools. It is very likely that the school personnel were simply too busy to devote any time to a project outside of the daily necessities of providing safety and a quality education to their students.

Location B proved to have fewer school leaders from which to choose, but an invitation was sent via email to four school leaders, asking for their participation in a focus group discussing their thoughts about the Youth Development Program. One of the

leaders responded immediately, eager to participate in the program evaluation. With no additional responses received after two weeks, I sent a second invitation requesting their expert input into the study. No further responses were received. IRB approved an interview with the one school leader that was willing to participate. The leader that agreed to participate in the study is a person who makes suggestions to the administrators of the school concerning the viability of continuing to partner with the Youth Development Program in years to come. She is a key informant as described by Lodico et al. (2010); therefore, input from her was essential.

Volunteers who serve in each location weekly were given the opportunity to share their thoughts during private interviews. Interviews were chosen for volunteer input because there may be personal thoughts and details that would not readily be shared in a focus group setting. Like school leaders, volunteers were chosen using purposeful sampling. For this program evaluation, a typical case sampling was used which means that the participants have similar experiences and can represent others in comparable situations (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014; Lodico et al., 2010).

In Location A, there are currently four volunteers. The opportunity to invite a former volunteer to participate in an interview was also presented. Thus, five volunteers were invited and chose to participate in an interview. Location B also had four volunteers, with one being a minor. Again, the opportunity to invite a former volunteer was presented. The minor was not asked to participate due to her age. Thus, four volunteers from Location B were invited and chose to participate in interviews. One volunteer served in both Location A and Location B. The volunteers at both locations are

young women with part-time jobs and flexible schedules which allowed interviews to occur quickly. The school leader and volunteers who chose to participate in interviews could represent school leaders and volunteers for the Youth Development Program in all five locations.

Gaining Access to Participants

Once Walden's IRB granted permission to conduct research and a meeting was held with the administrators of the Youth Development Program, I contacted the principal in each school to request authorization to conduct a focus group at his/her location. When working in large districts, often permission must be granted from the county level to conduct research in a school setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Based on the request, this was not required, and permission was granted from each of the principals. A Letter of Cooperation was sent to each principal, with both being signed and returned with the principals' electronic signatures. Emails were sent to all school leaders involved in the daily operations of the Youth Development Program, describing the nature and purpose of the study and explaining what agreement to participate would mean for them. The email included a statement that participation was voluntary and withdrawal from the study at any time was acceptable should that need to happen. A similar email was sent to the volunteers of the Youth Development Program after the primary intended users had granted permission for access.

All potential participants for interviews received an informed consent form via email. The form included such items as an assurance that participants' rights would be protected with measures such as anonymity using pseudonyms, electronic information

would be held on a password-protected computer, and the assurance that I will file written documents in a locked cabinet for at least five years. The consent form also included an explanation of risks and benefits to each participant, detailed information about the study and the researcher, and a guarantee of protection from harm of any type (American Evaluation Association, 2004; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009). Each person who agreed to participate in the interview process was asked to sign and return a consent form (Merriam, 2009). Details of the information contained in the consent form were discussed with each participant once again before the interview began, assuring that all were adequately informed of their rights.

When conducting program evaluations, it is important to form positive working relationships with all participants (Patton, 2012). Having an outsider examine your practices can be intimidating. I placed emphasis on the fact that this evaluation is to look for things that are important to them, not to me to ease any apprehension felt by the primary intended users or the interviewees. Having been a former school administrator, working with school leaders is natural and nonthreatening, making conversations easy. Volunteers are generally involved in projects because of their strong belief in the positive impact they make (Brown & Fry, 2014). Once the volunteers of the Youth Development Program realized that the program evaluation was being conducted to look for ways to improve the program in which they are involved, they were ready to offer suggestions and thoughts. An attempt to build rapport with each of the individuals was made before any interview was started.

Data Collection

The data collected for this utilization-focused program evaluation included the responses from a school leader who serves in one of the public schools involved in this program evaluation and eight volunteers who currently lead or have led a group each week with the Youth Development Program in one of two schools located in a large public-school district. Data collection began after approval from Walden University Review Board (IRB # 09-08-17-0474294). Two focus groups for the school leaders, one at school A and one at school B were planned. Focus groups are often used in qualitative research when topics are common to all involved and are not of a controversial nature (Spaulding, 2014). Unfortunately, only one school leader could participate in the study. After approval from Walden's IRB to conduct an interview rather than the planned focus group, an interview was scheduled at the school in which the school leader works during an agreed upon time. The participant was aware of the estimated time commitment and was willing to offer her expertise.

If topics are ones that could elicit sensitive or confidential responses, one-on-one interviews are suggested (Merriam, 2009; Spaulding, 2014). Willing volunteers of the Youth Development Program from school A and school B participated in one-on-one interviews. The interviews were scheduled individually to accommodate each participant's schedule. Interviews took 30 minutes to one hour. I informed the interviewees of the probable time frame before they committed to the interview. A copy of a summary of their interview was emailed to each interviewee for review. Face-to-

face or phone follow-up was offered should these summaries lead to a need to clarify specific thoughts or statements. No participant requested follow-up.

Open-ended, predetermined questions were used during the interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) recommended using this semistructured format assuring the researcher that he/she will get responses to the same questions with each interview, encouraging greater reliability. The protocol listing the core set of questions for the school personnel is found in Appendix B. There are eight open-ended questions in this protocol. Appendix C contains the protocol for the individual interviews with volunteers. It includes eight open-ended questions. Both protocols were researcher created. I solicited input from my committee members to determine if questions were understandable or if adaptations were needed to make them clearer. When a person who is not affiliated with the Youth Development Program reviews the questions, greater reliability of the protocols being used is presented (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The purpose of collecting data from both the school leaders and the volunteers was to provide a holistic view of the Youth Development Program by soliciting perspectives of two very different groups of individuals (Adams et al., 2015; Merriam, 2009). The school leader could offer information and suggestions from her standpoint of looking at initiatives from a big picture, overall view. She was also able to provide information according to changes noticed in the girls who participate on a weekly basis. Individual interviews were conducted with the young ladies who volunteer every week. The volunteers know about the Youth Development Program from a more detailed,

personal view. Perceptions of successes and needs from the viewpoint of the volunteers gave the primary users of this program evaluation much needed insight.

The women who were interviewed possess expert advice about the Youth Development Program (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Gill et al., 2016). It was my job to draw that information from them, organize the information in a usable manner, and present it to the group of women who make decisions about the Youth Development Program.

Lodico et al. (2010) stated interviews often look like discussions. I provided an overview of the purpose of the program evaluation to start each discussion, explaining the participant's rights and clarifying the measures which will be taken to guarantee anonymity (American Evaluation Association, 2004; Merriam, 2009).

The first step in the data collection process was to gain permission from the administrator at each school to conduct research on their campus. Once permission was granted, I conducted the interview at the school, at the convenience of the school leader. I gained access to the volunteers through the lead volunteer at each school. The interviews were arranged with each of the volunteers to meet at the time and location that was most convenient for them. With permission from the participants, interviews were voice recorded with both a dedicated recording device and the audio recording app on my phone.

Field notes are an important part of qualitative research. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggested field notes would help you document and process your observations during the data collection process and record your feelings before and after each interaction. The field notes are a place you can be honest about likes and dislikes and

document hunches about specific topics (Salmon, 2013). It is also a place you can confess your shortcomings to become better with each interview. I used field notes before entering each interview and then recorded my observations and thoughts immediately after each interaction.

Researcher Relationship

An external evaluator is an individual who is asked to evaluate a program from outside the organization (Lodico et al., 2010). Although considered an external evaluator, I am in the unusual situation of being a former internal individual in both the school system and the Youth Development Program. Even though I do not have a personal relationship with any of the school leaders who were potentially involved in the evaluation process, they may have known my name since I retired only five years ago from my position as an administrator in the school system within which they serve. I resigned from the board of the Youth Development Program in December of 2016. A few of the volunteers may have known my name or recognized my face, but service alongside any of them in the schools had not occurred.

External evaluators often find it difficult to obtain trust from participants (Pattyn & Brans, 2013; Spaulding, 2014). Once the volunteers realized that the evaluation is to celebrate successes and allow them to suggest ideas for improvements to the program without criticism, they readily shared their thoughts and ideas. Being involved in both the school system and the Youth Development Program, caution was taken about the formation of any preconceived ideas. Member checks, analyzing field notes that honestly stated my thoughts and biases, and discussing concerns with outside individuals with no

connection to either entity helped to lessen unfair appraisals and provided an additional measure of validity (Creswell, 2009; Leko, 2014).

Data Analysis

Qualitative research presents data using thick, rich descriptions of individual's experiences (Creswell, 2009; Leko, 2014; Merriam, 2009). To offer these accounts with the intent which was planned by the participant, the researcher must be cautious to present material as it was told. Each interview was audio recorded, with permission from the participant, ensuring complete accuracy of the information spoken. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. I transcribed the interviews myself and then entered the data into the software program, MAXQDA by VERBI. Directly following each interview, thoughts, observations, and feelings were recorded in field notes (Merriam, 2009; Salmon, 2013).

Participants were asked to review a summary of their interview for verification of the material gathered. This process is known as member checking and serves to guarantee a further validation of the data collected (Creswell, 2009). I sent the summary via email to each participant with a suggested time frame for follow-up. I then followed up with a phone call to see if the summary accurately represented the intent of their conversation or if they would like to meet again to clarify parts of the document or to offer additional thoughts. All participants verified that the information gathered accurately represented their discussion.

All the information gathered was entered into the computer program, MAXQDA by VERBI, which is designed to assist the researcher in analyzing qualitative data.

Reading and rereading each transcribed document to look for patterns and identify all different categories into which the information could be divided was the first step in analyzing the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2014). MAXQDA assisted in the open coding process and helped to categorize the data collected into themes. Themes were identified that logically supported the research questions (Adams et al., 2015; Merriam, 2009). It is not uncommon to have 20-30 codes or categories identified once all interviews have been transcribed (Creswell, 2009; Stapley, Midgley, & Target, 2016). With the help of the MAXQDA program, codes were consolidated and narrowed down to four different themes (Creswell, 2009; Stapley et al., 2016).

Creswell (2009) enumerated several strategies to ensure that the final report from qualitative research is valid when presented. Triangulation is used to show that themes derived from different participants are similar (Merriam, 2009). In the case of the program evaluation of the Youth Development Program, themes that emerged from the analysis of the data from each of the volunteers and themes derived from the discussion with the school leader have been compared to offer greater credibility to the findings (Merriam, 2009). In reviewing the information supplied by both volunteers and the school leader, there were no discrepancies noted. There are some differences of opinions regarding training needs of new volunteers and differences in ideas for the best way to recruit volunteers. This information representing both viewpoints will be shared in the final report to the administrators of the Youth Development Program.

Member checking is another strategy to incorporate when performing qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). A summary of each interview was reviewed

by the member involved. Each participant had an opportunity to clarify or add to the information before the final report was presented. As an educator who has worked in inner-city schools, it was possible that I had some biases which could have affected the outcome of the research. To combat this possibility, I made use of reflexivity and peer debriefing (Gough, 2016).

