

# **The Heller School for Social Policy and Management**

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The Food Project a Youth Development Model for El Salvador

**Submitted by**

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## **Master of Arts Degree In Sustainable International Development**

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### **3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This paper reflects my learning from my internship, the relationship between my work experiences and the different youth development theories found in the current literature, as well as what the research shows are key elements for effective, high impact, well-delivered programs.

I worked at a youth development organization named The Food Project, where I was involved in administering programs that provide services to a diverse group of young people in the Greater Boston area. My work was geared towards executing all the logistics for the 2007 summer program for the North-shore site and toward developing the recruitment and logistics for the 2008 summer program at the Lincoln/Boston site.

I was able to do this work, while studying The Food Project's development model and understanding how TFP's philosophy related to all the work I was doing. To connect my practicum experience and understand better the field, I was capable to review scientific information about youth development and violence prevention theories. In addition, I complemented my study by visiting Salvadorian youth development organizations to learn about their efforts and also reviewing emerging literature about current youth violence situation in the country. All of activities have been done to support the purpose of making this paper a well-researched contribution to the literature of youth development in El Salvador.

#### 4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## 5. ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

AYP: Academic Year Program.

BNRA: Brigham Nahas Research Associates.

CGHA: Community Guide to Helping American Youth

CRS: Congressional Research Service

DIRT: Dynamic Responsible Teenagers.

GTZ: German Agency for Technical Cooperation

IA: Interns and Alumni.

IACPV: Central American Coalition for the Prevention of Youth Violence

IADB: Inter American Development Bank.

IUDOP: Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública Universidad Centroamericana  
"José Simeón Cañas".

MOJE: Movimiento Jovenes Unidos.

NGO's: Non governmental organizations.

NYVP: National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center.

OCAVI: Observatorio Centro Americano sobre la violencia.

PAHO: The Pan-American Health Organization.

SYP: Summer Youth Program.

TFP: The Food Project.

UNDP: United Nation Development Programme.

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund.

UNODC: United Nation Offices on Drugs and Crime.

WOLA: The Washington Offices on Latin America.

WHO: World Health Organization.

## 6. INTRODUCTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

### A brief description of the internship

As a program administrator I have worked closely with the Director of Youth Programs to directly administer The Food Project flagship Summer Youth Program year round, and assist with the administration of the Academic Year Program and Internship Program. I have implemented, refined, and created administrative systems for all programs. I supervised a part-time fellow to assist in administrative duties. My specific responsibilities have included:

- Site supervision of Summer Youth Program
- Planning and implementation
- Administration of youth paperwork and workers' compensation claims
- Safety manual review and scheduling First Aid training
- Payroll and youth database
- Recruitment, interviewing and youth hiring
- Program support
- Logistics
- Youth Transportation

In addition, I have worked to ensure that safety systems and protocols at The Food Project are continually reviewed and updated.

### A discussion of my learning objectives for the year.

My purpose for the second year was to learn what scholars have discovered about effective youth development that creates conditions to improve young people's lives. I also wanted to join a non-profit organization that was working with young people doing positive youth development in a community-based model in the United States.

While at The Food Project, a highly successful model for youth development, I aimed to:

- Identify the components of youth development programs and understand how well-coordinated parts make a harmonious whole;
- Review the chronology and subsequent analysis of youth development initiatives in the US and their bearing's on The Food Project's methodology;
- Understand the methodology of a youth development program;
- Work effectively with people of diverse backgrounds, economic classes and ages, especially adolescents and their parents;
- Work in an energetic, highly collaborative organization focused on sustainable agriculture;
- Explore how to make economic, human and environmentally sustainable contributions to a community project that enriches youth;
- Learn how to build community through meaningful work, shared standards and interactive learning (the TFP Pillars);

- Discover how the philosophy of The Food Project creates teen empowerment;
- Understand how El Salvador's NGOs view youth development issues;
- Learn how the private sector can get involved as activists in youth development;
- Improve my written English.

**Specific Objectives**

- Develop an understanding from the inside of how TFP's program is administered;
- Benchmark TFP on various indicators and draw comparisons to Salvadorian youth NGOs;
- Add to documentation and research on youth issues in El Salvador.

I wanted to understand why El Salvador has a street gang problem, and I wanted to learn theories about youth development that can address this problem. I wanted to gain increased analytical skills about youth development issues, strengthen my strategic thinking, and work directly with young people.

The topic of my paper is creating practical options for El Salvador's NGOs, government and society to allow a positive adolescent development appraisal that will transform the society.

My overall role goal of the year was to prepare myself with real practical experience that will enhance my capabilities to lead youth development initiatives in my country. Getting the academic knowledge and experience necessary to create opportunities for young people to have a better future is my first step in helping in my society change the way it views teenagers.

## 7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROBLEM

I looked at the problem of youth involvement in violent activities in El Salvador, examining the general scientific literature on risk and protective factors that influence opportunities for a healthy development among youth, and examining the emerging literature on the topic in El Salvador.

The most feasible way to measure elevated violence is by the data of youth mortality. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2002, the highest homicide rate per age group in the world was among young males between 15 and 29 years old (p.10).

In the year 2005, El Salvador's homicide rate was 55.5 per 100,000, making it one of the most violent countries in Latin America (Brewery, 2007, p. 1). According to the Central American Observatory of Violence, 60% of the homicides committed that year were committed by people between 15 and 29 years old (OCAVI, 2007). There is no specific age group data available to determine among these deaths how many of them were people below 18 years old.

The cost of violence can be calculated in billions of US dollars in health care, and other costs associated with violence such as the loss of work and investment. According to the UNDP, in 2003 11.5% of the GDP of El Salvador was directed to deal with violence. Of this amount, 4.7% was used for additional health expenses that were added into the country's health system, the other 6.8% was the cost of private sector investment in security, or diminishment of foreign investment, etc. This amount of 11.5% of the GDP is more than double the country's annual budget for education and health (UNDP, 2004).

This level of violence has a clear impact on a country's health services.

The health sector, however, is the natural leader as it is explicitly designed to define, understand, and address population-wide health challenges, and at the societal level, it is the health sector that carries the major burden of care arising from the consequences of violence. The health sector is also likely to have experience with building the kinds of multi-sectoral partnerships that are necessary for the prevention of violence and the mitigation of its consequences (WHO, 2002, p. 5).

The encouraging aspect of recent violence research is information that suggests that even though some biological and individual aspects explain predispositions to aggression, more frequently other factors like the interaction with family, community, culture and other factors are the aspects that allow violence to occur (WHO, 2002, p. 1) Violence is a problem that can be prevented, "This is not an article of faith, but a statement based on evidence" (Department of Health and Human Services, 2005, p. 3). Viewing violence from a human developmental perspective and evaluating how individual characteristics interact with the environment in which they live and grow has enabled researchers, practitioners and youth workers to determine how violence can be prevented (ibid).

Currently it is believed that adolescent behavior is shaped by multiple factors. Studies suggest it is the confluence of certain "risk" factors that contribute to violent behavior, and the existence of certain "protective" factors, that create resiliency (NYVP, 2001, p. 1). Youth violence is also the result of many factors; to completely understand it, it is necessary to recognize the factors that cause violent behavior and also explore the conditions that create resiliency in young people that enable them to avoid violent activities (WHO, 2002, p. 10). Risk factors are factors that have been proven by objective evidence to have an underlying relationship to a problem. Contrary to risk factors, protective factors are the ones that are likely to reduce being engaged in risky behavior. These factors have the power to manipulate the level of risk an individual experiences or can balance the connection between the risk and the result (ibid, p. 1).

The ecological framework is one way to illustrate the connection and relation between risk factors and protective factors (ibid, p.1). This framework is frequently used by public health scientists to avoid and diminish risk of illness, injury and disease. This framework looks the whole picture, instead of focusing only on the individual with a health problem or with a particular behavior, for example violence, to see the relationship to the individual environment (ibid, p. 1). The WHO used this model to explain that violent behavior is the result of multiple levels of influence on individual behavior, because of a person's relationship with the environment (Appendix 1) (WHO, 2002, p. 12).

### **I The first level of the framework is the individual**

This level considers genetic, demographic, biological and personal aspects that shape a person's behavior (WHO, 2002, p. 13). For example, risk factors can be classified by their biological characteristics such as complications in pregnancy or delivery associated with brain injury, low heart rates, biological vulnerability, and intellectual impairment, early or late onset of puberty. Psychological and behavioral characteristics in this category can be engaging in health-compromising behaviors, aggressive temperament, impulsivity, affective disorder, attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder, aggressive behavior, stress reactivity, impulsiveness, anxiety, low intelligences (ibid, p. 33).

All these factors are critical in influencing if a person will become a victim or a perpetrator. However there are also factors that function as protective or defensive factors. Some examples identified by the Helping Americas Youth organization are a positive/resilient temperament, religious faith/valuing involvement in organized religious activities, social competencies and problem solving skills, perception of social support from adults and peers, healthy sense of self, positive expectations/optimism for the future, high expectations (CGHA, 2002, p. 3).

Without doubt, some biological characteristics are difficult to change in order to help young people to develop positively. The psychological and behavior factors are less difficult to foster in an environment where early treatment and protective factors can make a positive effect in the individual level.

One risk factor that has been identified in the book *Street Gangs in Central America* (IUDOP, 2007) is the lack of positive youth role models in shaping personal identity. In El Salvador, the search for personal identity leads youth to join violent street gangs that fulfill their need for a respected identity. Young people facing development challenges are searching to answer the question, “Who am I?” Erik Erikson (1968), a prominent theorist on the human development model, suggested that during adolescence<sup>1</sup> human beings are developing a sense of mastery, identity and intimacy (Eccles & Gootman, 2002, p. 47). Consequently, the building of the individual identity is extremely important at this stage and protective factors are needed at this time to prevent the young person from adopting negative behavior. After the individual level, the identity-shaping process is highly influenced by the second level of the ecology framework.

## **II The second level of the framework is the family/ peer relationship level**

This level investigates how the proximity of a person’s relationships (for example with relatives or peers) affects their performance and views of life, in this case, the person’s capacity to carry out or be victimized by violence (WHO, 2002, p. 14). At this level, the family support system is critical to developing positive youth behavior (ibid, p.14; NYVPRC, 2001, p. 2).

Some risk factors here that can produce violent behavior are low parental education, family mental illness, maternal stress, large family, access to weapons, authoritarian or permissive parenting style, exposure to family violence, poor monitoring, lack of supervision by parents, harsh physical punishment (WHO, 2002, p. 33). As well, there are some protective factors:

Good relationships with parents/bonding or attachment to family, opportunities and reward for pro social family involvement, having a stable family, high family expectations, school motivation/positive attitude toward school, student bonding and connectedness, academic achievement/reading ability and mathematics skills, opportunities and rewards for pro social school involvement, high quality schools/clear standards and rules, high expectations of student, presence and involvement of caring, supportive adults, good relationship with peers, parental approval of friends (CGHA, 2002, p. 4).

