

Dallas Young Women's Initiative: Year One Evaluation Summary

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Program Background

The Texas Women's Foundation (TXWF) launched the Dallas Young Women's Initiative (YWI) in 2017 to empower and provide leadership opportunities to young women. The mission of the Dallas YWI is amplifying the voices and power of young women of color. The YWI focuses on young women of color ages 16 to 24 from Dallas's southern and western sectors. The North Texas Alliance to Reduce Unintended Pregnancy in Teens (Ntarupt), is the TXWF community partner in Dallas for the YWI project.

Evaluation Questions, Data Collection & Data Analysis

CORE is collaborating with TXWF, Ntarput and the YWAC on the participatory and qualitative evaluation.

The evaluation questions for Year One were: 1) What are the initial or emerging components of the YWI program? and 2) Who benefits from participating in the YWI program? In what ways?

A qualitative methodological approach was used during Year One that contributed to an exploratory understanding of the Dallas YWI program. The data collection activities included document and literature reviews, interviews with YWI program staff, cross-sector committee members and YWAC, a focus group, session observations and field notes. In keeping with our value orientation to include the young women in the design of this evaluation and validate emerging findings, the data analysis approach and emerging findings were also shared with the young women.

Key Findings: Emerging Components of YWI

An initial undertaking for the evaluation was simply to describe and document key YWI components as they emerged during Year One. Understanding these components was a critical first step in developing an evaluation strategy specific to Dallas YWI; moving forward, the evaluation will continue to explore the ongoing presence and influence of these intended components in the work.

YWI Activities in Year One

The Dallas YWI YWAC was made up of 13 young women of color ages 17-24. The key structural components¹ and process pillars² of the Dallas YWI were adapted from the National Collaborative of Young Women's Initiative – Toolkit and Resources. The key participants in the Dallas YWI in the first year included: the Young Women's Advisory Council (YWAC), the YWAC co-chairs, cross-sector committee made up of leaders from government and community-based organizations who provided minimal guidance to the YWAC and YWI program staff from TXWF and Ntarupt. The *YWAC Retreat* provided a space for the YWAC to bond with one another and discuss issues that surround them. The YWAC *meetings* throughout the year provided a space to share updates and work in their work groups. There were *several training sessions* for the YWAC that included Racial Equity, LGBTQ Inclusivity, Policy and Advocacy, Immigration, Poverty, Homelessness, Grant Making etc. Finally, the *closing meetings* took place to reflect on successes, learnings, challenges and hope for the future of Dallas YWI. The YWAC identified five focus areas in Year One to further research, and for which they drafted initial recommendations to develop solutions for implementation; 1) Education 2) Representation & Projection 3) Identity 4) Self-Advocacy & Mental Health and 5) Sexuality. Moving in to Year Two, the aim is now for the incoming new YWAC and returning YWAC members to secure and implement a grant to address their recommendations in these areas.

¹ The YWI structure primarily consisted of 1) YWI Co-Chairs 2) YWAC 3) YWI Cross-Sector Committee and 4) YWI Working Groups.

² The Process Pillars include 1) Convene, Collect, Build and Listen 2) Design Structure & Secure Partnerships 3) Recommendation Cycle 4) Implementation 5) Asset Mapping and 6) Evaluation

Key Findings: Who benefits from participating in the YWI program? In what ways?

A second undertaking for Year One of the evaluation was to understand the way participation in the YWI may benefit young women. The areas of potential benefit that we identified in Year One will be measured as possible outcomes for later YWAC participants.

Lived Experiences

Each of the young women interviewed narrated their lived experiences as the core motivation of why they do what they do as a young woman of color. Undeniably, their inspiration, learnings, growth and actions were anchored to these experiences. In turn, lived experiences became an impetus and shaped the way they lived and defined what it meant to them to thrive as a young woman of color, and by extension what this would mean for other young women. A major finding in Year One is; these young women of color have recalled their lived experiences and connected them to their YWI work. A critical part of the evaluation of the Dallas YWI is examining the intricacies of their own lived experiences, life contexts and beliefs and how they inform the YWI work and recommendations they are making for action.

Individual & Collective Benefits

The young women who were interviewed named more than 40 emerging individual and collective benefits from participating in the Dallas YWI initiative. Exploratory themes that emerged from those benefits are described below.

Individual Benefits

Some of the YWAC members described how the Dallas YWI initiative helped *find their own voice* as a young woman of color. Voice was conceptualized in a few different ways that included 1) finding a lost voice 2) being empowered in knowing they have a voice 3) understanding their voice as a young woman of color 4) freedom in making one's voice known 5) owning one's voice 6) knowing the power in voices and 7) sensitivity to different voices of young women of color. YWAC members talked about how the YWI initiative helped them *embrace their identity* that included their culture, individual identity, language, speech and skin color. YWAC members also talked specifically about *mindset and attitude shifts* that happened through participating in the YWI.

Collective Benefits

YWAC members described how YWI helped in *sharing experiences and building relationships*. These were conceptualized in a few different ways that included 1) appreciating other's stories 2) respecting another experience 3) accepting differences 4) finding new sisters 5) provide support 6) listen 7) inspire and 8) respect. Further, several aspects of their descriptions align with the Developmental Relationships³ framework. One of the collective benefits was the *space for young women of color* to feel safe, comfortable, be expressive and have courageous conversations. The YWAC members talked about some of the professional and life *skills they gained*. The co-chairs talked about the leadership skills they gained through their role as co-chairs. The other young women talked about skills they have gained like effective research, grant writing, making presentations, gathering feedback, group discussions, brainstorming ideas and taking decisions. The YWAC members shared several benefits of collectively participating in their working groups to help *drive change* in their community. The YWAC described the *support, mentorship, resources* and positivity they received from the TXWF and Ntarupt as being benefits to their learning and growth as part of the YWI initiative. The YWAC members also described a lot of hope for the *future of the YWI* to benefit more young women of color like themselves.

³ Search Institutes Developmental Relationships framework describe how young people are more likely to grow up and be successful when they experience developmental relationships with important people in their lives. Developmental relationships are close connections through which young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them. Search Institute has identified five elements—expressed in 20 specific actions—that make relationships powerful in young people's lives (Source: Search Institute Developmental Relationships Framework).