Reflexivity is critical self-reflection concerning possible biases. I used field notes to record all thoughts and feelings before and after each interview. Honesty in the recording helped me to see areas about which I needed to be cautious when making assumptions. Involving outsiders who are not associated with the study being conducted is called peer examination or peer debriefing (Creswell, 2009; Leko, 2014). By inviting a peer to review my work and offer honest assessments and ask questions, I reduced the likelihood that my biases were a concern. Because the peer reviewer is not associated with Walden, I asked her to sign a confidentiality agreement, protecting the rights of the participants in the study. Having a peer examine the research also assured that the final product is understandable to the general population, as well as to the individuals involved in the Youth Development Program (Creswell, 2009). Making use of each of the above strategies provided a foundation to support that the findings of the program evaluation were credible.

Limitations

One limitation of this program evaluation is the fact that the girls attending weekly meetings of the Youth Development Program are under the age of 18. There is even one volunteer who helps present lessons that is younger than 18. Due to ethical

considerations, I did not interview any of the girls who were considered minors. A more thorough assessment of curriculum and implementation strategies may have been obtained if the minors were included in interviews, offering their opinions on current practices.

As with any qualitative inquiry, the results of this program evaluation will have limited use to other organizations (Chyung, 2015; Creswell, 2009). Narrative descriptions have been shared from the data gained from only nine participants, from a very particular population. Individuals in similar programs may be able to glean information or suggestions to assist in their program, but there will be no scientific data that can be accurately generalized. The conclusions drawn from this study are intended for the primary intended users of the Youth Development Program and will answer questions specifically for that program.

Data Analysis Results

The Youth Development Program began offering groups to young girls in 2014, designed to give them tools for empowerment. There had been no formal evaluation of the program since its inception. This project study focused on obtaining information that would assist the administrators of the Youth Development Program in evaluating the effectiveness of current practices and offer ideas for the future success of the Youth Development Program. Eight volunteers and one available school leader shared their perceptions of the following research questions in one-on-one interviews with the researcher.

Research Question 1: What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of the Youth Development Program's implementation of the curriculum and program in general?

Research Question 2: What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of challenges, and adaptations that could be made to the Youth Development Program to produce program improvements?

Research Question 3: What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of the most important points to consider for the recruitment, training, and support of new volunteers?

The data obtained from the conversations with these participants were then coded, analyzed, and divided into four major themes. Those themes were:

- Successful elements of the program
- Elements of the program that were not working
- Suggestions for adaptations to improve the outcomes for participants
- Essential points to consider when recruiting new volunteers

Most of the responses from interview questions related to Research Question 1 were coded as *successful elements of the program*. Themes of *elements of the program that were not working* and *suggestions for adaptations to improve the outcomes for participants* were identified from responses related to Research Question 2. Research Question 3 was answered by asking questions specifically about recruiting, training, and supporting new volunteers. The responses from interviewees to these questions generally were coded with the theme *essential points to consider when recruiting new volunteers*.

Many statements could be coded as addressing more than one theme, thus providing a rich wealth of information for the administrators of the Youth Development Program.

Research Questions

Research Question 1. Research Question 1 is as follows: What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of the Youth Development Program's implementation of the curriculum and program in general? The interview questions asked of the school leader that specifically addressed this research question were questions one through four found in Appendix B. The interview questions asked of volunteers that addressed RQ1 were questions one and three found in Appendix C.

Findings as reported by the school leader.

- Apprehension of ability of volunteers to connect with girls.

When the conversation with the school leader began, she told me about her initial thoughts when presented with the idea of the Youth Development Program. She stated, They were bullying each other, being mean to each other [the girls at her school]. We're saying what can we do? And then that's when we found out about the Youth Development Program. I'll be honest, I said, 'this is not going to work. These girls...They are going to eat these people alive!' I said, 'we need to be in there with them and have a heavy hand. Oh, God...Don't you worry, I've got your back ladies.'

After the first few weeks, the school leader was pleasantly surprised and said, As time went on, the girls, they really did enjoy it. I thought some of the girls would not come back or it'd be too much, talking about their feelings, that they

wouldn't want to do it. They were coming back! [expression of surprise] And I was like.... 'OK she's onto something!'

- Curriculum is appropriate for girls attending group.

The school leader stated that the curriculum used to present the lessons during the Youth Development Program is appropriate for the needs of the girls involved in the group. The lessons are well planned and include fun activities which appeal to middle school girls. Other teachers in the school notice the difference in the behaviors and attitudes of the girls who attend the Youth Development Program, so they are asking about the possibility of including some of their students in the weekly group. The school leader stated,

So, a lot more teachers are asking about the Youth Development Program... Yeah, it's like, 'OK this is what the student is doing... can...will she be a good candidate for this?' I'm like, I think she will be. I think it would be good for them to come. This year it took off even better. Because the girls last year enjoyed it so much.

- There are stories of positive changes in girls.

The school leader conveyed several stories of change seen in the behaviors of the girls who participate in the Youth Development Program. The changes mentioned included girls who started out exhibiting behaviors ranging from extremely quiet, to bullying, to verbally and physically aggressive, to noncompliant and some who lacked interest in any activity presented. Each story ended with growth seen in the girls in a positive, productive direction. Because the school leader is aware of what is covered in the Youth Development Program group each week, she often reminds the girls during the

school day, “Alright girls, what do we need to do?” And they answer, “we need to be building each other up.” The school leader reacted when telling this story with, “I’m like, Yes!!! I love that!!!”

Findings as reported by the volunteers.

- Presentation of weekly groups is consistent.

The first question asked of each volunteer was to describe a typical Youth Development Program group. The answers could have been copied and pasted since each volunteer explained the order of events the same. It was obvious from their description that each volunteer runs the weekly group using the same format. This consistency is healthy for the girls attending. When a girl knows what to expect during each group, she can more easily concentrate on the content being taught.

- Curriculum includes interactive activities.

Seven out of eight volunteers (88%) shared examples of activities used during a Youth Development Program group to help the girls visualize the principle being taught. Volunteer 1 mentioned that she wrote the names she was called as a teenager on her arms with a black marker when teaching the lesson on bullying. The girls responded with gasps as they saw how cruel others could be and it made them more cautious of the words they use when talking to or about peers. Volunteer 5 gave the example of taking a dollar bill, wadding it up, ripping the sides, and stepping on it to destroy it. She then compared the abused piece of money to the girls who felt they had no worth due to the abuse or words of others. The dollar bill was still worth one dollar. The girls quickly realized that they too had value even though they have been told otherwise.

- Girls appear to enjoy attending the Youth Development Program group.

When asked if the girls say anything about enjoying the weekly groups, one-half of the volunteers could give examples of statements made by girls or actions indicating their enjoyment of the Youth Development Program. Volunteer 1 stated that 14 out of 16 girls who attended group the week before, were girls who came to the Youth Development Program last year. One of the side benefits of the girls attending the Youth Development Program that was noticed by four of the volunteers is that participants are developing friendships with girls normally outside their circle of friends. Volunteer 8 shared,

There's one girl that um comes. She's very quiet...does not talk at all...she feels like she doesn't have any friends. But one girl [in the group] was like, "GIRL, everybody wants to be your friend! You're so nice!" And she [the quiet girl] was so happy!

- Volunteers had stories of positive changes witnessed in girls.

Most of the volunteers gave examples of at least one success story of positive changes seen in girls attending the Youth Development Program. Volunteer 7 shared this story about a particularly difficult young lady in fifth grade. She said,

[She] Told me to, "F you" (but used the real word). She said, "everyone gives up on me. I'm just like the troublemaker; I'm always in the office. you're going to give up on me, too." But, eventually she really opened up, and she was like this hard shell...really hard to crack. And then at the very last day, she was like, "I'm lovely for life." And she wrote it on her hand. She totally changed after Sarah

came [guest dance instructor]. She was listening, participating. She was not bullying the girls. It was just such a transformation from the first day!

This is just one story that illustrates what 75% of the volunteers mentioned. The volunteers commented that the girls began sharing more openly as they became comfortable with the volunteers and the other girls in the group. Some girls took longer than others, but positive changes were noticed in all of them.

In summary, findings for Research Question 1 indicated that the school leader was apprehensive when she heard that volunteers were planning to start a weekly group at her school. She was concerned about the ability of the volunteers to relate to the girls and maintain behavioral control. She soon learned that girls enjoyed attending and were attentive as lessons were presented. Both the school leader and the volunteers felt that the curriculum was appropriate, that the activities were productive, and that the girls enjoyed attending the group. Stories of positive changes in the girls attending the Youth Development Program were shared by both the school leader and the volunteers.

Research Question 2. Research Question 2 was: What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of challenges, and adaptations that could be made to the Youth Development Program to produce program improvements? The interview questions asked of the school leader that specifically addressed this research question were questions five and six found in Appendix B. The interview questions asked of volunteers that addressed RQ2 were questions two and four found in Appendix C.

Findings as reported by the school leader.

- Find a way to increase availability of services to all girls.

The school leader had no suggestions to make concerning the improvement of the program offered by the Youth Development Program. She spoke highly of the curriculum, the volunteers, and the results that were being experienced by the girls attending. She did talk about a program that she was trying to start herself on a different day of the week. The idea came to her because some of her students are unable to come on Tuesdays. She described the program she wanted to start, and it seemed to mimic the Youth Development Program; from the curriculum to the activities, to the snacks, and guest speakers.

Findings as reported by the volunteers.

- Changes needed in the curriculum for girls in elementary school.

The curriculum for the Youth Development Program was written years ago by a curriculum designer (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, May 17, 2015). Over the years, it has become necessary to add lessons and revise some of the old lessons. Volunteer 7 reported that she recently added lessons on team building, how to deal with stress, and how to deal with anger. She also stated that she tweaks the lessons almost every time she teaches. She adapted the language from the original curriculum to make it more applicable to the interests and language of middle school girls, and she has added questions to allow the girls time to process the lesson as it is taught.

The volunteers from the elementary school all stated that every lesson had to be adapted. Adaptations mentioned by Volunteer 5 were shortening the lesson and adding more hands-on activities and props to keep the girls' engaged during the lesson.

Volunteer 1 shared that the curriculum was written with middle school girls in mind. Administrators in elementary schools then began asking the administrators of the Youth Development Program to offer groups to the third, fourth, and fifth-grade girls in their schools. Volunteer 1 stated that “Having another curriculum might be helpful when it comes to...um...getting examples of things.” Volunteer 5 said, “I think more curriculum would just be beneficial in the sense that they are starting to come back and trickle through. And we just need to add more for them [speaking of students who continue in the Youth Development Program year after year].” As noted by the comments from the volunteers, adaptations to the curriculum to accommodate the needs of the elementary girls would be beneficial, but none of them felt rewriting the curriculum was necessary. They all mentioned that they felt comfortable making adaptations on their own.

- Behaviors of elementary girls can be problematic.