### Family Relationships

As noted, a high level of caring, nurturing and sustained positive involvement of the parents is critical in shaping a youth’s positive identity. Parents can influence their children’s views on the larger important issues of education, religion and politics, while their peers persuade them in less important aspects such as clothing, music, after school activities (CGHA, 2002,

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<sup>1</sup> Age 10 to 18

p. 59). In this level parental guidance is critical. Clearly parents should spend more time with their children to enforce positive adolescent behavior.

However, creating this caring, nurturing and sustained positive interaction is extremely hard when the media have a strong influence in selling the perception that violence is a normative behavior and promoting the idea that violence is appropriate as a problem-solving strategy (NYVPRC, 2001 p. 3). For example, parents see yelling at children as a normal behavior. Parents can also be influenced by larger cultural and societal assumptions, such as the preconception that teenagers are not valuable assets. According to Hall, Young people are only viewed as human beings living in a “storm and stress” period which brings problems to the family (as cited in Lerner, 2007). It is customary, for example, that a parent will worry when their child turns 13 rather than when the child turns 11. Also cultural norms and customary tradition have high influence in the way parents’ raise their children, I will explain this deeper in the third level.

### Peer Relationships

The Institute of Medicine recognizes that adolescents face biological and cognitive changes, but the most controversial challenge adolescents face is the one that is associated with peer relationships (CGHA, 2002, p. 58). Young people tend to give more significance to the activities they carry out with their friends, yet investigators have not accepted the idea that peer groups are the one to blame for inducing violent behavior. Beside families, adolescents are driven to get involved with peers that hold the same views as their parents, or find friends with which they have similarities and can relate (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000, p. 59).

Cruz, in his book *Street Gangs in Central America* has identified two critical high risk factors in the case of young people with high levels of violent behavior. The first one is that in general, violent youth have weak family relationships. They live in dysfunctional families; dysfunctional does not necessarily refer to family structure, such as single mother’s homes, but rather to families that base their relationship on three elements: aggression, disrespect and violence, and abandonment and neglect by parent or caregivers. Young people’s experience of discipline in this case is based on physical abuse. Instead of being a safe place, families are perpetrators of violence.

The second risk factor in El Salvador is that outside their families, young people are closest to their peers, and in many cases young people get involved in gang activity because people they know of their same demography area, age and life experience are involved (Cruz, 2007). At present, there are not enough groups in El Salvador where youth can find options for constructive relationships; they are not present in the community. To understand the importance of the community, we have to explore the third level of the ecological framework.

### **III The third level of the framework is the community level**

The third level is the community level, the environment in which relationships are taking place, for example in churches, schools, parks, recreation centers (WHO, 2002, p. 13). This level identifies the settings that are associated with being victims or perpetrators of violence. Two strong aspects identified by researchers as the main characteristics for violent behavior are identified in this level: the first one is the possibility for young people to get firearms and the second one is how communities are organized and give proper support to the individual (NYVPRC, 2007, p. 3). The effect of the community is strong on the individual, and its influence is even stronger when other levels are weak.

Some risk factors identified in this level are availability/use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs in neighborhood, availability of firearms, living in a high-crime neighborhood, community instability, low community attachment, economic deprivation/poverty/ residence in a disadvantaged neighborhood, and concentration of youth, presence of delinquent youth groups and gangs, social and physical disorder in the neighborhood. There are also some protective factors in this level that can foster better conditions for the young population, for example, economically sustainable/stable communities, safe and health-promoting environment/supportive law enforcement presence, positive social norms, opportunities and rewards for pro social community involvement/availability of neighborhood resources, high community expectations, neighborhood/social cohesion (CGHA, 2002, p. 34). A good portion of protective factors can make the difference in young people's lives.

Studies made in different communities have discovered that the prevalence of firearms and drugs are strong predictors of the violent behavior, community disorganization has the same high influences (NYVPRC, 2001 p. 3).

According to the latest report of the United Nation Offices on Drugs and Crime Division, *Crime and Development in Central America* (UNODC, 2007), 70% of El Salvador's homicides in 2002 were linked to firearms. They also note that for every death resulting from firearms, there are five more people who survive (ibid, p. 52). Access to weapons is fairly easy in the country; in their report, UNODC states that the country has 170,000 firearms registered. This number was the highest in the region. It is important to point out that a lot of this firearms were used during the civil war and remained in the hands of the civilians, (Brewery, 2007) furthermore this portion only represents one third of the total number of firearms in the country (ibid, p. 67).

El Salvador has the second lowest level of drug consumption in the region. This means that the effect of drug consumption in young people is not as high as in other places (Brewery, 2007). But the consumption of other "legal" drugs, like substances such as "shoe glue," paint thinner, gasoline, etc. is unknown.

In El Salvador, high risk young people live in communities with elevated social scarcity (Cruz, 2007, p. 76). These communities, which are largely urban, have diminished social

capital<sup>2</sup> as well as diminished trust among the people in the community. There is an absence of positive public spaces such as community centers or sports facilities. In general, they live in communities that have no mechanism to encourage citizen participation and internal integration.

Cruz writes that the El Salvador communities where young people are more vulnerable to risk behavior are not only communities with higher poverty levels, but are the ones where there is a significant lack of resources. People have permanent sources of income, and live in decent houses, but lack other important services such as sanitation systems, reliable electricity, and access to drinking water. Young people feel neglected, which encourages them to socially withdraw (ibid, p.77). They do not get their development needs fulfilled at home, and the community has no capacity to give them support, in many cases the system apparently is set to make them fail and put them in a social exclusion cycle. Communities may be there but in general, places that have reported high youth violence lack strong, trustworthy municipal governments, strong community engagement and positive participation (ibid, p. 78).

After analyzing the third level, we will move from a community approach to the bigger picture, which is society as a whole, the largest environment where individuals interact and are influenced.

#### **IV. The fourth level of the framework is the societal level**

The fourth level is environment or societal. This level describes all those factors that (1) facilitate the development of violence, (2) create an environment where violence is tolerated by society, (3) decrease inhibitions in opposition to violence, (4) create tensions and inequalities between groups in the society (WHO, 2002, p. 13).

Some large societal factors cited by the World Health Organization Report are: cultural norms, attitudes regarding individual choices, norms in favor of parental rights and authority over women and children, norms that support extreme power of police against citizens, norms that support political conflicts. In this big picture are also factors such as health, education, social policies and levels of social inequalities also that place (ibid, p. 13).

In El Salvador, risk factors in this environmental level are: social exclusion, violent culture, disorganized urban growth and high rate of migration to the United States. Social exclusion and disorganized urban growth effects have already been exemplified in the community level. On the other hand, violent culture and migration have not yet been clarified. The environment's effect on young people to perpetuate violence is so complicated; that this document will review some specific details about this issue.

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<sup>2</sup> Social Capital according to Robert Putnam is the 'features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam 1995, p. 67).

El Salvador's society continues to be influenced by the repercussions of the country's deadly 20-year civil war, centuries of repressive military rule and weak democratic institutions, as well as a polarized political system and an unsuccessful judicial system (Brewer, 2007, p.1). All these conditions have created a normalized view of firearms, and violent acts as a way to protect and create security. Violent culture in El Salvador is a pattern that allows violence to persist.

Cultural norms and values that view violence as an acceptable way of resolving conflicts and disputes. In a survey presented by the Pan American Health Organization, Salvadorians expressed the belief that they can take justice into their own hands, and that corporal punishment is necessary for their children (PAHO, 1997).

The print media highly influences the opinion of people in this matter. But according to Huhn "while politicians, military leaders and social scientists highlight the transformation of violence and the increase of homicides and youth delinquency, the news discourse on 'ordinary violence' is quite heterogeneous" (Huhn, 2006, p.21). There is no clear consensus of what is really happening.

Central American newspapers usually authorize a broad spectrum of news, they tend to produce a certain pattern of interpretation of violence centered around few topic clusters. While some newspapers are uncovering silenced news such as sexual violence or child abuse, others tend to neglect critical news related to the deeper roots of criminal violence (Ibid, p21).

Salvadorians are highly influenced by the media as is the government of El Salvador, which states that current violence in the country is related to youth gangs. However UNODC (2007) and The Harvard International Human Rights Clinic Report (2007) could not find any concrete evidence that youth gangs are committing the most crimes; contrary evidence supports that young people involved in gangs only kill people in the other gangs (UNODC, 2007, p. 61). The UNODC report finds conflicting statistical data for gang-involved homicide: information from the *Fiscalia General de la Republica* (Attorney's General Office) indicates 60% are gang-involved, while data from the same year from the Institute of Forensic Medicine estimates it at only 8%. This lack of consistency makes it impossible to build clear conclusions about the issue (ibid, p. 61).

Migration poses a very serious problem in El Salvador and also largely affects the youth population. According to data presented by *Ministerio de Seguridad y Justicia* (Ministry of Security and Justice) website, in the year 2006, 86% of the deported migrants were people coming from the rural areas while only 14% of them were coming from the capital. When young people are deported they return and they bring new cultural norms to a country where

they do not feel included, their links with their relatives and local communities is not strong, and therefore gangs become their alternatives to families (Cruz, 2007). In 2006, 14,395 people were deported according to *Ministerio de Seguridad y Justicia* of El Salvador there is no specific data showing how many of them were people below 18 years old.

The factors contributing to El Salvador's high levels of youth violence are found in each level of the Ecologic Model. In examining all of these factors I created my development question.

## **8. DEFINITION OF THE DEVELOPMENT QUESTION**

My second year was devoted to learning strategies to execute and manage effective youth development programs. I was especially interested in programs that can provide young people options for economic and psychological development and create an environment that prevents the development of risky behavior and activities. Specifically, I looked at The Food Project (TFP), a program designed for young people ages 14 to 18. My research project analyzed TFP in greater depth. I will explore from a very initial step this model relative to the youth development field in El Salvador.

There is a clear need for prevention programs in El Salvador, so my goal with my second year internship was to learn youth development frameworks in order to design and execute programs that can reduce the influence of risk factors and foster the presence of protective factors among young adolescents ages 14-18. The Food Project as a youth development organization does not explicitly focus on how to diminish risk factors but frames its work as enhancing protective factors among the youth that join the program. It does not specifically address ways to prevent, reduce or control youth violence as a main activity. However, 60% of the young people TFP works with come from some of the area's with greatest incidence of violence specifically the Boston neighborhoods of Roxbury and Dorchester. Low income, heavily minority neighborhoods, these communities have been identified by the Boston Police as "red zones", where they have the highest crime, drug traffic, gang enrollment and homicide rates in the city. TFP does not work with people involved in violent activities per se, yet the majority of TFP's youth recruited from these neighborhoods are exposed daily to several levels of violence. TFP uses a clear youth development model with practices that address creating positive adolescent development in the individual and at the community level which foster the existence of protective factors.

