

I Have A Dream: Chicago, IL

A Summary of:

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: The Case of “I Have a Dream”, to be published in 1999 in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, by Joseph Kahne and Kim Bailey, University of Illinois at Chicago

Overview

“I Have a Dream” (IHAD) is a youth organization providing financial, academic and social support to inner-city public school students throughout the country. Local sponsors, generally wealthy families, adopt an entire class of sixth graders, randomly chosen, and guarantee “last dollar”¹ scholarships for all those who graduate from high school. Besides maintaining personal relationships with the “Dreamers,” the sponsors hire a project coordinator to facilitate and coordinate services, such as tutoring, employment, volunteering activities, counseling, health and social services. In the two case studies, the coordinators were helped by volunteers from a Princeton program and AmeriCorps members. The premise is that, with personal support and financial resources, inner-city youth will be able to pursue postsecondary education and/or be better prepared to succeed in the workplace. For another study of [IHAD](#), see *Some Things DO Make a Difference for Youth*.

POPULATION

“I Have a Dream” serves inner-city children, from sixth grade until their graduation from high school. The study focuses on two programs in Chicago. La Familia was based on a youth organization on the city’s West Side and served 52 Dreamers. Of these, 31 were Mexican American, 14 Puerto Rican, five bi-racial, one white and one African American. The majority were female (56 percent) and for more than 70 percent, both parents had not completed high school. Seventy percent had families with incomes below \$20,000. Ninety-four percent of the initial Dreamers stayed in the program until graduation. Project Success was located in a church on the South Side of Chicago and served 40 Dreamers, all African Americans. Fifty-eight percent were women. The mothers of 55 percent of the group had some high school education (the researchers could not gather reliable data on more than half of the fathers). Eighty percent lived in families with incomes below \$20,000. Ninety percent of Project Success’ Dreamers stayed in touch with the program beyond graduation.

Evidence of Effectiveness

Researchers compared Dreamers to students from previous sixth grade classes at the same schools who had not participated in the program. When compared to the control groups, Dreamers showed:

- ◆ higher graduation rates from high school (graduation rates for Dreamers were 71 and 69 percent, double the 37 and 34 percent rates for the control groups; 6 percent of the Dreamers in the West Side program passed the GED)

- ◆ higher enrollment rates in two- and four-year colleges (63 and 67 percent of the Dreamers enrolled in college, almost three times the control group rate, estimated at 20 and 18 percent)

Of the Dreamers who went to college, 78 percent enrolled in 4-year institutions.

Key Components

The programs are tailored to the needs of the individual Dreamer. Key components, common to all programs, are:

- ◆ long-term personal relationships (the project coordinator and the sponsors maintain personal contact with the Dreamers throughout the duration of the program and, in many cases, even after the Dreamer enters college)
- ◆ working with the families (services are procured not only for the Dreamers, but also for their families, when needed; despite some conflicts with a few parents, mostly on issues of values, the relationship between staff and families tended to be supportive)
- ◆ linkage to existing community services (Alcoholics Anonymous, battered women's shelters, foster care, legal services, planned parenthood, summer jobs, homeless shelters, etc.)
- ◆ help with finding jobs and enrichment programs
- ◆ focus on peer support to promote and maintain pro-social behaviors
- ◆ academic support through tutoring and mentoring accompanied by high expectations (some Dreamers were transferred to private schools, paid by the sponsors, because staff felt that they were not receiving adequate attention and guidance in the public schools or because of gang-related problems)

The average cost per student per year for six years was \$1,482 for the program on the city's West Side and \$2,829 for that on the South Side. Private school tuition represented 19 percent and 55 percent of the cost respectively. To help improve public schools in inner city areas, the IHAD Foundation is developing a charter school, one sponsor has initiated a comprehensive neighborhood development program, and another IHAD group has initiated a publicly-funded school that provides after-school programs.

Contributing Factors

Building Social Trust

Time is important to build trust among inner-city youth. By accompanying the students from the sixth grade, the project coordinator has time to build strong relationships with Dreamers. Project coordinators for both programs remained in touch with at least 90 percent of their original Dreamers three or more years after they had left the program.

Relationships as Vehicles for Support

Inner-city youth generally deal with social pressures that tend to undermine success. The majority of Dreamers were victims of physical, sexual or substance abuse in the home and/or had participated in gang activities. Interviews indicated that a trusting relationship with IHAD staff helped Dreamers deal with such major concerns. Relationships with staff and sponsors were also an important tool for job opportunities and access to services and programs.

Implementation Quality

IHAD's major challenge is to hire staff able to provide the intense support and commitment required by the target population. Studies of other IHAD programs that did not show graduation rates as high as these indicate that more successful programs have low turnover of project coordinators, work with both private and public schools, and benefit from volunteer help. In the case studies, AmeriCorps members and volunteers from the Princeton Project 55 Program added two full-time staff members to each of the two programs. These individuals added extra hours of staff work, besides offering more opportunities for Dreamers to establish meaningful relationships (some volunteers were able to establish positive interactions with Dreamers who were resistant to approaching the IHAD coordinators).

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Researchers studied two IHAD programs for two and a half years and used a sixth grade class at the Dreamers' schools that had not been part of the program as a control group (assignments were randomized). The programs were chosen because they were consistent with the IHAD model, maintained contact at least with 90 percent of the Dreamers and their Dreamers were already making the transition to college. Researchers interviewed Dreamers, staff, parents and sponsors, observed program operations on over 100 occasions, ran focus group sessions with staff, sponsors and students, conducted surveys, and used school records to obtain data for Dreamers and the control groups.

EVALUATION FUNDING

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GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

Both programs are located in Chicago, IL.

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1. *the sponsor pays for college costs above those covered, for example, by grants and other scholarships.*