Five out of the six volunteers in elementary school (83%) mentioned that the behaviors of the girls when picked up for the Youth Development Program group are challenging. The facts that were mentioned that may cause the behaviors to be elevated are that there are no administrators present, the girls are released from class 15 to 20 minutes before the volunteers can arrive to gather them for the group, and the group meets on a Friday at the end of the day. The volunteers adapt the order of the lesson to accommodate the need for the girls to exert some extra energy. A Youth Development Program group usually lasts for one hour, but the elementary school schedule allows girls to be in a group for an hour and fifteen minutes. The extra fifteen minutes is used to serve snacks, review rules, use the bathroom, and come calmly back to their seats.

In previous years, the administrator of the elementary school invited the volunteers of the Youth Development Program to hold group on Thursdays. During the 2017-2018 school year, the day has been switched to Fridays. Teachers can leave at the end of the student day on Fridays, which makes it difficult to depend on school personnel to help with behavioral questions. Finding volunteers to come on Friday afternoons from 3:45-5:00 is also difficult. The lead volunteer is attempting to work with the administrators at the elementary school to get the group switched back to Thursdays for the 2018-2019 school year.

- Lack of parent involvement.

There was only one volunteer that had met or spoken with any of the parents. Research has shown that if parents are appropriately involved in supporting the efforts of volunteers, their child can make more consistent, stable improvements in behaviors and attitudes (Chan et al., 2013; Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). Half of the volunteers (four out of eight) expressed a desire to connect with parents. There were ideas offered by the volunteers, such as holding a special tea and inviting the parents to come for a meet and greet time, inviting parents to observe a weekly group, or arranging a time to meet the parents outside of the school setting. This recommendation will be offered to the administrators of the Youth Development Program to see if it is an idea they want to pursue.

- Benefits of incorporating guest speakers into the schedule more often.

Several volunteers mentioned that the girls were especially attentive when a guest speaker presented. The owner of a local dance studio brings students from the studio to

the elementary school one time each year to reinforce the concepts being taught in the Youth Development Program and to teach the girls dances that help them remember the lessons. The girls talk about Ms. S. and what she presented for weeks after her visit. Volunteer 1 mentioned that she has been attempting to get guest speakers who currently have jobs in professional fields, especially the math and science fields, to visit. She contacted an engineer, an accountant, an attorney, and an author. When the speakers come in, they are asked to share their story of challenges with which they struggled when they were a preteen. When the girls hear stories from women in all walks of life and see that they had struggles like their own, it gives them hope for experiencing a successful life, as well. Realizing that success took determination for each of these women is important for the girls to understand.

- Need to distribute human resources to facilitate expansion of the Youth Development Program.

The Youth Development Program currently serves students in five locations. Two of those locations have at least two volunteers who have been volunteers for several years. Three of the volunteers mentioned that those seasoned volunteers could be spread out to work with new volunteers, thus expanding the number of schools that could receive weekly services from the Youth Development Program. Reorganization of human resources is one of the recommendations that will be made in the final presentation to the primary intended users of this program evaluation.

Questions to address Research Question 2 focused on elements of the program that were not working and adaptations that could be made to encourage success. The

school leader had only positive things to say about the Youth Development Program. Her only suggestion for improvement was to find a way to make the program available for more girls. The volunteers mentioned that the curriculum was written for middle school aged girls, requiring those working in the elementary setting to provide adaptations each week. Behaviors of the girls in the elementary school are sometimes challenging with no support from the school staff, and there is a lack of parental support. Suggestions were made of ways to try to include parents on a more regular basis and the need to schedule guest speakers more often. It was suggested that growth could occur more quickly if the volunteers currently involved were distributed differently. These suggestions will be presented to the administrators of the Youth Development Program.

Research Question 3. Research Question 3 asked: What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of the most important points to consider for the recruitment, training, and support of new volunteers? The interview questions asked of the school leader that specifically addressed this research question were questions seven and eight found in Appendix B. The interview questions asked of volunteers that addressed RQ2 were questions five through eight found in Appendix C.

Findings as reported by the school leader.

- Characteristics needed to be a valued volunteer.

The school leader felt that the most important qualities of a good volunteer were patience, energy, having a fun-loving attitude, and possessing a true passion for the girls. She felt that the volunteers needed to be able to see past the exterior walls put up by the girls and that the volunteers needed to be able to relate to the girls with empathy, perhaps

even having overcome some of the same challenges that are currently being faced by the girls.

- How to recruit new volunteers.

The school leader mentioned the positive results she had experienced with volunteers from the AmeriCorps program.

One I still call to this day, but she's moved and got married. I adored her because she would help, she would relate to the kids and everyone. The ones that I have gotten have been jewels!

When I mentioned to the school leader that some of the volunteers suggested high school girls, she expressed her hesitation with that idea. Her concern was that perhaps the middle school girls would not be open when speaking with high schoolers. This is an important point to keep in mind if high school girls choose to volunteer; it will be important to watch interactions to decide if the high schoolers would be more appropriately placed with the elementary girls.

Findings as reported by the volunteers.

- Characteristics needed to be a valued volunteer.

The volunteers agreed that anyone who decides to work with girls in the Youth Development Program needs to enjoy interacting with children and enjoy watching as changes take place in the girls' lives. They need to be able to step out of their comfort zone and be silly with the girls. The personal values of the volunteers need to align with the values held by the administrators of the Youth Development Program. A point mentioned by several of the volunteers was that new volunteers need to be dedicated.

Volunteers need to be able to commit to one day per week for an entire school year.

Volunteer 7 mentioned how attached the girls get to the volunteers and when a volunteer doesn't show up, the girls are worried about them. If the volunteer is absent without having a good reason, Volunteer 7 believes that the girls feel rejected. Volunteer 7 mentioned that these girls experience a lot of rejection in their lives and to feel that their volunteer has rejected or abandoned them adds another deep wound.

- How to recruit new volunteers.

Finding volunteers was one of the areas with the most variety of suggestions. Everyone agreed that more volunteers were needed. There have been many requests from school administrators and counselors to add Youth Development Program groups in various additional schools throughout the county. Volunteer 7 stated, "They're pursuing us. If we tried, ...we could be in 20 schools right now." Half of the volunteers believe that the administrators of the Youth Development Program could find new volunteers by soliciting help from high school and college students. The various ways suggested for recruiting these young ladies were through organizations to which they belong, such as future teachers, future counselor's clubs, or Christian clubs and organizations. One volunteer felt that new volunteers should only be found from the young women at a local church, although that volunteer also mentioned that the Youth Development Program could not expand its reach much more, as most of the available young women are already volunteering. Another volunteer suggested that new volunteers be found through other churches in the area. These ideas, although quite different philosophies, will be presented to the primary intended users for them to use as they feel are appropriate.

- Training needs for proper preparation to become a volunteer.

Some of the main topics mentioned that should be included in the volunteer training were; the mission and vision of the Youth Development Program, how to teach a lesson, some examples of the types of situations that may occur when working with young girls, how to deal with behaviors that disrupt the group, and basic do's and don'ts of counseling. Almost all the volunteers mentioned the importance of receiving the curriculum at the training, so the new volunteers could review the lessons and be prepared. Seven of the eight volunteers mentioned that one of the best ways they could think of to learn how to prepare to become a volunteer was by shadowing current volunteers. Three of the volunteers felt it would be helpful to offer additional training periodically over the year to reinforce important topics, teach new concepts, or answer questions.

- Support needed for all volunteers

Many of the volunteers mentioned that they felt they were part of a larger support group. They described feeling as though the group of volunteers was a *sisterhood* and they all felt they could call on any of the *sisters* for support at any time. Every volunteer mentioned that they had a mentor with whom they met on a regular basis. The consensus was that this is an important facet of volunteering that needs to be stressed when training new volunteers.

Findings from the discussions concerning the most important things to consider when recruiting new volunteers provided the widest array of ideas. Thoughts ranged from recruiting from such programs as AmeriCorps to contacting students in local

universities, colleges, or high schools. Ideas for characteristics of a good volunteer were shared by both the school leader and the volunteers, many of them similar. All the volunteers had ideas about critical components to include in training, with the ability to shadow a current volunteer being the most often cited. The closeness of the volunteers was mentioned by many, stressing the importance of having a mentor with whom they could communicate concerning questions and concerns. Ideas for recruitment, training, and providing support to new volunteers will be discussed with administrators of the Youth Development Program.

Discrepant Data

The only discrepant data offered was of an opinion base. One of the volunteers stated that she would recommend only finding new volunteers at the church which supports the Youth Development Program. One volunteer mentioned that she felt someone should be involved in the Youth Development Program who is aware of the nonprofit world, to access all resources available to nonprofit organizations. Although not a bad idea, there was only one volunteer that mentioned this thought. One volunteer thought the age of the volunteer was inconsequential, while another volunteer thought the volunteers recruited should be as close to the age of the girls as possible. These various viewpoints will be mentioned while presenting the findings to the administrators of the Youth Development Program. They can then decide about the value of considering the discrepant opinions.

The Accuracy of Data Reported

When conducting qualitative studies, it is important that the researcher reports all information as the participant offered it. To verify that data was recorded accurately, the audio recordings were translated verbatim. I then sent summaries of the interviews to participants for member checks. Triangulation was another technique that was used to verify that the information offered by volunteers matched information offered by the school leader. The data gathered from both the volunteers and the school leader were comparable and themes matched with no discrepancies.

Often the use of reflexivity is needed to assure that no biases are entering the reported data (Gough, 2016). Because of my background in education, I felt it was important to record thoughts both before and after interviews and make use of a peer to debrief. I met with the peer several times and discussed my thoughts as the study progressed. She took the time to read all the transcripts and offered her input as to themes she recognized, how she thought an ideal volunteer candidate would be described according to the responses from the interviewees, and what should be included in training for new volunteers. Her document containing this summary is included in Appendix D.

Summary of Results

The program evaluation was initiated at the request of the director of the Youth Development Program (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, June 27, 2016). This youth development program had been in operation since 2014 with no formal evaluation. A utilization-focused evaluation was used as the framework for this study to provide information that was important to the individuals that

would be implementing the changes (Patton, 2012). The director and the administrators of the Youth Development Program wanted to gather information that would allow them to evaluate the worth of the program and collect ideas for possible changes that could enhance their efforts. After discussion with the administrators, three research questions were established which would provide feedback concerning perceptions of school leaders and volunteers of the Youth Development Program in two school settings. The questions would solicit thoughts about the current operations of the Youth Development Program, ideas for adaptations needed, and suggestions that may encourage the growth of the program.

Research Question 1 attempted to gather information concerning perceptions of implementation of the curriculum for the Youth Development Program and thoughts concerning the program in general. Results of interviews indicated that both the school leader and the volunteers felt that the curriculum is appropriate in meeting the needs of the young girls. Some adaptations are needed when presenting the curriculum to the elementary aged girls, but the volunteers felt equipped to make those adaptations on their own. The order of the lessons is consistent among both groups represented, and volunteers from both groups mentioned the many activities that volunteers incorporate into the lessons. Jones and Deutsch (2013) emphasized the importance of including activities during lessons that are appropriate to the age level of the students being taught. The girls appear to enjoy attending groups for the Youth Development Program, and there were many stories to illustrate positive changes seen in the behaviors and attitudes of the girls who attend.

