

# Program Evaluation Executive Summary



## Youth Development Competencies Program



# YDCP Program Evaluation – Executive Summary

## I Overview

The Youth Development Competencies Program (YDCP) works to empower Russian youth and develop their competencies to succeed and contribute as professionals and citizens by facilitating the replication and expansion of programs in line with the best practices in positive youth development (PYD). IREX designed this program in response to a request from USAID, and has implemented the program since 2008. In 2010, Social Impact was hired to conduct a program results assessment using an experimental/comparison group evaluation approach to determine the impact of this initiative.

Through this evaluation methodology, YDCP was found to significantly improve youth participants' citizenship, personal, social, and professional competencies; these competencies have a direct correlation not only to a decrease in destructive behaviors among youth, but also to an increase in the positive contributions that youth can make to the development of their society.<sup>1</sup> Participation in the program led to notably increased levels of engagement, empowerment, and tolerance across all geographic regions and program models, including a nearly doubled rate of involvement in community activities. Participant responses were consistently more favorable than those of their comparison group counterparts throughout all areas of program interventions. YDCP was particularly successful in involving youth in non-traditional activities<sup>2</sup> and in building vocational competencies. There is a clear and attributable effect of the YDCP program, despite the limitations of this assessment.

### **A: History and Program Overview**

IREX designed YDCP in response to a request from USAID, in an effort to consolidate disparate investments made by USAID and other donors so that youth projects focused on competency building could be replicated throughout Russia. The program aims to support young people in developing the skills, attitudes, and abilities they need to become successful adults and active citizens by engaging them in addressing community needs.

The nurturing of competencies for this generation will enable them to become productive and thoughtful citizens and will build human capital within the country in a sustainable manner. The development of

### **YDCP Program Impact Highlights**

- Nearly 98% of program participants reported involvement in a community improvement process or other community service, compared to approximately 50% of the comparison group
- YDCP participants were two to four times more likely than non-participants to have had interactions with local or regional government representatives
- Nearly 70% of program participants responded that their involvement in the program helped them to obtain professional skills
- Program participants demonstrated significant increases in reported ability to interact positively with peers

<sup>1</sup> "The Power of Assets," Search Institute. <http://www.search-institute.org/research/assets/assetpower>

<sup>2</sup> Non-traditional activities are considered non-traditional in the Russian context, and are defined as working with youth with disabilities, promoting tolerance, protecting children and youth's rights, and other activities not related to athletics and arts and crafts.

creative, empowered, engaged, and problem-solving citizens will ensure a more stable youth environment in the country, and will contribute to the more overarching development goals in the region.

By facilitating the replication and expansion of programs in line with the best practices in positive youth development, YDCP aims to empower youth and develop their personal, professional, and social competencies.

To achieve the stated objectives, YDCP utilizes two key models of youth activity: the Youth-Driven Model and the Community Schools Model. Together, they seek to engage and inform the youth sector in Russia, expanding the reach of successful programs while empowering young people through peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. As part of YDCP, these two models were implemented by youth-oriented organizations in ten regions throughout Russia.

### **B: Underlying Theory – Why Support Youth Competency Development?**

YDCP chose models for replication based on their alignment with positive youth development practices. The criteria for selection of models included: success in competency-building for youth, a focus on youth empowerment, commitment to mentoring adapters<sup>3</sup>, and proven sustainability in attracting and retaining youth leaders – all of which are in line with best practices in positive youth development (PYD).

PYD theory emerged in the 1990s in the United States and aims to empower youth to successfully transition to adulthood through broad support and specific strategies. Tenets of PYD include the following: a focus on assets rather than deficits; approaching youth as a resource rather than a problem; and focusing on holistically nurturing skills and competencies rather than on solving specific problems. PYD empowers youth in all stages of program assessment, planning and implementation, while responding to the needs of this population. There is an emphasis on positive outcomes, collaboration, and inclusiveness. Furthermore, PYD looks to engage the whole community in supporting youth development.