The question is "How can youth development contribute to the prevention of violence among youth?" In order to answer this, I have drawn from the public health approach. Public health interventions are habitually characterized by three types of prevention that vary according to the temporal aspect. The first type, primary prevention, looks to address violence before it has occurred. In addition, there is secondary prevention; this puts more attention on a solution immediately after violence has already occurred, for example care in hospital or treatment in emergency rooms. The last type, tertiary intervention, takes place in the long-term, for example rehabilitation, reintegration (WHO, 2002 p. 15). The Food Project has elements of both primary and secondary prevention.

I have chosen to study primary intervention because in general, government and policy-makers only focus on secondary and tertiary responses to violence. So far, El Salvador's government has done a lot of work on their judicial response to addressing the youth violence problem. Some examples of bills enacted so far: Firm Hand (2003); Anti-gang Law (2003); Reform to the Young Infractor law (Now Young People's Penal Law) (2004); Super firm hand plan (2004); Creation of a new Police force call Anti-gang task force (2005). (Carranza, 2007). The WHO report notes that "understandably priority is often given to dealing with the immediate consequences of violence, providing support to victims and punishing the offenders" (2002, p. 15). The Washington Office in Latin America (WOLA) framework for the current problem is that they firmly oppose repressive approaches to solve violence in El Salvador, and encourage the creation of interventions that prioritize prevention efforts in a coordinated way to involve police, government institutions, schools, communities and families (WOLA, 2008). The WHO report states that "a comprehensive response to violence is one that not only protects and supports victims of violence, but also promotes non-violence, reduces the perpetration of violence, and changes the circumstances and conditions that give rise to violence in the first place" (WHO, 2002, p. 16 ).

However there are also some governmental efforts aimed at prevention. Twenty percent of the newly created anti-gang fund was used for prevention and rehabilitation, while 80% of it has gone to tighten up legislatures and increase patrol police forces (CRS, 2007, p.4). According to OCAVI report in by 2007, El Salvador had one police officer per square kilometer (OCAVI, 12/21/07).

Using prevention methods as a way to promote youth development has been made the responsibility of one government agency, the *Secretaria de la Juventud* (Secretariat for Young People). Created in 2005, this institution depends directly on the president's offices and has the mission to implement the national plan for young people. The agency intends to accomplish three goals: (1) improve young people's quality of life, (2) promote youth development, and (3) assist vulnerable groups. According to the Young People Secretary Web Site, for the past 4 years they have accomplished several activities in different fields such as: leadership and entrepreneurial activities, music and cultural festivities, sports programs activities and religious events ([www.jovenes.gob.sv](http://www.jovenes.gob.sv)). However the work done by this organization is not enough, according to "Movimiento Jovenes Unidos" (MOJE) executive director Salvador Hernandez; his perception is that there was not much follow up to the government platform (Personal communication S.Hernandez, MOJE offices, Ilobazco, El Salvador, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

There are several international and community-based organizations involved in prevention efforts in El Salvador. At the international level, German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) has published several studies and has implemented programs; and USAID has founded community programs in 200 municipalities, and has worked closely with Central American Coalition for the Prevention of Youth Violence (IACPV) to create violence prevention strategies. For example, they hosted a conference on gang prevention. The Inter American Development Bank (IADB) has also contributed, not only funding projects but

promoting loan reduction incentives if El Salvador decreases violence levels (CRS, 2007, p.6).

At the national level, IUDOP has done extensive work documenting the youth violence problem, and NGOs like Barrios Unidos, MOJE offices, Asociacion Quetzalcoat, Poligono Don Bosco have focused in delivering youth development programs.

All of these efforts are largely focused on secondary prevention, they do not explicitly use youth development framework. I want to supplement their work with programmatic effort in the youth development framework develop by the scientific literature and my own experiences at The Food Project. My analysis of TFP, my research on risk and protective factors, and my preliminary study of programmatic areas in El Salvador can assist efforts that will improve the country's youth development model.

I have focused on understanding what is the current theory behind The Food Project, providing a preliminary evaluation of how its precepts can be included in current programs in El Salvador like those of the Young People Secretary that have the potential to prevent the development of risk behavior among youth ages 14-18.

While this analysis is directed for an audience interested in exploring program design in El Salvador, I expect it to be useful for other Central American organizations and policy makers in the emerging youth development field. A practical application of my experience will be beneficial because will give an additional interpretation to current youth development views in El Salvador.

I am expecting to use what I have learned at The Food Project as a frame to create additional perspectives for Secretaria de la Juventud I will share this paper with the Secretary and other civil society youth programs, so they can consider developing and implementing program models such as TFP's. I want my conclusions to induce these organizations to find programmatic examples that will help them to focus on early prevention. As part of my research, I made contact with El Salvador's UNICEF director and other NGOs leaders and they agreed that basic knowledge of what programs need to support positive youth development would greatly advance violence prevention efforts.

I will provide basic youth development information to El Salvador's organizations, so that they can enhance their influence in changing the youth development field and shift their perspective from focusing only on despairing risk factors to also creating protective factors.

## **9. METHODS**

In this next section I will explain the methods that I used to accomplish my goals

### **I Literature review: abstract**

I reviewed documentation related to the definition of youth violence and suggested interventions for youth violence, concluding that youth violence can be prevented, that there is extensive documentation about risk and protective factors and their influences on violent behavior. Violence needs to be prevented by considering the various paths to violence, youth age and developmental settings. Also I reviewed current youth development approaches: Prevention, Resiliency and Positive Youth Development and explored the deficits and advantages within each one. With that frame, I was able to see how these approaches helped me to frame TFP and its theories and conclude that TFP is indirectly built from all three of them but largely draws from positive youth development.

### **II TFP (June 2007 through April 2008)**

My internship was a management position with the following goals:

1. Update all recruitment contacts and begin scheduling visits and mailings.
2. Attend a summer jobs fair in Roxbury in order to promote Summer Youth Program (SYP).
3. Work with Interns and Alumni (IA) Coordinator to plan and implement the recruitment internship.
4. Supervise the recruitment interns – completing all necessary internship activities and paperwork.
5. Do 10 school presentations and build new relationships with at least 4 new suburban schools.
6. Improve and improvise new recruitment methods to attract new schools as well as other venues and increase the number of applicants in the suburbs
7. Get applications packets together and mailed out.
8. Begin preparations for the interviewing process.
9. Promote the SYP in local newspapers and in parents newsletters
10. Look for ways to use Dynamic Intelligent Responsible Teenager (DIRT) Crew for mid week office work and also help in SYP preparation.
11. Facilitate the review of positives and deltas from summer 2007 and the addition of action steps.
12. Accomplish the traditional ratio of recruitment 1 to 4 urban applications
13. Register 64 youth for SYP 08 (produce, send and follow up on paper work)
14. Have 60% of applicants applying through our online option.
15. Lead the urban interview process and make it a great experience for young people and parents.
16. Prepare Staff with NEXTEL communication service for spring, summer and fall.
17. Prepare Staff with CPR and safety training for 2008.
18. Prepare, coordinate and implement family feast.

19. Prepare SYP 08: Data base, Train tickets, T-shirts, binders, gear, boots, and legal paper work.
20. Facilitate the review of positives and deltas from summer 2007 and the addition of action steps.
21. Set up and organize the vehicle use system including insuring timely vehicle inspections.
22. Insure that all first aid kits are fully stocked and supplied throughout the summer.
23. Plan and run parent orientation event.

Specifically, methods:

- Observing the work of the host organization. Doing specific tasks for example:
  - Participating in staff meetings where the organization plans and instructs the personnel (frequency from August to May, twice per week; June and July once per month)
  - Leader meetings in the summer (frequency once per week): During the summer, every crew leader, assistant crew leader, site supervisor and the person that plays my role meet once per week for two hours to evaluate person by person, every participant in the summer program. Crew leaders read the names of each of their crew members and all the people attending the meeting give their positive feedback about that person, or give a “delta” (a delta is a detailed description of something a person needs to improve or change in their actions or attitude) about that person.
  - Participating in the annual budget planning process: I worked with my supervisor in creating the budget for the 2008 youth programs.
  - Movies and documentaries: TFP has a lot of documentation, and I have seen all the videos which explain from the youth’s point of view how they see The Food Project
  - Staff winter retreat: I participated in the overnight staff retreat.
  - Supervisor trainings and meetings: I was performing the work of a supervisor.
  - Organization Recording: TFP has an extensive and comprehensive line of organization manuals, in which all the work geared to the youth during the summer and school year is very well documented. Also, the organization has a good electronic arcade of files, which allowed me to check how things were done in the past and how they have changed during the year.
  - Farmers Markets: I participated in directing farmers markets during the summer, and I think this is the best example of a place where communities

interact with young people that work there, and see how they can relate positively.

- Working with youth: I supervised two adolescent during the winter, and I learned how to implement the “Four R’s” concept. The Four R’s are the tools TFP uses to deliver their youth development model. The following concepts are incorporated in every aspect of the work: responsibility, rigor, respect, relationship.

(1) Rigor: the work was not easy and it was time consuming; the interns know they will sacrifice extra game time if we do not finish the work on time. They are willing to hurry up.

(2) Respect: youth develop self respect when they know that they are doing meaningful work for the organization, where they can see they are learning and accomplishing. For example, we went to a career fair in Harvard Business School with one of the interns. At the beginning she was pretty shy about speaking out about the organization to “suit older persons” but after a half-hour she was confident, and at the end of the day she expressed verbally how she was now ready to have college interviews.

(3) Responsibility: accomplish an assigned task and schedule for each day. Every Saturday we worked for 8 hours: the first 3 hours was hard work, then lunch, a game and we concluded the day with hard work.

Through my work experiences I learned that of the 4 R’s, the fourth, “Relationship” was the most important. The first 3r’s followed in a cascade after we built up our relationship; we created a dynamic work group and the goals that were set up at the beginning of the internship were accomplished.

- Interacting w/ parents:
  - Staffing table at youth fairs: I was the spokesperson for The Food Project at several youth summer fairs in Middlesex County.
- Interviews w/ key TFP constituents:
  - Director of Youth Development: I interviewed Greg Gale
  - Youth participants: I interviewed the interns that worked with me in a very non-structured way and asked them in several short conversations in settings outside the offices how they think TFP has influenced their own live.

### **III Supplementary data gathering**

- (October 2007 through March 2008) Learning from leading scholars in the fields of youth violence and youth development: I attended a lecture by a leader in the field, Richard Lerner, where he presented his new book, *The Good Teen*
- (May 2007, June 2007 and January 2008) Research in El Salvador, including interviews with scholar and program directors in El Salvador: To gain deeper knowledge of youth violence in El Salvador, I had a conversation with Janet Aguilar

of the *Instituto Universitario de Opinion Publica* at the *Universidad Centroamericana "Jose Simeon Canas"* (IUDOP); she directed me to visit three organizations that work with youth at risk in El Salvador; she also recommended articles for my literature review, and gave me her perspective about the current youth problem.