Research Question 2 sought to find the challenges and some possible adaptations that may be needed to provide a quality program. One difficulty mentioned was concerning behavioral challenges experienced at the beginning of the lessons in the elementary setting. It was noted that the Youth Development Program group in the elementary school is scheduled for a Friday afternoon when staff members can leave; therefore, the staff is not available to assist with behavioral concerns. The lead volunteer is going to speak to the administrator of the school to see if the day for the Youth Development Program can be changed to alleviate some of the difficulties with behaviors. Some suggestions for adaptations that may improve the services offered by volunteers of the Youth Development Program were to incorporate guest speakers into the curriculum more often, to try to encourage parental involvement, and to distribute human resources to make expansion into more schools possible.

Research Question 3 focused on perceptions concerning the most important factors to consider when locating, training and supporting new volunteers. Suggestions were made for institutions from which the administrators of the Youth Development Program could recruit new volunteers. Those ideas included primarily high schools and colleges, along with volunteers from the AmeriCorps program. Qualities that are sought when looking for volunteers included moral values that align with the mission of the Youth Development Program, women with empathetic and caring personalities, and women who love to see positive changes in the lives of young girls and can make a long-term commitment to serving. Many aspects were mentioned when the discussion of training was initiated. Every volunteer mentioned the importance of having ongoing

support from someone seen as a competent advisor, which Bean et al. (2015) also suggested. The main topics to be included in training, cited by volunteers, were supported in the literature (Bean et al., 2015; Deutsch et al., 2013; Iachini et al., 2014). These ideas included the need to convey the vision and mission of the Youth Development Program, a clear presentation of some of the topics that may arise while working with young girls, ways to handle behavioral challenges, and the importance of shadowing current volunteers.

Deliverable to the Primary Intended Users

When presenting information to the primary intended users, the researcher needs to be aware of the culture of the organization (Merriam, 2009). From the first meeting with the administrators of the Youth Development Program, it was evident that the culture of the Youth Development Program is casual, and the administrators are personable and approachable. For this reason, I decided to present the findings from the research and program evaluation informally in a PowerPoint presentation: Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program. Along with presenting summaries of the data gathered, I included many of the stories heard while interviewing both the school leader and the volunteers. The completed presentation: Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program, along with notes can be viewed in Appendix A. A time will be arranged with the administrators of the Youth Development Program that is convenient for them when the short presentation can be made, allowing time for discussion and questions.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The evaluation report: Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program, delineating the key findings of the utilization-focused program evaluation of the Youth Development Program, will be presented to the primary intended users of the organization. This group will include the director and the three administrators who make decisions concerning changes needed for the organization. The Youth Development Program began in 2014 and has had no formal evaluation completed until now. The administrators of the Youth Development Program want to offer a quality program that will create positive changes in the lives of the girls who participate. This evaluation is a result of a request from the director of the Youth Development Program for feedback to help the administrators know how to deliver an excellent program that changes lives (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, June 27, 2016). Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program will address the local need, which was to conduct a program evaluation of the Youth Development Program and include such topics as the purpose of the evaluation, the methodology used, the findings from the interviews, and recommendations for the future. The goal of the evaluation report is to give the administrators some information about the successes of the Youth Development Program so far, to help them recognize possible changes that need to occur, and to present ideas that may facilitate healthy growth of the Youth Development Program.

Rationale

An evaluation report was chosen to deliver the findings of the program evaluation to the administrators of the Youth Development Program. I chose an evaluation report because there was no information available to address the current state of the Youth Development Program. The evaluation report will be presented by using a PowerPoint format which will be offered in an informal setting, allowing much discussion and the opportunity to ask questions throughout the discussion. Presenting the results of the interviews in this format encourages conversations about the positive stories told, giving the administrators an opportunity to experience them.

The volunteers made suggestions for possible adaptations to improve the quality of the program offered to girls. These suggestions will be enumerated on one of the slides for review and discussion with the administrators. I will discuss ideas with participants for recruiting and training new volunteers. One of the most unexpected outcomes of the data analyzed was the suggestion to reorganize the volunteer resources. When presenting the evaluation report, more time will be allotted to this portion of the study to allow for extended discussion. The findings presented in Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program will offer suggestions that could increase the effectiveness of the Youth Development Program and propose ideas that may encourage growth opportunities.

Review of the Literature

The literature review for the evaluation report focused on matters of importance noted during interviews or topics related to recommendations made after reviewing the

data collected. Peer-reviewed journal articles and books examined for this study were found in the Walden University Library's electronic databases. Databases used were Education Source, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Sage Journals, and Thoreau. Key search terms included: *volunteer, volunteer, adolescent girls, training, support, growth, nonprofit, capacity building, and parent involvement*. The research corroborates the belief that parental involvement can make a substantial difference in the success experienced by children involved in afterschool activities. Findings also emphasized the importance of training and support for volunteers in volunteer programs and offered suggestions to encourage successful growth for programs such as the Youth Development Program.

Parental Support

Educators have long tried to get parents to participate in activities that support the daily efforts of teachers in the classroom (Curry & Holter, 2015; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Research supports the belief that students make significantly more progress, both socially and academically, when parents work in conjunction with educators (Chan et al., 2013; Gordon, Downey, & Bangert, 2013). Many believe that children may need volunteers due to the inability or ineptness of their parent to adequately guide their child. Therefore, they may not ask parents to support the volunteering efforts (Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, 2016; Lakind, Atkins, & Eddy, 2015). What appears to be a lack of parent involvement could be a difference in parenting styles or cultural norms according to Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, (2016). Preadolescents often try to break away from the constant guidance of their parent, yet they still need adult support and encouragement

(Meltzer, Muir, & Craig, 2016). Being involved in a volunteering program is often an appropriate way to meet the need of a step toward independence for young girls.

Chan et al. (2013) noted that when the parents can collaborate and assist volunteers, most children will make significant improvements in academic endeavors, show less behavioral difficulties, and experience an increase in self-esteem. For girls involved in the Youth Development Program, support from parents may be as minimal as occasional conversations with the volunteers to discuss current topics being covered or to discuss a challenge the parent has encountered outside of school. Some ideas that were mentioned in the literature to help the parent become comfortable in this new role of involvement were (a) invitations to attend a group to observe, (b) organize a celebration (perhaps a multicultural celebration) that would give the parents time to interact with volunteers and their child, (c) for the volunteer to attend a performance in which the girls who attend the Youth Development Program are involved, or (d) correspond with the parent by way of a quick note in a journal (Curry & Holter, 2015; Finn-Stevenson, 2014). Parents from some cultures find it helpful to participate if friends are already involved, so encouraging the parents already involved to invite their friends may be a successful way to make parents feel welcome (Curry & Holter, 2015). When volunteers have a positive working relationship with parents, the quality of the interaction with the child will be enhanced, thus maximizing the effectiveness of the relationship (Lakind et al., 2015; Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014).

Considerations for Growth of Nonprofits

When pursuing growth in nonprofit organizations, there are important considerations to make concerning the financial impact, personnel needs, and the importance of training to maintain a quality program (Lanspery & Hughes, 2015; Yamada & Gutierrez, 2014). Moore, Riddell, and Vocisano (2015) wrote about scaling up, scaling out, or scaling deep. The owners of any nonprofit organization must decide if they want the work of their organization to impact laws and policies, to impact greater numbers, or to impact cultural roots. The administrators of the Youth Development Program have indicated that their goal is to expand the availability of the Youth Development Program groups to girls throughout the local community (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, September 12, 2017). Moore et al. (2015) would classify this goal as scaling out. Nonprofit organizations that expand using the scaling out method of growth must replicate the program in new locations, deciding what the nonnegotiables are to maintain the integrity of the program and present material with fidelity. Being satisfied with slow, well executed growth is an important tactic that must be considered when using the scaling out method of expansion (Lanspery & Hughes, 2015).

The goal of most nonprofit organizations is the ability to increase positive outcomes for the participants (Fusco, Lawrence, Matloff-Nieves, & Ramos, 2013; Gordon et al., 2013; Lanspery & Hughes, 2015; Minzner, Klerman, Markovitz, & Fink, 2014). Most experts in organizational development have a few essentials that they agree upon when approaching growth for a nonprofit organization. Important components of

growth include (a) the need for a strategic plan, (b) the need for accountability, (c) the importance of training volunteers, (d) the need for at least one person who can oversee and distribute funds, and (e) someone to coordinate and support volunteers (Lanspery & Hughes, 2015; Minzner et al., 2014; Yamada & Gutierrez, 2014). Moore et al. (2015) pointed out that accountability is important when attempting to present the program with fidelity. However, Fusco et al. (2013) warned of the danger of losing the human connection and doing what is right for participants when trying to measure success using numbers to satisfy financial supporters. With this thought in mind, all suggestions for organizational growth must be implemented with the goal of increasing positive outcomes for participants.

Recruiting Volunteers

The growth of nonprofit organizations that depend on the assistance of volunteers is often restrained by the number of volunteers available (Randle, Miller, Ciarrochi, & Dolnicar, 2014). Faith based organizations tend to rely on volunteers from their religious community which limits the amount of assistance available (Yamada & Gutierrez, 2014). Suggestions such as reaching out to local colleges and universities, to high school girls, or to companies whose demographics match that of the volunteers needed were made to expand the volunteer base (Randle et al., 2014). Selecting the right volunteer is important. A failed mentorship can be more detrimental than no mentorship at all (Higley et al., 2016; Weiler, Zarich, Haddock, Krafchick, & Zimmerman, 2014). When talking of the 4Results program, Higley et al. (2016) stated that only about 1 in 50

individuals interviewed were chosen to participate, emphasizing that slow growth with the people who belong is better than expanding quickly and gathering the wrong people.

Many authors spoke of the characteristics possessed by the volunteers which they believed made the volunteers successful. Being open to new experiences and not afraid to try new things even if it was uncomfortable for them, having strong leadership qualities, consistently modeling positive behaviors, getting excited over even small successes seen in youth, and consistently attending group were important characteristics mentioned by fellow volunteers in a large group volunteering program (Donlan, McDermott, & Zaff, 2017). Additional qualities mentioned by other authors were respect, sincerity, commitment, knowledge, maturity, and the ability to see youth from a strength-based perspective (Higley et al., 2016; Joshi & Sikdar, 2015; Weiler et al., 2014). It is easy to see why only 1 in 50 applicants was chosen for the 4Results program when the administrators were trying to locate volunteers that possess even a portion of these qualities (Higley et al., 2016). Even though the position is voluntary, extensive screening is essential for success.

Training New Volunteers

In reviewing the research about successful volunteer programs, almost all the authors mentioned the fact that volunteers need to be trained and that they need to feel supported. The topics to include in training vary from one author to the next, but some of the most often mentioned themes to include in training are (a) the importance of a commitment to participate in the program for a given time, (b) what to expect from the particular group of mentees with whom the volunteer will work, (c) adolescent

development, (d) how to work with groups, (e) active listening, and (f) practice in presenting lessons appropriately (Chan et al., 2013; Higley et al., 2016; McGill, Adler-Baeder, Sollie, & Kerpelman, 2015; Weiler et al., 2014). For after school programs, research has shown that committing for an entire school year increases the likelihood of success for the girls receiving services (Chan et al., 2013; Gordon et al., 2013; Higley et al., 2016). This expectation needs to be voiced during the initial training, so volunteers can evaluate whether they can commit to such an expectation (McGill et al., 2015). If parents are encouraged to participate in the volunteer/mentee relationship, the training staff should offer ideas on how to best involve parents and the benefits when working together as a team (Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, 2016). Each initial training should be fashioned according to the needs and expectations of the group with whom the volunteers will be matched.