PYD has been applied successfully around the world to build youth competencies. Extensive research on PYD in the U.S. has demonstrated that young people with strong ‘competencies’ are not only significantly less likely to engage in high risk behavior (including drug use, alcohol abuse, and violence), but are also significantly more likely to remain on a path to make constructive contributions to society (indicators include remaining in school, maintaining good health, exhibiting tolerance for diversity, and on-going community leadership).<sup>4</sup> To ensure an economically and socially strong society, the rising generation must be prepared to contribute in a positive, meaningful way; PYD is the catalyst to create these attitudes and behaviors in the young generation.

### **C: Types of Programs Replicated**

In order to appeal to a broad spectrum of youth and reflect regional priorities, the project models cover a wide variety of themes. Some facilitate direct communication between young people and adult decision-makers. The **Children and Youth Rights Council** allows school students to poll the opinions of their peers and bring the results to the attention of local and regional government decision makers, while **Focus of Attention** features community “talk show” events that facilitate frank discussions between youth and adults on topical issues.

YDCP also features models that promote ethnic tolerance, respect for diversity and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in after-school activities for young people. During the course of the **Cameras for Kids** project, children with and without disabilities work together on photojournalism projects and discover how

---

<sup>3</sup> *Adapters* are youth organizations who choose to pilot and use YDCP model programs, with support from YDCP.

<sup>4</sup> The Search Institute. “The Power of Assets.” <http://www.search-institute.org/research/assets/assetpower>.

much they have in common. Other models provide young people with practical vocational skills and career opportunities. The **Real World Business** model provides young people with the opportunity to complete real tasks for local businesses, while **Career Networking Center** has established much-needed ties between educational institutions and potential employers.

Other YDCP models engage young people in the design and implementation of local community development projects. The **Community Schools** program implemented in Tomsk, Murmansk, and Kursk, for example, teaches its young participants to conduct needs assessments, and to collaborate with their parents and teachers in improving local conditions.

## **2. Results**

### **D. About the Program Results Assessment**

In May of 2010, IREX hired Social Impact to aid in the design and implementation of a program results assessment of the YDCP initiative. As YDCP aims to build competencies through the development of social, personal, and professional skills, the two organizations recognized the need to develop and administer a Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) survey to determine program impact and attribution.

The KAP survey was designed to assess the level of development of personal and professional competencies and skills through proxy questions within the program's target audience: youth living within the selected geographic regions. Participants were asked to respond to a number of open and closed-ended questions. For certain questions, this included rating the level to which they agreed with a number of statements; and for others it entailed stating how the respondent would act in a given hypothetical situation. The survey intended to identify the preliminary impacts of the project, as well as to build understanding of the project's progress in various program components. Questions were formulated in a manner which best allowed data to feed into indicators – including both 'hard' and 'soft' questions to determine thresholds of areas such as tolerance.

The survey was administered to a group of 590 participants involved in implementing the various YDCP models, as well as to 590 young people who were not involved in YDCP; in total, there were 1180 respondents in the experimental and comparison groups. Because each group was nearly identical in demographic composition, this methodology allowed Social Impact and IREX to determine the extent to which participation in YDCP was able to achieve the intended impacts, and to what extent changes were attributable to participation in the program.

The use of KAP surveys and similar assessment methodologies for youth programming is largely unknown in Russia. In contrast with more traditional qualitative assessments that merely capture participant satisfaction, a KAP survey attempts to quantitatively measure the success of YDCP in achieving its stated objective – transmitting youth competencies to its program participants – using control and experimental groups. It goes beyond measuring program outputs (such as the number of people trained, and participant satisfaction) to determine outcomes and impact (e.g. changes in behavior and knowledge). As a result, the analysis addresses the notion of YDCP's impact on its participants, as well as the attribution of observed changes to YDCP. As an approach new to Russia for assessing youth programs, this evaluation methodology could serve as a model for other program evaluations, and can also assist local government and organizations in the evaluation of their own investments in youth development.

Distribution of the questionnaire was implemented by Regional Coordinating Organizations (RCOs) in the targeted regions of the evaluation. Participants were gathered to complete the survey, with IREX Moscow office and RCO staff providing instruction and clarifications. The quantitative aspect of the assessment was complemented by qualitative data in the form of open-ended questions and seven focus group discussions. These focus groups were implemented to clarify any questions emerging from survey results, and therefore the questions were developed based on initial survey findings. This component utilized participatory

methodologies through the training of young program participants to organize and moderate focus groups to build youth capacity in this area and facilitate further discussion. All quantitative and qualitative data was triangulated, coded, and analyzed by Social Impact staff following its collection.