- Per Ms. Aguilar's advice, I visited and interviewed people from "Movimiento Juvenil" (MOJE), Quetzalcoatl Foundation, and Jose Luis Perez of Catholic Relief Services, three organizations that are doing youth development work in El Salvador.

#### **IV List of limitations**

1. I have never worked in a youth develop organization so I did not have a point with which to compare them.
2. I have not seen the whole youth cycle. A young person can have four positions inside the organization, and I have seen different people working on different positions but I have not experienced the effect of the program on a youth from point zero to point four, meaning I have not seen a person enter the SYP and finish her/his work at TFP as a board member.
3. My approach to understanding the reality of youth organizations in El Salvador was merely from secondary sources. I was not able to observe youth activities directly, rather I learned from interviews and from the organization's documentation.

#### **10. LITERATURE REVIEW**

I am interested in ways to promote prosocial, healthy development among youth that will prevent youth from engaging in violence and other risky behaviors. I reviewed literature in the youth violence field, the research on resilience and on the youth development field that can help me understand how to foster such processes.

Researchers and practitioners decided to use the public health approach toward violence prevention, because it has a combination of knowledge coming from many disciplines that allows a holistic response to the problem and draws solution from the intervention of diverse sectors such as health, justice, education, social services and policy (WHO, 2002, p. 4). The public health approach has a strong emphasis on prevention – preventing violence before it happens (ibid, p. 4). The public health perspective gives the needed umbrella, which allows the creation of an intervention that combines different disciplines. It unifies what is known about risk factors and public education, and reconciles findings that sometimes seem contradictory in youth violence studies. The public health approach uses the following steps to move from problem to solution: (1) define the problem with consistent data,; (2) categorize potential causes for it; (3) design, develop and evaluate the effectiveness of the

intervention; (4) disseminate successful models in order to educate and outreach (Department of Health and Human Services, 2005, p. 3).

To create a policy intervention, it is necessary to consider that there are several myths related to youth violence. However there are as well proven factors that show statistical probability to increase a young person's risk of becoming involved in violence -- "risk factors," and also less-known factors that seem to protect youth from being exposed to risk factors -- "protective factors" (ibid, p. 4). To prevent violence, it is important to identify when youth's violent acts occur. The Department of Health and Human Services report using the scientific developmental perspective, determined that the path to youth violence has two trajectories: (1) before puberty, (2) after puberty (ibid, p. 3). The seriousness of a youth's violent act will depend on the youth's developmental stage. Young people who become violent before the age of 13 tend to commit more serious crimes. Some of them can escalate violence into adulthoods (ibid, p. 6). Knowing this information allows policy makers to determine effective interventions that would target the correct age group as well as the correct risk factors. In conclusion, any kind of intervention should be well planned, with the purpose of targeting the most specific factors that can deliver positive results to help youth avoid delinquency (Hoffman, 2004).

In order to implement policies that address violence, is necessary to consider all the violence indicators identified in the Department of Health and Human Services report: (1) Trends in youth violence including official reports on youth arrested data, number of youth homicides, serious injuries and rape, as well as self reports, confidential reports (surveys) by youth themselves; (2) Identify risk and protective factors; a typical public health approach is to determine when in the life course the risk factor will be presented. It is important to note that the risk factors occur to groups not to individuals. On the other hand protective factors need more research to be identified, so far only two factors have been found that have a positive impact: commitment to school and an intolerant attitude toward deviance. (3) Preventing youth violence: There is a clear definition that prevention programs can act with efficacy "in early and late onset form of violence" (Department of Health and Human Services, 2005, p. 8). In the long term, the financial gains of involvement in prevention are greater that the cost of prevention programs. However there is need for more program evaluation, and additional research about the characteristics of effective youth programs, as well as determining the role of the community in improving the conditions for youth (ibid).

To find a solution for the problem of youth violence, it is necessary to create interventions that supply young people with what they need to become successful adults, make these interventions accessible to them, and be careful to create programs that do not loose their fidelity when they are taken to scale (Department of Health and Human Services, 2005, p. 10). At the policy level, it is not only important to implement measures but also to have monitoring and evaluation tools to measure their efficiency, and to involve youth, families, researchers and private and public organizations for periodic youth violence dialogues and program sharing.

Now the question is what intervention model is the right one to be implemented to promote youth development and reduce youth violence?

It is widely accepted that in order to increase effectiveness in dealing with youth problems, it is necessary to involve families, professionals, and community leaders, with broad-based approaches. These stakeholders have an interest in solving youth problems. Families and professionals are interested in young peoples' well being, and community leaders are interested in societal well being (Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 4).

Youth development and problem prevention models are grouped in three types:

(1) Prevention; (2) Resiliency; (3) Positive Youth Development. Sadly the terminology for all these fundamental concepts, especially things related to "risk and protection factors, assets or resources and the designation of successful outcomes" are not consistently used in the three different models.

There are some important concepts that need to be clarified to get into this discussion. First, there is a distinction between risk and protective factors and risk and protective process. Factors refer to statistical indicators that determinate certain outcomes (Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 3); process describes mechanisms that seek to explain the reason for risk or protection (ibid, p. 3). Currently, risk and protective factors are more useful to determine the statistical probability to an outcome for a population rather than for an individual. It is important also to note that protective factors only exist if risk factors are present (ibid, p. 3). For example: the use of condom will only protect a girl from teen pregnancy if the girl is sexually active.

Developmental assets are the tasks of building in young people capacities and skills that will be crucial for their personal well being and adulthood (Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 4). Continuing with the same example, avoiding teen pregnancy does not mean that a young woman will be able to find a job as an adult. The scarcity of assets is directly related to the success or failure of a person to have great outcomes in life. But they are indirectly related to problem behavior, which means that person without assets won't necessarily be involved in risk behavior activities (ibid, p. 4). In other words, someone without assets will not necessarily become a problem to society. They presence of risk factors are the drivers of a problem behavior, more than the lack of assets; in many cases, asset-poor environments are full of risk factors, and these ones are the ones that create problem behavior (ibid).

The dilemma in the field is that there is not a consistent definition of what is the major youth development outcome, if it is to prevent young people from getting into trouble or to enhance competence among youth to ensure a better adulthood (ibid, p. 4). Now we will review different approaches for youth development that look at both sides of this dilemma.

### **Prevention Approach**

The prevention approach came out of the principle that is more cost-effective and efficient to address or prevent problems before they occur, than take care of them when they are already

in place. According to Durlak, this type of approach has been existent and documented since the 1900's, but the huge mobilization of this method began 20 to 25 years ago, moving from what Bloom call an "epidemiological approach to disease prevention" (as cited in Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 4). As well, the mental health field influenced this approach, which has been very popular and has been the framework for several current youth programs.

In 1964, Caplan identified three types of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary (as cited Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 4). The task that each addresses depends on the timing of the intervention related to the violent act. Durlak et al (1997) recommend that the different types of prevention should be categorized as universal, selective and indicated, which is related to the target population (ibid).

In the prevention models, there has also been the contribution of Tolan and Guerra (1994), who describe the existent approaches for young people between 12 to 21 years: (1) Changing peer group norms to encourage pro-social activities; (2) Stopping association with anti-social peers to redirect them to pro-social activities; (3) Involving youth to become agents of resolution, mediating in conflict situations with their peers (as cited in Hoffman, 2004). Basically they present that prevention programs that are skills-oriented, multimodal, and cognitive in approach, and that support pro-social behavior, are most effective for rehabilitation. And a program's positive impact is higher when it also targets the young person's family, and is linked to his/her community (ibid).

All program prevention approaches have two targets: reduce risk factors and increase or promote protective factors. Also, prevention may imply increasing skills and abilities in the target groups to prepare them to handle future challenges. Coie et al (1993) view prevention from the ecological framework and acknowledge the influence of other risk factors in the different levels and the need to treat them in conjunction, believing that addressing a single cause won't have a great impact because the problem may be correlated with multiple causes. Also, each risk factor can result in different outcomes (as cited in Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 4).

Evaluating the prevention approach: The prevention approach is the most common model used for designing youth development programs. All the research done during the last 25 years has proved this model to have the capacity to enumerate risk factors and provide a framework for addressing them. According to Benson et al (1997) the clear weakness of this approach is that it "tends to be deficit-oriented emphasizing youth problems" (as cited in Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 5). The large problem is that this view can stigmatize youth and undermine their willingness to join programs. Basically people expect youth to fail. The authors believe that the highly critical limitation is that the prevention approach gives little to "promote normative youth development" (ibid). Also there is the problem that prevention gives the same weight to each risk and protective factor, making it harder determine if a factor is the cause or the effect, and furthermore it implies that each factor applies in the same dimension and with the same effect to all persons (ibid).

### **Resilience Approaches**

According to Garmezy (1993), the concept of resilience was born in the field of primary prevention when researchers observed that some children who experienced developmental difficulties did not present problematic outcomes. They decided to find out which factors enabled an individual to overcome stress and difficulties with success. Bartelt (1994) and others identified two factors that needed to be present to demonstrate resilience: a stress situation and successful adaptation to it (as cited in Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 5). With these two characteristics there is agreement among scholars. To summarize, resilience is the ability of a person to get away from the related negative result that a problematic situation can carry, and defeat this event in a problem-free manner.

This approach has encouraged the youth development field to develop innovative strategies to foster resilience in disadvantaged youth<sup>3</sup>, to help young people avoid negative outcomes (violence, drugs, and crime) and promote positive adulthood. The concept of resilience has expanded not only to characterize the person, but also the family and the community (ibid, p. 5).

Evaluating the resilience approach: there is a lot of disagreement on the concept of resilience; some scholars define it too broadly and others say that the idea gets too general. Another criticism describe by Tolan (1996) is that the concept does not take into consideration environmental conditions. Rutter (1993) pointed out that that building resilience in the individual potentially can be blaming the victim, and over emphasizing resilience can not drive the attention away from real problems that needs to be addressed by policy makers (as cited in Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 6). People's vulnerability varies according to each circumstance, so it is misleading to assume that individuals are invulnerable. Resilience is best exemplified when a person can keep away from problems and attain developmental probability regardless of contact with risk (Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 6).

The authors point out that resilience results from a mixing of four processes that allow the individual to have the needed assets: (1) Resilience may result from the successful operation of protective processes; (2) Resilience may occur as a result of certain exceptional personal characteristics; (3) Resilience also may be achieved by successfully recovering from a stressful situation or crisis event; (4) Resilience may occur through the process of steeling (ibid, p. 6.).

### **Positive Youth Development**

In recent years a new approach called "positive youth development" has been taken by policy makers, programmers and practitioners. Youth-serving places, such as after school programs, have embraced it with enthusiasm. Positive youth development leaders include The Search Institute's Developmental Asset model, Public/Private Venture's Community

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<sup>3</sup> Programs Say It Straight (SIS), Families and Schools Together (FAST) and Resilient Youth Curriculum.