Support Needed for Volunteers

Research shows that being involved in purposeful activities related to youth growth often increases the self-esteem of those volunteering (Liang, Lund, Mousseau, & Spencer, 2016; McGill et al., 2015). However, this intrinsic motivation is not enough to keep most volunteers excited about returning for long periods. Another essential mentioned by most authors was the need for the volunteers to feel supported. This support could be offered by administrators of the program, by senior volunteers, or by fellow volunteers (McGill et al., 2015; Higley et al., 2016). When volunteers have a chance to talk with someone about the challenges they have encountered, the successes they have experienced, or questions they may have, they felt supported and valued

(McGill et al., 2015; Higley et al., 2016; Studer, 2016). Clear communication offered by way of newsletters or web-based media increased connectedness for volunteers, helping them recognize their role in a larger community (Yamada & Gutierrez, 2014). Many organizations schedule gatherings to thank the volunteers and allow them time to share stories with their peers. These celebrations offer the volunteers a chance to feel appreciated, supported, and understood (Studer, 2016; Yamada & Gutierrez, 2014). Activities such as the consistent support, frequent communication, and celebrations, give the volunteers confidence, understanding, and connectedness that keeps them coming back week after week (Studer, 2016; Weiler et al., 2014).

Project Description

Resources and Support

The director of the Youth Development Program requested a program evaluation of this youth development program in June 2016 (Director of the Youth Development Program, personal communication, June 27, 2016). The administrators of the Youth Development Program were brought together on September 19, 2017, to discuss what each of them thought was important to consider as I interviewed volunteers and school leaders. They were supportive of the program evaluation and provided contact information for each of the volunteers in the two schools being assessed. Every volunteer was willing to participate in the interview and openly shared experiences and suggestions when asked. The fact that all participants were eager to help and wanted to be involved in making a difference in the outcomes for the Youth Development was encouraging.

After I gathered data and began analyzing the responses, I had an opportunity to share some of the results with the director of the Youth Development Program. Within a week, she had asked three of the current volunteers to accept more responsibility and begin implementing the suggestions which could be executed immediately. One volunteer accepted the responsibility of planning New Mentor Training. To date, two different formats have been tried, yielding approximately 15 additional women who are interested in volunteering. It is reassuring to see the fine tuning that has already taken place. There appears to be no fear of failure, and this volunteer was willing to change the format of the training when she saw certain aspects of the first training did not work.

Another volunteer has taken the responsibility of organizing Mentor Hangouts. The goal is to have one every two weeks over the summer to provide support and additional informal training times (Volunteer 7, personal communication, April 14, 2018). The get-togethers should help the new candidates form relationships and feel a part of the *sisterhood*. Informal training will occur during those get-togethers as seasoned volunteers tell stories. Topics such as how to involve parents and ideas on possible guest speakers will be part of the talk during these informal get-togethers.

The lead volunteer has started the process of reassigning experienced volunteers, to pair them with the new volunteers who will be starting in the fall. With the influx of the new volunteers and restructuring of placement for seasoned volunteers, it is anticipated that at least three new locations can be opened in the fall of 2018. Additional suggestions will be made when the evaluation report: Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program is presented. It will take commitment and extra time on the part

of many, some of whom are not currently as involved, to put all the suggestions into place.

Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program includes a brief background of the need for the program evaluation, the research questions that were agreed upon when meeting with the administrators of the Youth Development Program, and a summary of the literature that was reviewed. I will discuss the method of evaluation and how participants were chosen for the interviews. Information about how the interviews were analyzed will be included and results to each of the research questions as reported by both the school leader and the volunteers will be shared. Because the report is being presented in an informal setting, I will encourage discussion throughout. Many of the stories that were told by the interviewees will be shared with the administrators. The volunteers of the Youth Development Program made suggestions that were shown to be supported by research, thus they were included in the evaluation report. Some recommendations for adaptations have been mentioned to the director of the Youth Development Program and steps toward addressing those changes have begun. I will carefully review the rest of the suggestions with a focus on the reorganization of resources to allow for more efficient operations and expansion of the Youth Development Program.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

When looking at the suggestions in the evaluation report, Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program, there are some potential barriers. Even though research has shown that parental engagement encourages academic, behavioral, and social growth

in preadolescents, the involvement of parents has been limited in both schools in which the Youth Development Program weekly groups are held (Chan et al., 2013; Gordon et al., 2013). Volunteers in the elementary school report that the only contact they have had with the parents has been when they met one or two of them at an open house in the fall. Volunteer 7 reports that in the middle school there are a couple of parents with whom she has recently started communicating via text messages (Volunteer 7, personal communication, November 14, 2017). Georgis, Gokiert, Ford, and Ali (2014) suggested that we look at the strengths of families and then form relationships, remembering what their culture dictates. Even with the best efforts of the volunteers and administrators of the Youth Development Program, it is possible that parents will still choose not to participate.

The Youth Development Program offers groups in schools from August or September until the end of May. Approximately 15 new volunteers have been identified through the two mentor trainings that have already occurred. It is difficult to maintain the excitement of the young ladies who have signed up to volunteer when they must wait all summer to get into the classroom. For some, the Mentor Hangouts will keep the momentum strong, but others may need additional encouragement. Even with the additional volunteers, the Youth Development Program may not be able to accommodate all the requests from school administrators to start new groups. The director of the Youth Development Program will have to decide which schools would be the most urgent to serve. It will be important to remember that maintaining a quality program is more

important than expanding too quickly and not being able to meet the needs of the girls in the schools.

Implementation

During the first meeting with the administrators of the Youth Development Program, it was apparent that the culture of the organization was casual. The initial meeting was held in a small office, with the administrators gathered in a circle in comfortable upholstered chairs. Rather than present a white paper, I decided that the evaluation report should be presented in a PowerPoint format. The evaluation report, Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program, includes 20 slides with notes attached (Appendix A). I will present the slides in a relaxed setting, using a discussion format. I will factor into the schedule ample time for the administrators to talk about the information and ask questions when they see the need. Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program will be presented to the administrators of the Youth Development Program at a time of their convenience. The director of the Youth Development Program responds quickly to text messages, so I will contact her to arrange a convenient time and schedule the use of the conference room at their office.

Roles and Responsibilities

My responsibility will be to offer an evaluation report by presenting Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program to the administrators of the Youth Development Program. This report will summarize the findings of the program evaluation. A PowerPoint format was chosen because the women to whom I will be presenting often share information using this format. The presentation will be done in a

small conference room making the setting more intimate, as there will only be five people present. I will sit at the conference table with them while sharing the findings. Three printed copies of the evaluation report will be available for any of the administrators who want to follow along or take notes. The setting will be casual to allow all participants to feel comfortable in asking questions or making comments. It is my goal to make the presentation a discussion format, thus making the administrators of the Youth Development Program active participants in the evaluation report.

I will offer to present these same findings to the volunteers and the school leader who participated in interviews if that is deemed appropriate by the administrators. It will be the responsibility of the administrators to implement any suggested changes in the Youth Development Program and to continue to recruit and train new volunteers should they decide to expand the volunteer base further.

Project Implications

Social Change Implications

Quality youth development programs have been shown to positively impact the behaviors and attitudes of preadolescents who are a part of them (Brown & Fry, 2014; Deutsch et al., 2016; Leventhal et al., 2015). This program evaluation of the Youth Development Program was conducted to provide feedback concerning the current implementation practices and to make suggestions to the administrators that would highlight areas in which changes could positively affect outcomes. Requests for expansion of the Youth Development Program have been made from school administrators throughout the county who serve in schools with students considered at

risk. The administrators of the Youth Development Program have also been asked to offer training on how to start the Youth Development Program in two locations far from home; Virginia and Jamaica.

The school leader and the volunteers that were interviewed reported that one of the changes noticed in the girls participating in the Youth Development Program was the appearance of an improved self-esteem. Jackman and MacPhee (2017) stated that girls who experience an improved self-esteem show more hope for the future and often limit risky behaviors that may have been exhibited prior to the change in attitude. If the identified changes are implemented, and expansion can occur in these additional locations, many more girls could experience the benefits of lessons learned through the Youth Development Program. With the opportunity to build a strong foundation, it is possible that the Youth Development Program will be able to reach more young girls both in the local area and afar.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

Valuable information is offered to primary intended users when results of the program evaluation are presented to them in a usable manner (Patton, 2015). The data obtained from the program evaluation of the Youth Development Program will be shared with the administrators of the Youth Development Program using the presentation: Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program, to outline pertinent findings. Interviews with both volunteers and one school leader gave insight into the perceptions of the most active participants of the Youth Development Program. This information will be offered to the primary intended users to assist them in making decisions concerning changes that could benefit girls attending groups offered by the Youth Development Program and to make considerations about the growth of the Youth Development Program in the years ahead.

Limitations of this program evaluation were that all data were obtained by gathering information from interviews only. Including other forms of data such as reviewing school records from the girls who participated in groups offered by the Youth Development Program or including surveys from participants in groups may have yielded additional information that would address behavioral, academic, or social changes noted in participants. It was difficult for school leaders to find time to participate in interviews or focus groups, limiting the number of responses from persons observing the Youth Development Program from an outside viewpoint. This was unfortunate, as input from additional school leaders may have given further insight into the final study. Another

limitation is that this program evaluation focused on only two of the sites in which the Youth Development Program offered weekly groups. If the other three sites were included in the data collection, it is possible that additional information would have been gained that could help the administrators make decisions based on all locations, rather than just two.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Conducting a program evaluation that would include findings from all sites offering groups presented by the Youth Development Program would give a more thorough body of information for the primary intended users. An alternate way to conduct the program evaluation would have been to collect data using a mixed-methods approach. Plano Clark (2017) stated that mixed methods studies offer richer insights and more thorough data from which to make decisions for a change. Including surveys, and incorporating data found in school records would offer information from which quantitative statistics could be obtained. Combining this evidence with the qualitative data gained from the interviews and focus groups of volunteers, school leaders, and any parents that may be affected by the Youth Development Program would present the primary intended users with even more diverse information from which to make decisions for the future.

An alternative problem statement could focus on the success of the Youth Development Program by evaluating positive changes seen in the girls participating in the weekly groups. The curriculum could be evaluated for topics and components included; according to best practices suggested for teaching preadolescent girls. Observation of

lessons while being presented would add valuable thoughts about the efficacy with which each lesson was offered in each location and the skill with which it was presented. If data were gathered which focused on results seen in the girls, the quality of the curriculum, and the efficacy and skill with which each lesson was presented, the results could be better generalized to settings in which other groups offered similar curriculums. Having research available which described quality youth development programs may open the door to other organizations that are interested in beginning new endeavors, thus positively affecting more youth in the local area.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change Scholarship

The doctoral journey has been an interesting one. Waiting until retirement to start the doctoral study was a wise decision for me. I admire those that can obtain an advanced degree and continue to work, but that would not have been profitable for me. Trying to accomplish both would not have allowed me to focus adequately on either endeavor. Even as an educator, I have not been a person that loves reading. However, during this process, I have found that reading research excites me. I have a great desire to know more. Many nights were spent looking up, “just one more thing.”

