Peer-Led Professional Development and Mentorship: Reinventing Youth Workforce Development

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A Focus on Peer-Led Mentorship

Peer-Led Mentorship among Museum Youth

As an individual progresses through the Youth Workforce Development Program, they gain valuable insight into being a youth member of the Museum community. This insight can then be applied to mentor fellow youth who are entering the Museum and engaging the career ladder. Program Assistants have a unique opportunity to mentor Summer Youth Interns by co-leading weekly Workshops and planning social events. As former Summer Youth Interns themselves, Program Assistants can better mentor and lead workshops due to their shared past experiences.

Peer-Led Mentorship among Partner Institutions

Museum youth have the opportunity to learn from and share their experiences with other youth and adults in neighboring institutions. When youth from other institutions visit the Summer Youth Internship Workshops, interns have the opportunity to model what they have learned through their workshops by leading activities to build community among their peers in Greater Boston.

Collecting Youth Feedback to Improve Future Youth Experiences

Each summer, Program Assistants from Youth Programs create a survey for the Summer Youth Interns to share their feedback and opinions on the overall Youth Workforce Development Program. The results from this survey inform future Program Assistant decisions on the schedule and content of the following year’s program.

Case Study: Deshawn Jones, Jr.

Exhibit Hall Interpretation Volunteer

Deshawn started as an Exhibit Hall Interpretation Volunteer as a part of our Fenway High School Partnership. His responsibilities included engaging visitors in activities that included excitement about science and technology and encouraging the use of science inquiry, engineering design, and mathematics skills. After exceeding 50 volunteer hours, Deshawn applied to be a Summer Youth Intern in the Tech Studio department.

Tech Studio Summer Youth Intern

As a Tech Studio Intern, Deshawn engaged with people of all ages using hands-on engineering and computer science activities. When asked about his experience, Deshawn said, “Interacting at the Museum of Science has helped me learn more about my future career options. Before I started volunteering at the Museum, I wanted to be an automotive technician. But being here and interacting with kids made me realize how I want to help make the world a better place. Now, I want to major in computer science.” After completing the Summer Youth Internship, Deshawn applied to be an Exhibit Hall Interpretation Program Assistant.

Exhibit Hall Interpretation Program Assistant

As a Summer Program Assistant, Deshawn was considered Museum staff and received more hours per week and increased pay. Deshawn monitored and provided Exhibit Hall interpretation volunteers and developed a project for the department. At the end of the Summer, Deshawn was offered to stay on as a Program Assistant through the year.

Looking to the Future

We continue to strive to improve and grow the Youth Workforce Development Program and have recognized the following challenges and next steps to work through in the coming years:

- Funding: Each year we need institutional support from our Advancement and Accounting teams to raise sufficient funds to support our youth intern salaries and program costs.
- Space: A designated classroom space is integral to create a consistent and warm learning environment to comfortably fit up to 20 individuals while participating in various activity formats. We would love to secure a youth space in the future that could double as a youth zone throughout the year, in addition to a workshop space during the summer.

Career Ladder Model: Currently our youth career ladder is similar to a pyramid model. We have many available volunteer opportunities for youth, but only up to 50 openings for paid internships and 20 openings for Program Assistant positions. By moving to a ladder model, we would be able to retain more youth in various stages of our Youth Workforce Development Program.