Change for Youth Development and the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research. According to the authors, this approach “emphasizes the promotion of positive development and the conditions that contribute to youth health and well-being” (Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 7). According to Roth et al preventing a problem is not sufficient to create responsible, successful adults (ibid).

Positive youth development practitioners believe that every young person has the potential for successful, healthy development and that all youth possess the capacity for positive development, and they build upon that belief (Lerner, 2002, p. 11).

Whitlock and Hamilton (2001) believe that there is a misunderstanding in the proper meaning of the term positive youth development. According to the authors it has been used in three different ways:

- (a) to describe natural process of development in children and adolescents; (b) as a category of programs and organizations that provide activities to promote youth development; (c) as a unifying philosophy characterized by positive, asset-building orientation that builds on strengths rather than categorizing youth according to their deficits (Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 7).

The third aspect described is the one related to an asset-building model that determines how community groups have developed youth programs. Connell et al summarize this theory’s basic assumptions for positive youth development as the following:

1. Encouraging young people to reach their full potential is the best way to keep them from experiencing problems.
2. Providing multifaceted opportunities and support is a key element for youth to succeed.
3. Community’s social capital and support, geared to youth, need to be present to create positive adolescent development.
4. The view of youth as a burden or a set of problems to be fixed needs to change to the view of youth as partners to be involved in development (as cited in Small & Memmo 2004, p. 7).

Evaluating the positive youth development approach: A positive aspect of this approach is the fact that it is undoubtedly universal, by promoting assets and reflecting on the developmental needs of adolescents. This approach can be relevant to any youth (at risk youth, youth leaders, middle of the road youth). Also the authors contend that “Politically it is often safer to identify and confirm what is right about young people than to come to agreement about what is wrong with them” (Small & Memmo, 2004, p.7). It is easier to agree on good things than on bad things.

Small & Memmo identify some deficiencies in this approach. One example is that this approach fails to notice that adolescent face risks that can affected their transition to adulthood; another is that it gives the same importance to every asset, when there are clearly some assets that have stronger effects and more importance on a person's development (2004, p. 8). Also there are some assets that youth programs clearly understand how to implement and teach, but there are others that lack community consensus about their importance.

To conclude, there already exists a wealth of knowledge available from youth development scholars, but practitioners do not always place value on what others have developed in the past; rather, many in this field are trying to come with unique, new theories. It is important to recognize and understand that knowledge is cumulative and to build upon the existing knowledge base (Small & Memmo, 2004, p. 8). In addition, it is also important to come to a unified consensus about terminology definitions. Self-interest can corrupt the advancement of youth development: just because the expertise of one person is generally accepted in the field, it does not mean that others can not see the same problem from more than one perspective and enrich the solution. To conclude, the authors emphasize that there is no one best approach; youth development is complex, and there are many actors, consequences, and risk situations. They “believe that a broad-based approach” (ibid, 2004, p. 7) is the best way to address youth needs. All these approaches have good qualities and bad qualities, and implementing one over the other will depend on the specific concern to be addressed. The Institute of Medicine suspect that these different perspectives exist for a competition for “funding and the changing trends in public rhetoric and policy” (Institute of Medicine, 2000, p. 36). From all this, I conclude that for an effective youth development program, ideally the design should look for a “take home lesson” for every approach and integrate them according to the different youth needs.

As the Institute of Medicine says in its report, every approach for youth development is needed, young people need “adults who teach and encourage them... but also they need focused help in steering clear of specific obstacles” (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 35). For example, young people need to have adults' trust and confidence, but they also need clear information on specific problems such as violence, gang and AIDS prevention. However the distinction between each approach gets confusing when programs are evaluated. Some programs that are so-called prevention programs involve positive youth development activities, for example skills building. On the other hand, there are so-called positive youth development programs that focus their efforts on preventing certain behaviors.

With this literature review, I am now able to frame The Food Project model and determine TFP's model of violence prevention. TFP drives its approach from the three theories – prevention, resilience and positive youth development, and their role in violence prevention is indirect, due the fact that program targets a very diverse group of adolescents who face various challenges.

## 11. EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

In this section I will examine what factors designed The Food Project and which ones have been effective in promoting positive adolescent development. Also I want to explore what is the current scientific theory behind the organization. Finally I want to explore TFP's useful tools to address at-risk behavior.

### **I. Program Design of the Food Project**

#### *General definition*

The Food Project created a model for youth development programs based on three pillars (Gale, 2006). The first one encourages the youth to be involved in *meaningful work*, which means teaching by action the value of work and the satisfaction of contributing to a larger cause. The channel that TFP uses is agricultural work, which requires hard physical and mental work. According to the Institute of Medicine Report, there is evidence that "constructive learning activities" have strong correlation to young people's success in school (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 29). Learning activities help young people to develop and extend cognitive skills and learning capacity (ibid). The second pillar is *shared standards*. TFP uses participatory methods to involve the youth in setting personal and community goals. This instills the realization that teamwork is the best way to achieve these goals. The standard sheet methodology creates a sense of accountability in the youth and helps them gain a clear understanding of what choices they have. The third pillar is *interactive learning*. To support interactive learning, youth are engaged in a series of workshops and games that teach them by action themes such as gender roles, cultural diversity, poverty, hunger and other important social issues.

Scholars have agreed that even though there is not a clear recipe for understanding what factors work perfectly in any given program, there is a common generality in all programs reviewed: they all teach life skills and offer improved adult social supports (ibid, p. 174). These two characteristics are intrinsic in the three pillars of TFP. Taking the definition of the Institute of Medicine report, a community program has the duty to provide concrete benefits to the young people enrolled. They should walk the extra mile in preparing young people for adulthood and designing programs that go beyond filling free time (ibid, p. 33).

The Food Project is a community program that not only aims to promote youth development, but also gears its efforts to promoting sustainable agriculture. The vision of The Food Project is to "create personal and social change through sustainable agriculture." Personal change is a goal of all the TFP youth programs and the organization's desire is to produce social change through the collective efforts of all the young people that go through the program.

To create personal change, TFP has its own Theory of Change (Appendix 5), with the purpose of creating outcomes for youth, local communities and a national movement. The impact objectives of the model are: (1) Engaged, civically responsible, multicultural aware youth (2) sustainable local food systems, (3) developing the next generation of youth leaders

in sustainable agricultural movement. The whole program is designed to accomplish these goals.

The theory of change has been stable, but The Food Project has had many process transformations during its 16 years. Aiming to increase the amount of young people that participate and get involved in the last five years, the programs have become more targeted and have grown not only in work opportunities for the youth but also in their curriculum. Each program has its own challenge and recognizes changes that adolescents face related to their expertise, maturity, and responsibility (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 117). TFP likes to represent its program in an onion shape. I will explore each layer of the onion in the operational description section.

Another important factor that characterizes TFP is the connection of the organization to agriculture work. People that go through the program find this particular aspect a key element. Young people learn to understand the importance of the land and rediscover the connection between land, environment and food. As the young people say, “At the beginning everything is little and by the end it is big -- you grow with the food.”<sup>4</sup> The program lets people feel ownership over the food they help grow, and allows them to say: “The rewards are real, even the physical rewards; I spent weeks of sweat and toil and then had a big juicy tomato to call my own.” Agricultural activities give the participants the certainty that there is a way they can sustain themselves, they can plant a seed and they will have food. Also agricultural activities bring people together: while youth are in the fields, they are fostering communication and sharing who they are. Farming is a new activity for almost every youth that goes through the program, which gives all of them a common ground.

In addition, people who work with TFP are disciplined; this is a key element to delivering not simply a good program but a great program. The supervisors have commitment, will, and talent. People who work for the organization are committed to the mission (Collins, 2005).

Every program that TFP runs is scheduled, planned and structured. According to the Institute of Medicine report, young people’s participation in structured activities outside school time is associated with “development of positive identity, increased initiative and positive relationships with diverse peers and adults” (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 30) According to Barber et al, this positive outcome produces “better school achievement, reduced rates of dropping out of school reduced delinquency and more positive outcomes in adulthood,” (ibid).

Newman et al found one critical point that constrained adolescents from poor communities to accessing after school programs, and that factor is financial and transportation limitations (as cited in Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 31). To create equal opportunities and facilitate accessibility, every TFP program pays the young people for their work and covers their transportation cost. It also pays youth in the Summer Youth Program a stipend every two weeks, and gives an hourly salary to those in the Academic and Internship programs. The

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<sup>4</sup> Brain storm meeting with L/B interns, November 2007

summer stipend for youth and transportation expenses are the biggest expenses in TFP's program budget. The justification for this is to give opportunities to inner city youth to have access to the program.

The outcomes that TFP wants to achieve with the youth development program are job training, communication, leadership, diversity skills, healthy food choices, sustainable food systems, and commitment to services and social change. TFP tries to address some of the development challenges identified by the Institute of Medicine by letting young people participate in experiences that can lead them to facilitate "future economic independence and interdependence," and also let them think about new social roles, as well as "transforming peer relationship into deeper friendship" (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 47).

TFP identified these outcomes after they received the results of their first longitudinal study where former alumni shared their own experiences with the organization (BNRA Report). TFP programs try to reach all these goals at different levels.

In designing its programs, the Food Project tries to fulfill the four general categories needed to create a program that provides personal and social assets, which are: physical health (agricultural work), cognitive development (social curriculum and workshops), psychological and emotional development ("Straight Talk", positives and deltas) and social development (belonging to a clear organization and transmitting their sense of belonging through farmers markets, peer relationships and activism).

## **II. What is the current theory behind TFP?**

TFP used as their foundation a study called *Urban Sanctuaries* by Milbry McLaughlin (1994) of Stanford University, where the researcher asked youth instead of adults what they considered to be the key elements for an effective youth development program. The researcher came up with the three "R's" of effective youth work. The first one was relevance: the work the young people do needs to offer them skills for today and the future. The second one was responsibility: letting young people lead and take care of tasks where they are the director and executor. The third was relationships: provide the youth with support, friendship, and care that supports them in their growth (Gale, 2006, p. 19). After TFP staff evaluated the report and compared it to the way TFP is conducted, they added another R, rigor: challenging young people to give their best effort over time to accomplish a goal (ibid).

Other researchers have their own conclusions. According to the Institute of Medicine's *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* there are eight features of positive developmental settings that need to be present in a youth development program. I have reviewed each one of them and found a matching factor that relates to TFP.

1. Physical and Psychological Safety: TFP addresses this need in two ways. The first one is the general physical security: working on an open farm has physical threats, the heat in the summer is intense, the hard work requires good physical condition, and the

use of unfamiliar tools makes it difficult for young people. There is a good amount of youth who do not eat breakfast in the morning who or go to bed very late, increasing their risk of injury. Taking into consideration all those aspects, TFP's community norms include serious penalties for young people who take risks with their personal safety.