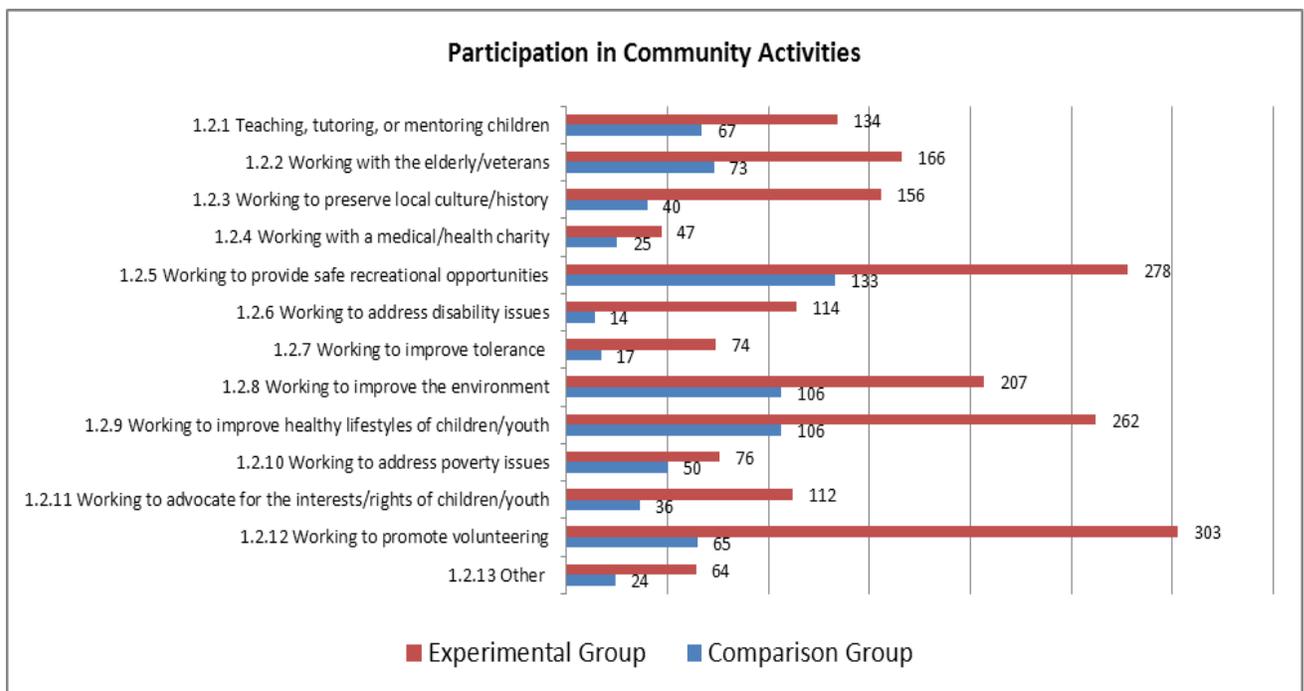
It is important to note the limitations of the assessment, particularly the potential for self-selection bias and the lack of substantive baseline data. Because the experimental group members were comprised of those who had already taken initiative to become involved in YDCP, it is likely that they would have started with higher levels of various competencies than their comparison group counterparts. The use of a comparison group and experimental group served as an imperfect means to determine impact that could be attributed to participation in the program. To address this limitation, non-program-related leadership was accounted for in statistical calculations in order to best determine if the non-program-related leadership or program participation was the cause for improved competencies.

### E: Analysis of Major Impact

Participants in the YDCP program consistently demonstrated higher citizenship competencies<sup>5</sup> compared to those who did not participate, and YDCP was able to build upon interests and innovation to engage youth in non-traditional activities. The YDCP program appeared to have the most significant impact on youth involvement in the community, through both community service activities and engagement with local or regional government. Youth who participate actively in their communities are not only less likely to engage in destructive behavior; they are also more likely to build professional skills, and are positioned for a future of constructive civic engagement.