I have never been one to love writing. Scholarly writing was something new to me and took a while to embrace. APA style was not only a mystery but a challenge. This journey began to obtain a degree that would help an organization for which I volunteer. The skills and interests discovered have helped me more than I could have

ever imagined. I am very thankful to have had this opportunity to grow over the past few years and for the curiosity placed in my heart by the hours of research.

Project Development and Evaluation

Before starting the doctoral journey, I considered myself a very detail-oriented person. Breaking down every minute piece of information to create the Data Alignment Tool (DAT) was a challenge. Frequent discussions with my advisor helped me narrow the details until the DAT was a document that guided the rest of the study. I thoroughly enjoyed the data collection process, but then analyzing the data took more concentrated effort. Frequent discussions with a peer reviewer helped focus my thoughts and discover additional appropriate themes. Discussing findings was a new concept for me. However, as I conversed with others about the program evaluation, new insights seemed to awaken within me. Throughout the doctoral process, the most helpful skill learned was to allow others to walk alongside me. Believing that others are interested in what I am learning, and to view reaching out as a strength, not a weakness was a tool that will empower me throughout the rest of my life.

Leadership and Change

Although I was asked to conduct this program evaluation of the Youth Development Program, there are portions of the findings that could be difficult for the owners of the program to hear. It takes a humble leader to listen to constructive criticism and decide to make difficult changes to something that has been her baby for several years. It has been encouraging as I conveyed results to the director of the Youth Development Program during the data collection and analysis process. She has already

incorporated some of the findings into the daily operations of the Youth Development Program. There have been two trainings for new volunteer candidates over the last few months, thus attempting to increase the volunteer base as the administrators of the Youth Development Program try to meet the needs for expansion. Suggestions for topics to include in the training were considered and incorporated into the classes offered. Although the primary intended users have not heard all the findings from the study or heard all the suggestions, they are trying to make changes that will benefit the girls involved in the Youth Development Program with each suggestion heard.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

When implemented well, youth development programs are making positive changes in the lives of young women throughout the world (Mann et al., 2015; Munro, 2014; Thomason & Kuperminc, 2014). The stories of changes which have already taken place in the lives of girls in the two schools involved in this program evaluation were inspiring. The stories indicated that preadolescent girls are learning how to speak up for themselves in an appropriate, respectful manner. They are exhibiting signs of improved self-esteem. Administrators in several additional schools across the county have asked to have the volunteers of the Youth Development Program present to the girls in their schools each week. Incorporating the findings and suggestions from this program evaluation for effective growth strategies should make expansion more efficient while producing a quality program for the young girls in the area. Offering the Youth Development Program in additional schools will provide the opportunity for more girls to be affected by the lessons taught each week.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

In recent years, researchers have been conducting longitudinal studies to follow girls identified with low self-esteem during their adolescent years, into adulthood. These studies indicated that when low self-esteem was identified in adolescent girls, it served as a predictor of depression in adulthood (Orth & Robins, 2014; Steiger, Allemand, Robins, & Fend, 2014). Steiger et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of concentrating on ways to increase the self-esteem of young girls, to help counteract the possibility of depression in adult women. Youth development programs present opportunities for young girls to increase their self-esteem through the many lessons and activities offered (Kuperminc & Thomason, 2013; Mann et al., 2015). Volunteers and the school leader who was interviewed for this program evaluation shared many stories of girls whose behavior, attitudes, and language indicated a significant increase in self-esteem. If the research conducted is accurate, I believe that at least a few of these young ladies may not have to struggle with depression as adults because of the increase in self-esteem experienced early in life.

Thus far, the administrators of the Youth Development Program have taken a cautious attitude toward growth, causing little need for large amounts of financial support. With the possibility of expanding the Youth Development Program into other schools, it is possible that more money will be required to fund the needs of the additional locations. Many businesses that donate to nonprofit organizations freely give when they can see what has been accomplished by that organization (Lansperg & Hughes, 2015; Minzner et al., 2014). Future research to include a mixed methods

approach for the Youth Development Program is recommended. Blind data from the schools including attendance, discipline, and grades for the girls who have attended the Youth Development Program, along with surveys from parents, students, and teachers would offer information that would either encourage sponsorship by local businesses or provide additional data to the administrators of the Youth Development Program emphasizing areas in which to improve.

Conclusion

The purpose of this program evaluation was to assess the curriculum and implementation strategies used during weekly groups of the Youth Development Program. The findings from the evaluation provided suggestions for continued success with curriculum implementation, recruitment, training, and support of volunteers. All participants reported a strong curriculum that was easy to use and many shared stories of positive changes seen in the girls involved in the Youth Development Program. As the data were being analyzed, informal discussions with the director of the Youth Development Program included suggestions made for recruitment, training, and support of volunteers. The director immediately contacted the lead volunteer and discussed ideas of how to start implementing recommendations right away. Assessment of volunteer placement has begun with plans to make changes in the fall, thus allowing the newly recruited volunteers to serve with and learn from veteran volunteers. More detailed data will be shared with the administrators of the Youth Development Program through Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program (Appendix A). It is possible that

more girls can be positively affected by the Youth Development Program if the suggestions bring about the anticipated growth.

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Appendix A: Program Evaluation of a Youth Development Program

PROGRAM EVALUATION OF A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

AGENDA

- Introduction
- Problem
- Methodology
- Findings
- Recommendations
- Discussion

INTRODUCTION

This youth development program is a nonprofit organization, that exists to empower girls by providing them with tools, education and peer-mentorship for living a purposeful, productive life.



Reference:

The Youth Development Program. (2018). Retrieved from the Youth Development Program website

PROBLEM

- First group held in 2014
- Now have five groups in the area
- Administrators unsure of appropriateness of curriculum and implementation
- Administrators unsure of appropriate steps for growth

The first group was held at a residential treatment center in 2014. This group has continued until present time.

Groups are now held at the residential treatment center, three public schools (2 elementary and 1 middle school), and one private school

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of the youth development program's implementation of the curriculum, and program in general?

What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of challenges, and adaptations that could be made to the youth development program to produce program improvement?

What are the volunteers' and school leaders' perceptions of the most important points to consider for the recruitment, training, and support of new volunteers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

<p style="text-align: center;">CHALLENGES FACED BY PRE-ADOLESCENT GIRLS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body dissatisfaction increases • Self-worth decreases • Media emphasizes “thin” • Peer acceptance paramount <p style="text-align: center; color: orange;">May lead to depression and/or disordered eating</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WAYS TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES</p> <p style="text-align: center; color: orange;">Provide Programs that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include stress reduction techniques • Include activities to build self-esteem • Education on body image/satisfaction • Build emotional resilience • Increase social acceptance
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Challenges faced by preadolescent girls:

Body dissatisfaction increases

Ferguson, C. J., Munoz, M. E., Garza, A., Galindo, M. (2014). Concurrent and prospective analyses of peer, television and social media influences on body dissatisfaction, eating disorder symptoms and life satisfaction in adolescent girls. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43(1), 1-14. doi:10.1007/s10964-012-9898-9

Rodgers, R. F., McLean, S. A., & Paxton, S. J. (2015). Longitudinal relationships among internalization of the media ideal, peer social comparisons, and body dissatisfaction: Implications for the tripartite influence model. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(5), 706-713. doi:10.1037/dev0000013

Self-worth decreases

Arens, A. K., Yeung, A. S., Craven, R. G., Watermann, R., Hasselhorn, M. (2013). Does the timing of transition matter? Comparison of German students’ self-perceptions before and after transition to secondary school. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 57, 1-11. doi:10.1016/j.ijer.2012.11.001

Media emphasis on the “thin” ideal

Chrisler, J. C., Fung, K. T., Lopez, A. M., & Gorman, J. A. (2013). Suffering by comparison: Twitter users’ reactions to the Victoria’s Secret fashion show. *Body Image*, 10, 648-652. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2013.05.001

Perloff, R. M. (2014). Social media effects on young women's body image concerns: Theoretical perspectives and an agenda for research. *Sex Roles, 71*, 363-377. doi:10.1007/s11199-014-0384-6

Tiggemann, M., & Slater, A. (2013). NetGirls: The internet, Facebook, and body image concern in adolescent girls. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 46*(6), 630-633. doi:10.1002/eat.22141

Peer acceptance is paramount

Hamlat, E. J., Shapero, B. G., Hamilton, J. L., Stange, J. P., Abramson, L. Y., & Alloy, L. B. (2015). Pubertal timing, peer victimization, and body esteem differentially predict depressive symptoms in african american and caucasian girls. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 35*(3), 378-402. doi:10.1177/0272431614534071

These challenges may lead young ladies to depressive symptoms (Hamlat et al., 2015) or disordered eating habits

Murray, K., Rieger, E., & Byrne, D. (2013). A longitudinal investigation of the mediating role of self-esteem and body importance in the relationship between stress and body dissatisfaction in adolescent females and males. *Body Image, 10*, 544-551. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2013.07.011

To address these problems programs that have proven to be successful include:

Stress reduction techniques

Murray, K., Rieger, E., & Byrne, D. (2013). A longitudinal investigation of the mediating role of self-esteem and body importance in the relationship between stress and body dissatisfaction in adolescent females and males. *Body Image, 10*, 544-551. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2013.07.011

Activities to build self-esteem

Thomason, J. D., & Kuperminc, G. (2014). Cool Girls, Inc. and self-concept: The role of social capital. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 34*(6), 816-836. doi:10.1177/0272431613511329

Education on body image/satisfaction

Yager, Z., Diedrichs, P. C., Ricciardelli, L. A., & Halliwell, E. (2013). What works in secondary schools? A systematic review of classroom-based body image programs. *Body Image, 10*(3), 271-281. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2013.04.001

Build emotional resilience

McDaniel, S., & Yarbrough, A. M. (2015). A literature review of afterschool volunteering programs for children at risk. *The Journal of At-Risk Issues, 19* (1), 1-10.