TFP creates psychological safety through its guidelines (Appendix 6), which are standards and norms that ensure that the young people can feel comfortable in their group interaction. At a recent TFP brainstorm, current supervisors described different adjectives that define "safe space": privacy; a place where people feel comfortable and can share private issues without being scared; comfortable to be uncomfortable; confidentiality; no blame, shame or attack; disagree with respect; free of inappropriate or offensive language; knowing boundaries; humor at no one's expense; and trust. One particular example of how TFP provides "safe space" was shown to me during the summer of 2007, when a young person that lives in a tough situation told me, "When I am here, I can be silly." TFP creates an environment where young people can feel comfortable being who they are.

2. **Appropriate Structure:** The standards and the goals and norms create a controlled setting where young people are given the clear rules of the game. For example, during the summer program TFP tries to manage the agenda so that young people have no free time. Every second from the moment they get off public transportation to the moment they get back is managed by an agenda, and if weather or delays in public transportation happen, there is a range of different back up activities that are put in place.

TFP balances the comprehensive planning with the recognition that "structure must permit age-appropriate levels of autonomy" (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 93). TFP encourages young people to work by themselves, trusting in their capacity. Games and team building activities are another key element for TFP's four programs, keeping in consideration the age of the participants and the knowledge that young people need time to relax and have fun.

3. **Supportive Relationships:** TFP tries very hard to create a sense of community within the people that participate. Every Friday during the summer program, the young people from one crew cook for the others, each crew has a weekly task to prepare a skit of the "theme of the week," and also each crew works all day together to learn from the enrichments in the workshop, games or in the agricultural debate where they play roles against other crew members.

In the academic year, the AYP coordinator has weekly advisory sessions with the young people and works with them on a direct support system, personalized according to the needs of each person. TFP is not only their employer, but also a place where they know they can find a friendly hand (Brigham & Nahas, 2008, p. 25). Staff that work at TFP have caring relations with the young people they lead, and help

them within the capacities of the organization. Basically TFP has a “youth-centered” approach where adults participate in youths’ lives but impose a controlled and ruling environment (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 95).

4. Opportunities to belong: The work on the farm is goal-oriented, and the young people work hard and see how important their work is for the organization. As well, they see their contribution in the hunger relief organizations, where their contributions are needed regardless of the youth’s economic, social or cultural background. As Adam Reeve<sup>5</sup> said, “The Food Project allows me to be part of something that’s much bigger than myself. At TFP I can see the change that we make because we make it. I can see it in the community; in the people we interact with and in each other here at TFP.”
5. Positive Social Norms: Letting young people set their own goals and checking on them from time to time creates a place where there are high expectations. As well, TFP has two mechanisms to implement positive social norms.<sup>6</sup> the first one is a standard sheet and violations chart (Appendix 7) and the second one is a strong feedback system, “Straight Talk”, where young people learn how to communicate and how to receive personal feedback without feeling offended; most often are excited to get more information about themselves (Brigham & Nahas, 2008).

By using a standards sheet and violations chart, TFP centers their organization around “core values of community, responsibility, services, initiative, commitment, hope and courage” (Gale, p. 31). Holding to these standards is not only the mission of the youth that pass through the program, but also of the staff. Basically these standards are implemented and the consequence for the young people when they violate some of them is a deduction from their pay. The amount of money they lose is determined by the frequency of the violation; the first step is a warning during which they do not lose money, but if the behavior continues they must pay the price.

““Straight Talk”” is a process of communication where young people create a list of comments about their peers on specific activities executed by the team, and then they share it to help each other accomplish standards and meet their goals. “Straight Talk” provides youth with critical information about what they are doing well, where they can improve, and whether they committed any violations,” (Gale, 2006, p. 24). “Straight Talk” can be very challenging for youth at the beginning, so TFP has created rules or guidelines to facilitate it (Appendix 8). People get to prepare a list with specific examples; these are given as positives and deltas, or aspects the other party can improve The rules are clear: they have to always point out a specific

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<sup>5</sup> Adam Reeve, age 16, Urban Education and Outreach intern, Fall Survey 2007.

<sup>6</sup> The Standards and “Straight Talk” section were developed by using material from Teen Empowerment Program Implementation Manual, written by Stanley Pollack and Mary Fusoni. Teen Empowerment worked in collaboration with The Food Project. To learn more about Teen Empowerment’s work, go to [www.teenempowerment.org](http://www.teenempowerment.org)

example to make their criticism clear, and they should be kind, with the intention of letting the other party learn and grow from the feedback.

Young people are interested to learn how they are perceived by others, and straight talk allows them to have an idea about how people perceive them. Young people face many changes while they are growing, and the most important is to establish a sense of identity and respond to the question who am I? (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 59). Having honest feedback from their supervisor and their peers lets them understand themselves and learn how to improve. According to the BNRA report, of all the benefits youth received from the TFP curriculum, 50.5% of the alumni interviewed pointed out that straight talk was the most valuable tool they were given (Brigham & Nahas, 2008, p. 25).

6. Support for efficacy and mastering: letting youth lead is a big challenge and youth who pass through TFP have that opportunity when they start the Academic Year Program. There, they are completely responsible for leading volunteers on the farms.

“Experiential learning is core to developing entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes... the core experience needs to be built around authentic adult relationships and role models: hands-on experience,” (Integral Assets Consulting Group, 2006). TFP believes that young people have the capacity to lead and be examples to the volunteer groups of different ages that help on the farm; this leading experience builds their confidence.

TFP has a strong culture of setting high expectations. “A culture of high expectations and belief in a young person’s ability to succeed (efficacy) are critical to success,” (Integral Consulting Group, 2006). TFP describes itself as an efficacy program, where young people cannot fail.

7. Opportunities for skill building: Workshops, work experiences, getting paid and the work per se develop strong life skills in the young people. As Mike Veling<sup>7</sup> said:

I believe that working at TFP has allowed me to be more articulate. I believe that the ultimate measure of intelligence is how well you know why you are doing something. Working at The Food Project has allowed me to formulate my thoughts, which is a major skill required in public speaking, and that has allowed me to think through why I am doing anything. Without TFP I would not be as intelligent as I am today, by my definition of intelligence anyway.

There is a strong movement in the youth development field to encourage youth programs to create options in their curriculum that promote the development of assets. According to Benson, development assets are key elements for youth to thrive in academic achievement and social achievement (as cited in Lerner, 2002, p. 133).

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<sup>7</sup> Mike Veling, age 17, Diversity intern, Fall Survey 2007.

Young people not only need to pass through the risk of adolescence but also have success in adulthood.

8. Integration of family, school and community efforts: “Programs need to be deeply embedded and connect young people with the communities in which they work” (Integral Assets Consulting Group, 2006). Young people feel that community and mutual responsibility is more important than fulfilling their own needs (Zeldin, 2004, p. 625). Community members become involved with the work of the youth at the farmer’s market, and the family is involved at family events where they get together and share how the young people’s behavior has changed and is geared to more healthy eating discipline or other aspects.

Part of the TFP model is that 40% of the food that the young people help grow on the farm goes to shelters and hunger relief organizations, giving the young people the feeling that they are contributing to their community.

Although the research related to what makes effective programs for positive youth development is limited, mostly because there have been a few longitudinal studies, the eight features presented above aim to start a framework of factors community programs need to have.

In the case of TFP, it is also important to note that even though its staff is committed and there is adequate funding, “no single program is going to succeed in helping every participant,” (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 87). At each stage of their life, young people have many agents that influence them with more power than a youth program would. TFP sees evidence of this every summer, when two or three people are fired from the summer youth program, because it is too hard for them to adjust to the new community standards.

### **III. Operational Description**

TFP frames their youth programs in an onion drawing, illustrating the layers and levels of growth young people go through in its various programs.

#### **Summer Youth Program (SYP)**

The first program, what the senior manager director calls “Boot Camp” is the entry program, the Summer Youth Program (SYP). This program is designed “for” the young people, and was the first program that the organization developed in 1991. Since then, a few things have changed but the main ideas -- meaningful work, interactive learning and shared standards -- have been present since the beginning. SYP is a complex but well-organized program. Everything that happens during the 7.5 weeks of the summer program has been planned in advance, six months before it takes place.

For the Summer Youth Program, TFP hires young people from 14 to 17 years to work on a farm for 7.5 weeks. Each participant gets a weekly stipend, and works in crew of 10 people; each crew has a leader and assistant crew leader. The general schedule for the week includes

agricultural tasks, social curriculum, volunteer work and recreative time (attachment 5). During the summer program, young people work in the farmer's market, participate in community lunches, spend one overnight on the 31-acre farm and conclude the summer with a celebration called the family feast event. TFP tries to hire 40% of young people from suburban areas and 60% from urban areas (Dorchester and Roxbury), and from that ratio the balance between genders is 50% female and 50% male.

There is a significant amount of administrative work behind the SYP. The process starts nine months before the summer. The first task is to update the recruiters' information; every year TFP reaches out to schools, community centers, sport centers and other organizations that are frequented by youth in order to send them the summer program material so their young people can see it. Usually the packet will include a letter to the recruiter inviting him/her to help the organization get the word out, a poster with postcards that young people can use to request information about the program, several youth program applications and also POP information about the program. For summer 2008, TFP contacted 178 people and sent 200 packets. All this process is executed by hiring young people that finished the program in the summer of 2007 and participate in the academic year program and the intern program in the organization.

To support the initial outreach, a marathon effort happens during the core of the winter, when 300 posters are placed throughout the farm's surrounding communities, and staff participate in many fairs, school presentations, school assemblies and other public relations events that can help the organization get the word out about the SYP program. During the first three month of 2008, 33 presentations were made all over the Greater Boston area. In addition, applicants that were on a waiting list for the past summer are contacted by a personal letter, alumni of the program are asked to help use their network to attract more people, and parents of alumni are also requested to help in the recruitment process. Two weeks before the application process ends, all alumni of the past two summers are contacted by phone and requested to help get the word out. Also TFP has a strong presence in the internet media, using network web sites such as Myspace and Facebook, and publishing the job opportunities on official web sites directed to young people looking for jobs during the summer.

All the recruitment efforts provide the organization with a ratio of 2:1 (two applications per 1 spot) in the suburban area and 4:1 (four applications per 1 spot) in the urban areas. Each applicant has to go through an interview process which includes filling out an application (attachment 6) and attending a group and personal work interview. For example, in 2008 TFP interviewed for the Lincoln and Boston sites 180 urban youth over two days, with two sessions per day.

The selection process is long and hard. Each applicant's folder has an interview sheet where the interviewer writes their comments, and also adds any feed back from young TFP people that participate in leading the interview process. This selection occurs in a five-hour meeting, where each interviewer presents each candidate and categorizes if they are at risk, with leadership potential, or are middle of the road. Every staff person that participates in the interviews is passionate about their candidates and that makes the process of choosing the

participants harder. The selection starts each summer with 20% of the participants in the category of leaders, 60% in the middle of the road and 20% are at risk. From the risk percentage, TFP considers young people that are influenced by violence either in their homes, or school, or people whose communities are not safe. This entire process is documented in the recruitment manual of this program; and each year a new updated version is printed that includes changes to make the whole process go smoothly. (Coward, 2006)

At the same time the participants for the summer program are chosen, the selection of crew leaders and assistant crew leaders is also taking place. All participants are divided into “crews” of 10 people for the program. The crew leader and assistant crew leader positions are key elements to great achievement; they have the primary responsibility to give the support the young people need in each crew to learn and take the best advantage of the program. Also they are the ones that enforce the norms and standards among youth during the summer. Both positions have a competitive market salary.