Nearly 98% of YDCP participants reported involvement in a community improvement process or other community service (far exceeding the 60% target), compared to approximately 50% of the comparison group. However, the response rate may reflect the nature of the

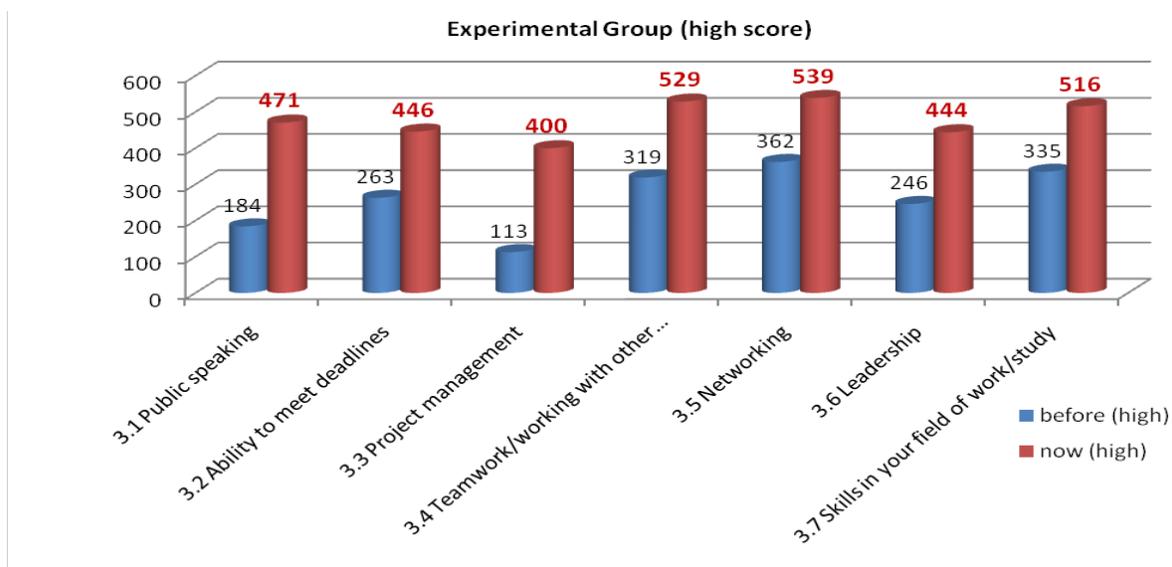
No, I did not participate in any community service activity in the last 12 months	
Experimental group	13
Comparison group	284



<sup>5</sup> Citizenship competencies can be defined as leadership, engagement with government, community activism, and a sense of personal agency (the belief on the part of an individual that he/she can make a difference in the community).

intervention, in that YDCP participants were required to participate in community service. Further, the experimental group demonstrated nearly twice the amount of involvement in activities (including school clubs and sports teams) and nearly three times the amount of involvement in community service activities. YDCP youth not only displayed higher levels of general activity participation, but they exhibited an increased interest in community service and involvement, typically in non-traditional youth activities, relative to youth who did not participate in the program.

Furthermore, program participants experienced significantly higher levels of engagement with local or regional government and a greater sense of their ability to work with adults to solve community problems. YDCP participants were two to four times more likely to have had interactions with local or regional representatives within the past year. Further, youth in the program developed a stronger sense of their ability to work with adults and to contribute to the resolution of community problems. The program was found to have a significant effect on this perception even among older youth who naturally displayed greater confidence in their ability to work with adults. In addition, YDCP participants consistently demonstrated higher levels of both concern and knowledge about challenging issues, such as juvenile justice, poverty, alcohol abuse, and quality of education. YDCP participants have a greater awareness of community challenges and an increased sense of their ability to work with local adults and leaders to solve these problems.



As stated earlier in this report, YDCP focuses on providing young people with the skills that they will need to become successful adults. It is therefore of great interest to note that nearly 70% of all experimental group participants responded that their involvement in the program helped them obtain professional skills due to acquired contacts (networking) and more finite skills and knowledge. There are particularly notable increases in public speaking and project management competencies. YDCP participants' ability to logically and clearly give explanations and responses was also significantly higher than those respondents who did not participate in the program.