Ullrich-French, S., Cole, A. N., & Montgomery, A. K. (2016). Evaluation development for a physical activity positive youth development program for girls. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 55*, 67-76. doi:10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2015.12.002

How to increase social acceptance

Sakhat, Z. (2017). Butterflies. *Social Work with Groups, 40*(4), 308-314. doi:10.1080/01609513.2016.1217481

QUALITATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION

- Interviewed participants - two public school locations
 - Elementary
 - Middle School
- Held conversations about participant's thoughts about:
 - What is working
 - What is NOT working
 - How to find volunteers
 - Training needed

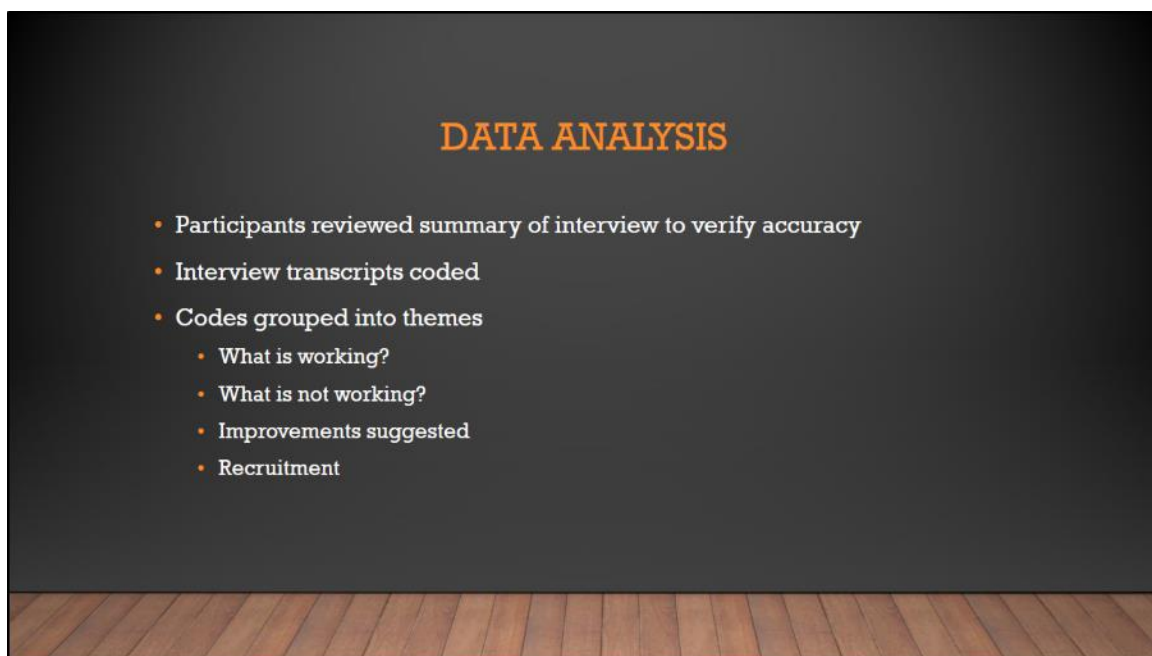
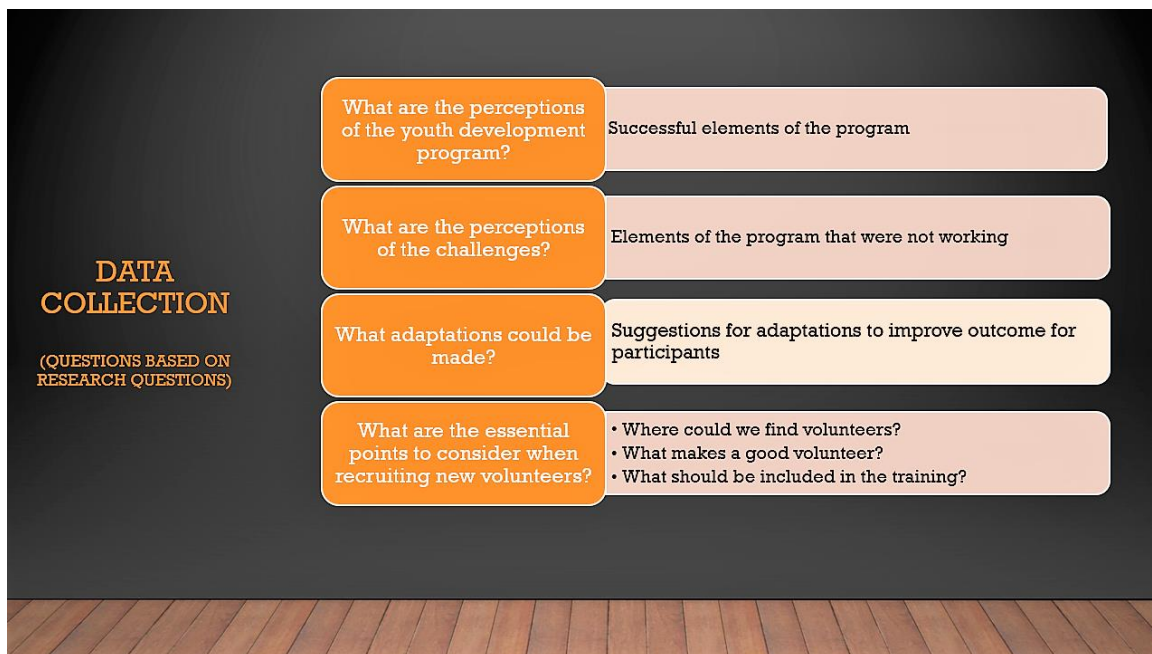
PARTICIPANTS

- Purposeful selection of participants
- Eight volunteers from the Youth Development Program interviewed
- One school employee interviewed
 - (18 invited to participate – one available)
- Voluntary participation
- Anonymity assured

Eight volunteers were given the opportunity to participate in interviews. All eight volunteers agreed to take part. Two interviewees were former volunteers, the rest were current volunteers. Two volunteers worked in both schools. The elementary school had six volunteers that shared information. The middle school had four volunteers that participated.

18 school personnel were invited to participate in the study. They were sent at least two emails explaining the study and inviting them to be a part of it. One administrator agreed to participate by mail. After gaining approval from IRB, the request to sign the consent form was sent twice with no further response from that administrator. The final result was that only one school employee was able and willing to take part in an interview. This person told me that she gathered information from a colleague that worked with the Youth Development Program last year and was incorporating those responses into the answers, as well.

Circumstances such as Hurricane Irma damaging and causing school closures, Hurricane Maria causing an influx of students and employees from Puerto Rico, along with Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays caused interruptions and roadblocks that could not be helped. School staff seemed to be involved in many extra responsibilities that prevented them from participating in interviews or focus groups.



I used a data analysis program called MAXQDA which organized the codes according to category. Responses to each category could easily be seen and analyzed.

FINDINGS

What are the perceptions of the youth development program?

As reported by school personnel

- Lessons - well planned
- Curriculum - appropriate for the needs of the girls
- Activities FUN!
- Other teachers recommend girls for the Youth Development Program
- Teacher reminds girls of how they should act as “lovely girls” and they respond appropriately
- Teacher relates stories of change in girls
- Bus driver reports improvement in girls’ behaviors

Perceptions of the Youth Development Program:

As reported by school personnel

- Lessons - well planned
- Curriculum - appropriate for the needs of the girls
- Activities FUN—**girls love them!**
- Other teachers recommend girls for the Youth Development Program
- **When girls start misbehaving**, Teacher reminds girls of how they should act as “lovely girls” and they respond
- Teacher relates stories of girls who have changed since being in this group (**Very tough girl who showed no interest but kept coming back...finally opened up and shared her heart. Quiet girl with learning deficit that NEVER spoke in class—making friends—beams at thought of having friends**)
- Bus driver reports improvement in girls’ behaviors (**to volunteer**)

FINDINGS

What are the perceptions of the youth development program?

As reported by volunteers

- Girls love to come to group
- Reflections about changes seen in specific girls
- Most of mentors (75%) said that the girls open up as the year progresses
- Mentors feel very well supported
- Mentoring with the Youth Development Program = “sisterhood”

Perceptions of the Youth Development Program

As reported by volunteers

- Girls love to come to group—many come year after year
- **In elementary – 14/16 are repeats from previous years**
- Reflection about specific girls indicate **changes in behaviors (bullying stopped, quiet girls speaking out and making friends, indifferent girl deciding what she wants to do with her life)**
- Most of volunteers (75%) said that the girls open up as the year progresses **(One reason that committing to be a volunteer for an entire year is important)**
- Volunteers feel very well supported. **Many mentioned fact that all volunteers HAVE a mentor. If they cannot get answer from someone in their group, they have a mentor to whom they can reach out.**
- **They feel as though the volunteering community is like a *sisterhood*.**

FINDINGS

What are the perceptions of the challenges?

- Curriculum written for Middle School girls
- Girls who return to the Youth Development Program have heard the lessons
- Having enough help
- Lack of commitment
- Behavior (in elementary setting, especially)
- Parent involvement
- Budget

Perceptions of challenges:

Curriculum was written for middle school girls. **It must be adapted for elementary** (*lessons may be too long, or the material is too advanced, activities and examples are for older girls*). **Although it takes time, all the volunteers are willing to make those adaptations**

Because some of the girls have been in the Youth Development Program for several years, they have heard the lessons and **examples (new examples would be helpful)**

Having enough volunteers to meet the **requests from different organizations/schools**

When a volunteer is NOT committed to **attending weekly or for the entire year**

Behavior is sometimes a challenge (especially in the elementary school) **(63% of volunteers indicate this)**

Parent involvement is **nonexistent in the elementary school and limited in the middle school**

Lack of **understanding** concerning budget (or lack of available money) may prohibit **certain activities that would be beneficial to the girls (or cause some volunteers to pay from their own budget)**

FINDINGS

What adaptations could be made?

- Expand curriculum and/or activities
- Schedule more guest speakers
- Parent involvement events to gain support (or at least awareness) from parents
- Distribute mentors, so as to use volunteer resources wisely
- Make “lead mentor” in each location aware of available budget

Adaptations:

Expand curriculum and/or activities **to address elementary needs and examples**

Schedule more guest speakers **(half of the volunteers mentioned the positive response to guests)**

Attempt to incorporate a parent involvement event (50% of volunteers mentioned this) (tea with meet and greet, Piccolo Coffee, observe a group, perhaps personal contact) to gain support (or at least awareness) from parents

Distribute volunteers, to use volunteer resources wisely

Make “lead volunteer” in each location aware of available budget

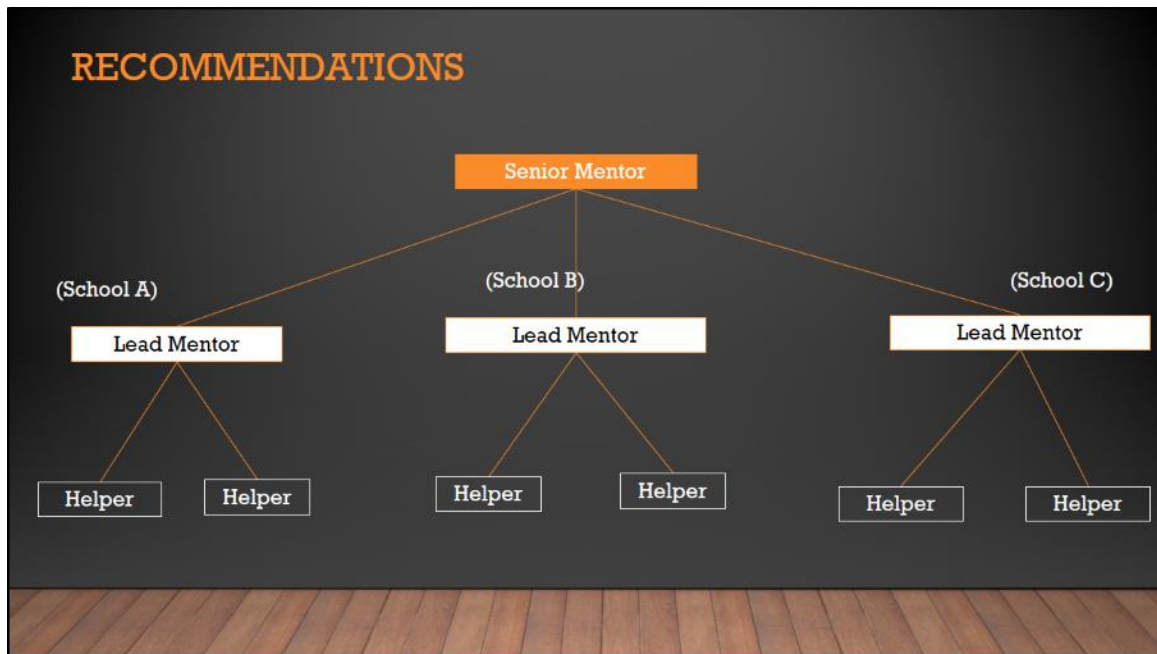
**Where to find:**

AmeriCorps,
Local colleges or universities (counseling program, education program, or Christian clubs),
High Schools (Christian organizations)