The selections of these two positions are as detailed as the selection of the crew worker. For the crew leader position each candidate has a phone interview as first step, then a personal interview with people from the staff and then a day in action working with the academic year program youth. Each of these people that interact with the candidate have a say in the final decision. Criteria for a crew leader are they have to be between 20 to 28 years old and have high devotion to young people. Usually The Food Project hires 20% of the crew leaders from their own alumni and these people have to represent the diversity of the youth population in the program. The assistant crew leader is a young person that has gone through the program the year before. This person has to prepare a cover letter and resume and have a job interview with a staff member. This is another example of how TFP tries to promote life skills training in every aspect of operations.

It is important to mention that TFP has a great commitment to diversity and that the organization makes a great effort in hiring crew workers from different racial, cultural, social and economic backgrounds. They also embrace this diversity with the people that have leadership roles during the summer.

The last position that has a lot of responsibility in producing the summer program is the site supervisor. This person is always an alumnus of the program, and has the challenge to synchronize the whole process, facilitating workshops, the morning meeting, leader’s meetings, trainings and other activities that take place through the summer.

After the site supervisor, crew leaders, assistant crew workers and crew workers are selected, the program starts. The first step is to finish the whole hiring process. Each young person receives a packet that contains a job offer letter, and other documents that request medical information, tax information, etc. (Coward, 2006). After they complete and return the packet, the enrollment process begins. Each person, base upon their particular characteristics, is assigned intentionally into a crew which will be their group of colleagues during the whole summer.

Before the summer starts, crew leaders and assistant crew leaders attend a one week training prepared by the site supervisor; this week is key. During this time the community for leaders is built and the organization youth development methodology is presented; it is then continually reinforced during the whole process (Evans, 2007).

The TFP's method of youth development presented in the summer program includes different aspects, all of which are framed in the vision and mission of the organization, and linked with the guidelines (attachment 8), and standards (attachment 9). Each participant signs the standards agreement. The agreement is linked with loss of money if the youth break any of the rules. In addition, TFP places a lot of emphasis on the safety of their participants, not only on the physical safety (every TFP staff is first aid and CPR trainee) but in the creation of safe space for youth whatever can accept and be accepted by their peers. The guidelines are used for this, and also a communications tool called "Straight Talk." Once per week, each participant receives feed back on their job, as well as their violations if they have broken any standards.

The summer program encourages each participant to brainstorm what will become the group norms, as well as their own personal goals and how they will meet these goals. Also, each participant is given at the beginning of the program a manual that includes the schedules and agendas for their summer, in a macro and weekly detail (Evans, 2007). The idea is to teach young people the good habit of planning. Empirical research presented by the Institute of Medicine states that the ability to plan is a key factor for better well being (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 72)

Each day crews arrive at different agricultural sites, and one day of the week they work at a hunger relief organization; Hunger Relief organizations are key elements of the TFP program, as connecting youth to people that need them brings an enormous contribution to their own life. The ability to make a contribution is a positive adolescent development feature, and also puts the young person on the way to wanting a better future for society (Lerner, 2005, p. 23).

As noted earlier, TFP promotes meaningful work as one of its three pillars, and agricultural work is the activity that represents this. When the summer starts, young people have a significantly different attitude than the one they present at the end, at the family feast event. With the agricultural component, TFP tries to bring physical health and many personal assets to be developed in the young people.

Organizing all this coordination would be impossible without effective technologic software designed by The Food Project that records and manages the youth programs, and that was customized for the need of the organization. In the same way a retail store has sales software, TFP has its own software that organizes, administers and manages the young people that go through the program.

### Academic Year Program (AYP)

The Academic Year Program is designed to work “for” and “with” youth, which means that the curriculum still looks forward to promoting youth development but requires that the young people become active participants.

After young people finish the summer youth program they can apply to the academic year program. The spots for those positions are limited, yet 15% of the youth who apply are accepted. They also receive a stipend.

Academic Year Program participants are often called members of the DIRT crew, which stands for dynamic, intelligent, responsible teenagers. They are key work force for the agricultural staff and continue to help with administrative work during off season. DIRT crew members get together once per trimester in a retreat where they participate in capacity building and training to do their job, as well as social curriculum workshops.

Participants work on the farm one day per week in the fall and spring, where they not only do the farm work but also are responsible for leading volunteers who work on the farm. They have the opportunity to manage a crew of 8 people, some of who are older than them. In the winter, they help in diverse Boston hunger relief organizations preparing and distributing meals. “Youth grow and contribute as active citizens through service and leadership,” (4-H Guideline Report, 2008, p. 1). Youth get involved in the needs of the community and they get paid to make a significant contribution to people in need, developing in them the ability to become caring and committed citizens and being aware of social justice issues.

### Alumni & Internship Programs

The alumni and internship programs are considered programs “by” and “with” the youth. Their goal is to let youth lead and take action to create initiative in each of their different job opportunities.

Young people that complete the summer program can apply for any TFP internship; almost every job in the organization requires the presence of young people. Also interns and alumni are selected as candidates to travel with the organization in support of the national work of the TFP, *promoting personal and social change through sustainable agriculture*.

Each internship opportunity varies according to needs, and has a specific supervisor, who is trained in the TFP model of youth development. Each supervisor has not only to perform effective work but also be collaborative, supportive, invested in each other and in the youth’s success. Every two weeks, supervisors get together to discuss the progress of each intern and help each other with concerns or difficulties. Supervisors are in a continuous learning cycle attending trainings that help them proceed to go the extra mile for the youth.

## Board

The organization has a great commitment to youth that is also seen at the board level. Twenty percent of The Food Project's board must be filled by young people who have gone through the program, and they have to represent the diversity of the program by race and gender.

As a board member, youth have legal duties: (1) duty of care (act in good faith) and (2) duty of loyalty. It is important to notice that in the legal context the young people that serve on the board are allowed to perform activities normally regulated by the state according to their age (Young, 1999).

The board role is a program "by" the youth. The youth role in the board is geared to provide "Opportunities for shared decision-making, planning and program implementation" (4-H Guideline principle report, 2008, p. 1). They have the same voice and vote of any other board member, and also the same privileges and responsibilities. "Having youth in vital decision-making roles improves programming effectiveness" (Zeldin, 2000, p. 39) Young people on the board can attend board meetings, belong to any committee, and receive board newsletters and information.

Youth find a space on the TFP board because the board is more focused on "vision and learning" (ibid, p. 9) rather than "rule making and management" (ibid, p9). In the first areas, young people have many contributions to make, while in the second one, they lack the skills that come with age and experience.

## VI. Evaluation

Evaluation is critical to measure the effectiveness of a program (Institute of Medicine, 2002). TFP had a comprehensive evaluation of the whole organization prepared by Sparhawk Group in 2003. This report was directed to donors and possible funding opportunities, to explore the possibility of documenting and disseminating the TFP model. The organization had all three of the youth programs documented, with the results published in two books and several working manuals. The manuals are so detailed that they even include small things such as communication tools that create efficient techniques to work with crews. Organizations that are great, do not build around a person but around the organization, and updating of documentation is key for this success (Collins, 2005).

The Sparhawk report founds that just within summer youth program, TFP was notably increasing the ability of participants in presenting ideas, personal qualities, use of information and interpersonal skills.

The Institute of Medicine describes two main ways to evaluate programs: the first one is process evaluation (formative evaluation) and the second one is outcome evaluation (summative evaluation) (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 202). It is important to note that TFP has been evaluated by an external firm for its outcome evaluation, and that staff every year evaluate the curriculum for the process evaluation.

The process evaluation is made through TFP's own positive and delta system. Every year the local youth program staff go on a retreat and evaluate how the program is operating, the results of each workshop, how services are delivered during field work and the result of the time in the hunger relief organization.

The positive and delta system is an integral part in every program. At the end of the summer youth program, crew leaders and assistant crew leaders get together with the site supervisor and they do a brainstorm of positive factors and deltas (which are things that should be changed to ensure better results). The same process happens at the end of the academic year program and the internship programs. All this feedback is critical for designing next year's program; everything gets documented and recorded to refer back to if it is needed. This process has been the engine that keeps improving the organization.

The outcome evaluation: TFP wants to deliver the theory of change as an outcome. The first evaluation made by the organization is the BNRA report, where a group of researchers took a sample of alumni who were contacted first in phone interviews and then by focus groups. These included participants from 1998 to 2003, and almost all the participants had gone through more than one program. The findings were that The Food Project is a phenomenal first job experience as they detail:

The general tenor is that work can be important and beneficial, but that the quality of adolescent jobs matters enormously; high quality, learning-rich jobs can help young people see the connection between what they learn in school and what they need in life... Also they determine that caring staff treat youth with kindness and respect; high expectations and rewards for performance are balanced with ample opportunities to learn from mistakes and show improvements. (Brigham & Nahas, 2008, p. 25)

Last year, TFP started working on a systematic process evaluation, based on the learning from the outcome evaluation. "Clarity about outcome...it is critical to be very clear about the targeted outcomes and to tailor programming to the targeted outcome (Internal Asset Consulting, 2006, p. 6). TFP assigned a value per hour for each activity executed during the different programs, and included group activity as a subset part of the main goals – also called "Home runs"<sup>8</sup> -- that TFP wants to achieve with their program; the idea with this is to map out time/program and adjust each program if TFP wants to increase the program delivery to achieve a specific outcome. Currently, I am part of this process where the

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<sup>8</sup> Healthy food choices, service /social change, job skills, leadership, sustainable food systems, communication, diversity.

programs are evaluated to improve them, creating a great fit for youth. After the BNRA report, the TFP graduate profile become clear and the organization is now aiming to achieve “Home Runs” with all graduates that go through the four programs.

## **12. POLICY OR PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS**

### **The Food Project**

As a youth development project, The Food Project's greatest strength is that all the work that is done is not framed simply to achieve youth development but also to promote social change through sustainable agriculture. Young people and the staff that pass through the program are committed to this higher goal and work towards that. The motivation of the young people coming to work is not only getting a stipend, but also they are aiming to achieve a higher goal, that is a huge impact in social change. At this critical time when environmental sustainability is a key element for global sustainability, TFP should connect with TFP alumni to start a collective revolution for social change; the seeds have been planted, TFP just needs to harvest the crop. TFP needs to take the next step and give direction to the young people that have graduated, they need to think beyond their four levels and start developing a fifth level, a "force for change."