The Youth Development Competencies Program also aimed to facilitate the development of personal and social competencies. These competencies refer to the ability of youth to develop positive methods of interaction with others, and to develop behaviors and outcomes valued within one's culture. YDCP participants consistently demonstrated significant increases in positive peer interaction in nearly every category. Participants developed the ability and motivation to respond accordingly to surrounding social systems, an understanding of how to deal with emotions, and to develop friendships and relationships

through communication, cooperation, and negotiation. Focus group responses also indicated an increase in adaptability and personal responsibility.

Social competencies include not only the ability to interact effectively with one's immediate peer group, but also with a larger group of more diverse individuals. Promoting tolerance in this large and ethnically diverse country is indeed one of the main challenges facing Russian educators. The YDCP program has been able to make some headway in this rather sensitive area, as program participants consistently and significantly responded more positively to questions regarding diversity acceptance than comparison group counterparts. They also displayed a comparatively higher level of cultural tolerance in their selection of friends and acquaintances, associating with more representatives of different religious and ethnic groups. In spite of these improvements, however, participants demonstrate a significant need for further development in this area. Participant responses still echoed some of the intolerant attitudes towards migrants and minority religious groups that can be observed in the general population. Given the historical and widespread social background of this type of thinking, a number of highly focused interventions would be required to significantly lower its effects.

#### **F: Highlights, Recommendations, Closing**

The approach and processes taken by YDCP are likely much of the cause for the consistently higher results in achieving YDCP objectives by the experimental group than by their comparison group counterparts, including higher levels of leadership, tolerance, and better logical explanation of their answers. There is a clear and attributable effect of the YDCP program, despite some potential self-selection bias, with significant development of the comparison group's measured competencies. A major success is in the area of youth engagement, particularly in the ability of the initiative to involve youth in non-traditional activities. Similarly, program interventions which offered participants practical professional and vocational skills were regarded highly and thought to be extremely effective by the participants.

Enhanced emphasis on youth empowerment and problem-solving will be essential in ensuring that the competencies obtained throughout YDCP are applied following program completion. Similarly, should the program hope to influence youth at a stronger or deeper level with respect to areas such as tolerance of diversity, the initiative must work to create personal bonds between participants and those from other backgrounds. Of course, these aspects of the program should be considered in light of the cultural context in which they take place. Finally, since females performed at a significantly higher rate in this assessment, YDCP should look to involve young males more in its activities, and potentially modify certain activities to facilitate the development of boys' competencies.

YDCP has produced a significant and attributable impact on youth participants and their development of a number of personal, social, and professional competencies. As it aimed to influence diverse competency areas in a cultural environment where such approaches were innovative, this is a particularly notable achievement. Future initiatives should aim to take advantage of these successes, and build upon the approaches utilized, while ensuring progress in those areas identified that demonstrate further need.

Since 1992, **USAID** has devoted more than \$2.6 billion to Russia's development. Today, USAID supports projects in the areas of health, civil society, rule of law, local governance, and conflict mitigation. USAID is also building alliances with Russian government agencies and the corporate sector to mobilize new resources and expand the each and impact of successful development models.

**IREX** is an international nonprofit organization providing thought leadership and innovative programs to promote positive lasting change globally. We enable local individuals and institutions to build key elements of a vibrant society: quality education, independent media, and strong communities. To strengthen these sectors, our program activities also include conflict resolution, technology for development, gender, and youth.

Founded in 1968, IREX has an annual portfolio of over \$60 million and a staff of over 400 professionals worldwide. IREX employs field-tested methods and innovative uses of technologies to develop practical and locally-driven solutions with our partners in more than 100 countries.

**Social Impact** is a global social enterprise dedicated to helping international agencies, civil society and governments become more effective agents of positive social and economic change. SI provides a full range of innovative management consulting, technical assistance and training services to strengthen international development programs, organizations and policies. SI works across sectors to reduce poverty; improve health, education and the lives of women and children; promote peace and democratic governance; strengthen civil society; foster economic growth; and protect the environment.

Particular areas of expertise include monitoring and evaluation, project and program management, gender mainstreaming, and organizational capacity building. SI's evaluation experiences are extensive, ranging from impact evaluations to participatory and empowerment evaluations at the local, national, and global levels.

This report is made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the sole responsibility of IREX and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