Thoughts about what Training should include:

- Vision and mission of the Youth Development Program
- Discussion about topics that may arise and how to handle them (**examples of topics that have come up**)
- Rules concerning **things to report and to whom**
- How to deal with behaviors
- **review curriculum and provide curriculum before volunteering**
- Demonstration of typical weekly group
- **Chance to shadow a volunteer** and observe a group
- Practice **in a safe environment with feedback provided before teaching**
- **Encourage each volunteer to have a mentor**



Organizational structure

Senior Volunteer would oversee all groups (until the program grows too large for one person to coordinate)

Lead Volunteers would be in the schools or facilities as the “expert” and would be doing much of the teaching/planning

Helpers would be those who are not yet mature enough or confident enough to lead a group on their own. They would be small group leaders and assist during group activities. (not limited to two)

The slide features a dark grey background with a wooden floor texture at the bottom. The title 'RECOMMENDATIONS' is centered at the top in orange. Below it, on the left, is an orange box containing the text 'Senior Mentor'. To the right of this box is another orange box containing a bulleted list of four items.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Senior Mentor

- Disperse current human resources
- Develop structured training for new mentors
- Distribute yearly budget for each location
- Schedule regular meeting times for Lead Mentors

Senior Volunteer **would be liaison between administrators of this youth development program and volunteers** and would be responsible for:

- Dispersing current human resources--Pair seasoned volunteer/newer volunteer
- Developing structured training for new volunteers
- Distribute yearly budget for each location to lead volunteer
- Schedule regular meeting times for Lead Volunteers **to share & collaborate**



RECOMMENDATIONS

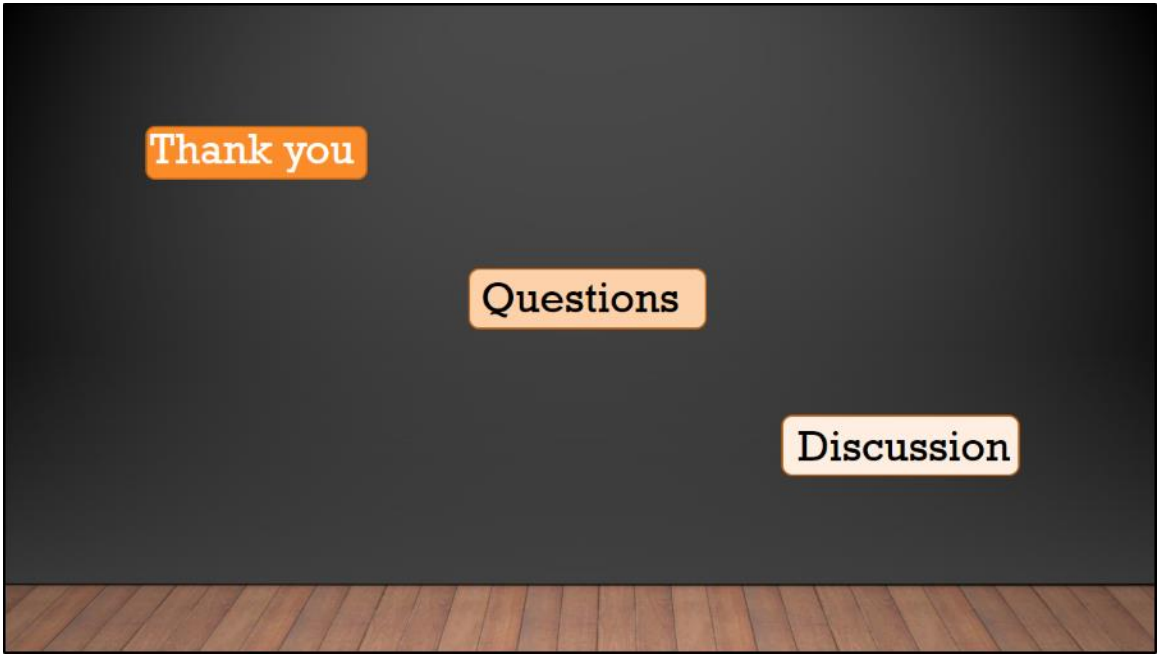
Lead Mentor

- Manage budget
- Schedule guest speakers
- Provide opportunities for parents to meet mentors
- Add to curriculum
- Gather materials as needed
- Meet with Senior Mentor on regular basis

Lead Volunteers would:

- Manage budget **for location**
- Schedule guest speakers
- Attempt to offer opportunities to meet parents (**Mom and daughter tea, invite Piccolo Coffee to serve parents, meet and greets of any kind, home visits**) [to gain support or at least awareness from parents]
- **Additional ideas/lessons for younger girls, record new lessons attempted that work well**
- Assist in gathering materials needed for lessons
- Be available to meet with Senior Volunteer on regular basis

Senior Volunteer will meet with lead volunteers on regular basis to assist with above responsibilities



Thank you

Questions

Discussion

Appendix B: Questions for Interviews with School Leaders

1. Describe your experiences while working with the volunteers of the Youth Development Program.
2. Please describe your experiences with weekly groups.
3. What feedback have you heard concerning the Youth Development Program's overall program implementation?
 - a. What feedback have you heard from teachers concerning the Youth Development Program?
 - b. What feedback have you heard from parents concerning the Youth Development Program?
 - c. What feedback have you heard from the girls concerning the Youth Development Program?
4. Describe your thoughts on the curriculum for the Youth Development Program.
 - a. What are the strengths of the Youth Development Program's curriculum?
 - b. What are the weaknesses of the Youth Development Program's curriculum?
5. What challenges have you encountered with the Youth Development Program?
6. What suggestions do you have to improve the Youth Development Program?

- a. What suggestions do you have to improve the Curriculum?
 - b. What suggestions do you have to improve Implementation?
 - c. What suggestions do you have to improve the quality of services offered by the Youth Development Program?
7. What characteristics (personalities or skills) do you feel are important for volunteers of the Youth Development Program to possess?
 8. What ideas can you suggest for finding quality volunteers?

Appendix C: Questions for Interviews with Volunteers of the Youth Development
Program

1. Please describe a typical Youth Development Program Group.
2. What are the strengths and weakness of the Youth Development Program's program implementation?
 - a. What challenges have you encountered with the Youth Development Program's program implementation?
 - b. Is there any additional information you would like to share concerning the Youth Development Program's program implementation?
3. Please describe how the curriculum provided by the Youth Development Program is implemented at your location.
 - a. What are students' comments regarding the curriculum?
 - b. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Youth Development Program's curriculum?
 - c. What suggestions do you have for changes in the Youth Development Program curriculum?
4. What suggestions do you have to improve the quality of services offered by the Youth Development Program?
5. What characteristics (personalities or skills) do you feel are important for volunteers of the Youth Development Program to possess?
6. What ideas can you suggest for finding quality volunteers?

7. Describe your idea of an *ideal* training for those desiring to become a volunteer with the Youth Development Program.
8. What support do volunteers of the Youth Development Program currently experience?
 - a. What additional support do you feel should be provided?

Appendix D: Summary of Findings from Interviews (as Reported by Peer Reviewer)

Table of Themes:

Themes		% of responders	Notes
1	Typical Youth Development Program format consists of the following: snack, game, lesson plan, small group activity	100	there is some variation in order of events, but overall format is the same
2	Report that students open up as the year progresses	75	this includes being more vulnerable, outgoing, talkative, change in behavior
3	Observe participants developing friendships within group	50	including anecdotes of girls who self-report having friendships because of the Youth Development Program
4	Student behavior can be challenging	63	disciplinary action can be difficult
5	Anecdotal stories illustrating change in participant behavior after attending the Youth Development Program	63	specific stories, detailing a significant change in behavior of the participants
6	Students self-report that they enjoy attending a group	50	Attendance stays consistent (minus one outlier, where attendance dropped over 50% due to a change in meeting day)
7	Feel Supported by the Youth Development Program	100	have their own mentors, able to get support from other volunteers, open communication with the Youth Development Program leadership and BAND
8	Unfamiliar with curriculum prior to becoming volunteer	88	familiar with overarching goals and themes, prepared lesson plans based on that knowledge, all prior to having curriculum
9	Did not receive formal training through the Youth	100	learned primarily through observation and prior experience

	Development Program prior to becoming a volunteer		
10	Adapts curriculum to meet group need	100	no elementary school curriculum available
11	Wants to develop relationships or connection w/ parents of participants	50	responders shared ideas for events and ways to communicate w/ parents
12	Expressed need for more volunteers	100	alignment on need to scale program
13	High School/ College population ideal pool for recruitment	50	candidate pool for volunteers
14	Hosting guest speakers adds value to the group	50	students are more engaged
15	Dance troop and Sarah have visited group and it adds value	37	students talk about it for weeks after
16	Volunteer-volunteer community is close knit, communicating regularly through BAND	50	volunteer community is like a 'sisterhood'
17	Would like volunteer community to establish regular cadence of meeting and sharing best practices and stories	50	want to meet more often with the Youth Development Program volunteer community as a whole

Description of Ideal Youth Development Program Volunteer Candidate:

- The ideal volunteer is dedicated, able to commit to their weekly Youth Development Program group for an extended period of time (preferably 1 school year), for approximately 2 hours/ week
- Likes interacting with children and being an influencer for girls ages 8- 19 (including either elementary, middle or high school)
- Personal values align with the Youth Development Program's brand and code of conduct
- Excited to see positive change in city, particularly for young girls in school system
- Able to step outside her comfort zone e.g. being silly with the students by participating in dance, sharing stories of triumph in their own lives and opening up to girls in group

The Youth Development Program Training should include:

- Workshop on the Youth Development Program's foundation and principles
- Observation of group
- Review of curriculum
- Practice teaching and receiving feedback
- How to respond to topics that might come up (divorce, rape, abuse)
- Guidance on when to report information shared in group by student