Currently TFP is succeeding with young people in the middle of the road category. Most of the young people that drop out of the program are the ones considered at risk. There is no official documentation on this, but in a conversation I had with the youth director, he expressed that, in general, the young people who do not finish the program are the ones who are at risk and lack the family support to complete the initial paperwork to get involved in the program. TFP does not specialize in at risk youth, but the few at risk youth who make it through the program, find that it has a significant positive impact in their life.

Recommendations for The Food Project: I think that being an organization that learns continually gives TFP a big advantage. TFP needs to continue its efforts to improve each and every single workshop to make the most of it and have a greater impact on young people's lives. Also TFP has a lot of space to grow at the interns' level, internships have great potential to put young people on the path to success, so internships should continue to be documented and included in TFP's program scheduling.

TFP does a great job, and they have the potential to become a great resource center of findings about youth development. Their programs have the features needed to make the overall program excel, now TFP should focus on documenting and evaluating the effects of each aspect in a more scientific, technical and methodical manner. Finally, it should share its model's designs and findings with other organizations at both the national and international levels.

### **El Salvador**

Can youth violence in my country be prevented?

My answer is a definitive yes. "Youth violence is not an intractable problem," (Department of Health and Human Services, 2005, p. 4). We now have the knowledge and tools needed to reduce or even prevent it (ibid, p. 4). " I draw this from my academic learning and from the

insights gained from field experience in a youth development program but also from analyzing statistical data on my country's youth.

Many young people in El Salvador are seeking a positive, safe future, but the opportunities are limited. A recent survey showed that 84.7%<sup>9</sup> of youth said that they are not involved in youth organizations. While the survey concluded that this is because young people are lacking interest in participating in youth organizations, in fact, 86.3% said that they do not trust organizations (*Encuesta Nacional de la Juventud*, 2005). The same survey showed that 74.6% of them want to be given the capacity to develop job skills, but there were no options after school or in the summer to address those needs. According to the Young People Secretary's survey, this explains why they do not want to be involved. But I pose the question, "Are Salvadorian options for youth organizations really available to youth?" A recent Harvard study in Boston found a gap in program interest and program availability. More than one third of the youth surveyed indicated, for example an interest in specific programs, but those programs were only available to 19% of the youth surveyed (Harvard, 2004, p. 40). Most often, it is the higher risk youth who are not participants.

In my experiences in participating in summer fairs in the Greater Boston area, I contacted more than 120<sup>10</sup> organizations that have structured programs for young people with options that not only entertain them and keep them busy, but that also contribute in their development toward a positive adulthood. Indeed, the options were so vast that young people can choose which youth development model they want to participate in. In my experiences as a recruiter for TFP, the amount of young people that want to belong to this program is beyond the organization's capacity; if even in Boston program interest exceeds program capacity, how much greater could this problem be in El Salvador?

Having a great program for youth, as I learned, is a complicated, complex and detailed task, but giving youth options that do not challenge them would never make an impact. From the organizations that I visited in El Salvador, MOJE, Quetzalcoatl Foundation and Catholic Relief Services, I can tell that the willingness to provide young people with opportunities is present, what is needed, however is a programmatic, scientific approach to effectively target particular needs for young people's development. The targeting should be preventive, with resiliencies or with positive development, as I learned they are correlated. A great program, in my opinion, must include all of them. I see so much potential in my country and I believe different institutions can learn something from each approach and incorporate them into their delivery.

At the present moment, I believe that the most effective youth "development" organizations in my country are gangs, they influence youth in a negative way but they do shape identities, provide income and give a sense of belonging and safety; what El Salvador needs is to give an option to youth where they can have these development needs fulfilled in a positive way. Programs like TFP's, which promote social change through sustainable agriculture, would

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<sup>9</sup> Survey from the young people secretary

<sup>10</sup> Hand out Summer Programs Resource Fair from Boston after school & Beyond 2008.

benefit El Salvador, where agricultural activity is a key sector in the economy. These programs, particularly in the rural areas, would address youth's interest in working at a job, receiving payment, giving them incentives to stay in the rural area. According to GTZ, the majority of the teenager population that actually works in El Salvador is currently involved in agricultural activities (Carranza, 2006). Programs like TFP's can exponentially increase local youth employment, and at the same time youth development. The Harvard study showed that 32% of youth are employed in after school jobs (Harvard, 2004, p. 40) illustrating young people's desire to work and receive an income.

El Salvador needs to take responsibility and be accountable for its youth, and become aware that the media and politicians' views of young people at risk come from the beginning of the 20th century. We need a new, 21<sup>st</sup> century approach: that the violence problem needs to be addressed at each level. In my case, I think my study will contribute at the community level because it encourages communities to act for the benefit of their youth. El Salvador, in the process of acknowledging the problem, needs to do two important things: (1) be consistent and transparent in tracking real data about homicide and the nature of violent acts committed by young people; there should not be any difference between the data managed by law enforcement and the data from the public health sector. For example, in 1999 *The Instituto de Medicina Legal* determined a rate of 41.3% of deaths by homicide but the Pan American Health Organization reported 47%, which implies a difference of 378 deaths (UNODC, 2007 p. 54). (2) Create models for local programs in youth development, and ways to assess if these models have good coverage for all youth or whether there are major gaps in who is being served (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 118). It is necessary to focus on tangible outcomes for the programs, and to choose very wisely the program staff, and the program design according to youth needs.

Acknowledging that El Salvador has a problem, gathering together the whole community to work on it, and incorporating institutions in the work will develop a positive environment. Stanley Pollack<sup>11</sup> in a interview with the *Boston Globe* about the dropping rate of crime in Boston between 1996 and 2003, noted that a "significant reason for the drop in crime was the transformation of beliefs and values within the youth culture, which was the product of strategic support by private and governmental donors for an asset-based approach to youth development. Donors dedicated significant resources to many programs that hired teenagers and trained them to be agents of positive change," (Boston Globe, 2006, p. 11).

Governmental institutions should stop the political rhetoric that promotes a bright future for youth but does not provide the tools needed to achieve it. I have learned that giving a one-hour workshop to a ninth grader about how to raise chickens won't be the tool that changes that person's life and I want to share that knowledge with the government of El Salvador. I think that El Salvador's Young People Secretary has so much potential. However, instead of working on implementing programs with a low youth development component but high visibility – like El Salvador's "Latin American Idol," – they should be organizing communities and municipalities to create local youth development and social change

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<sup>11</sup> Notable practitioner in Boston. Director of Youth Empowerment Inc.

programs. I have a dream: I see the Young People Secretary as an institution that can become the link between communities, NGOs, international and governmental funders, and the private sector. Also, as an institution that can provide local research, support small communities, and evaluate and disseminate local youth development findings to all stakeholders (youth, schools, families, communities, funders, leaders in the business sector). I am not advocating that the government fund all these programs but rather that they use their capacity and network to serve as the facilitator between community-based organizations and international funders in a sustainable, programmatic way.

To implement The Food Project in El Salvador, there is clearly a great need for getting more documentation about youth development field within the country, consulting with local organizations and including their inputs, acknowledging the fact that TFP is not completely transferable, but that it needs in-depth evaluation and assessment beforehand. In other words, there needs to be more research done in El Salvador to understand the current situations and applicability of TFP programs there.

Through my study of youth development, I learned about various theories that discuss the issues and the eight factors to design a great program for youth development. I also learned from my experience at TFP that in order for a designed program to not only be implemented but also become a reality in El Salvador, it is essential to have consultancy with the country experts (locals NGOs, young people, government, schools etc). It is also important to consider cultural norms and values to address each of the eighth factors in El Salvadorian context. For example “safe space” in El Salvador could be different from its concept in the U.S. considering about the long-lasting civil war, and “free participatory operation” is not even an option in El Salvador. Other factors like “appropriate structure,” if successfully established, can be significantly beneficial to the smooth implementation of youth programs. Each factor and its impact in the new setting need to be studied and analyzed.

Urban setting in El Salvador might be another possibility for a project like TFP, but the applicability of the whole idea of farming organically in the city needs to be assessed by using focus groups and hearing local people’s opinions along with the possible support from the local community that can be expected. There is no farming in the current culture of urban cities, which will be a challenge to change the local paradigm about agriculture.

I want to conclude the paper with my personal experiences that I learned throughout my youth development study. I learned that it is necessary to have a strong belief in excellence to evaluate your work, understand your boundaries when you are working with young people (family, school and community programs role), know that it is a full time investment and that it might bring frustrations and disappointments sometimes yet with great rewards afterwards.

I hope this paper will generate new ideas and an expanded orientation to efforts carried out by Young People Secretary. One way that I hope to achieve this is by posting my paper on TFP’s web site, translated to Spanish and distributing it to influential youth organizations in

El Salvador such as: UNICEF, MOJE, Foundation Quetzalcoalt, Catholic Relief Services and IUDOP.

**Appendix 1**

The Ecological Framework



Image belong to: National Youth Violence Resource Center  
<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/facts/docs/risk.pdf>

## Appendix 2

### Interview MOJE

**Salvador Hernandez (Executive Director) MOJE**

**Date: June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

**Location: MOJE offices, Ilobasco, El Salvador**

I: What is MOJE?

S: Well MOJE is an organization that was born here in Ilobasco (Cuscatlan Department, El Salvador), as an initiative of a religious group in the community. We were very worried about the current situation of young people in our community, there was a lot of violence, so we decide to start a project with the idea of job creation. Then we start the handicrafts workshops, to teach them skills with handicrafts. We tried to keep innovation in our products and they have been highly accepted in the market. We started with the idea of creating the products and then we started the sales point, the main idea was to improve their economical situation, and teach them to do something.

I: What are the rules off the organization when you work with youth?

S: We have established ground rules, for example: everyone needs to call each other by name, no one use nicknames here. We treat people as humans.

I: How do you deal with young people that have belonged to gangs?

We tried to do workshops designed by our organization, or some that the priests gave us. We tried to explore their reasons for why they belong to a gang asking them positive and negative things of why they belong to a gang. We also try to develop trust from the youth to our self.

I: What has been the major intervention that your organization has made to stop violence?

S: Well, I think the main thing is that our work was compelling to gang members, so they stopped recruiting more young people. Also, young people started to lose their "Gang" identity and become part of a MOJE identity.

I: What do you think is your great challenge?

S: We lack ways to help drugs addicts.

I: Have you worked with the government? How do you get funded?

S: Well the government signed an agreement with us, but we haven't gotten anything in concert so far. We get founding by the government of Sweden, our collaborators are: CORDAID from the Netherlands, ICEP Institut Zur Cooperation Bei entwicklungsprojekten, CODESPA Catalunya, Central America Women fund, Sweden technical cooperation.

### Appendix 3

#### Interview TFP

**Greg Gale (Capacity Building Director) THE FOOD PROJECT**

**Date: March 23, 2008**

**Location: Lincoln, MA, USA**

I: How was TFP born?

G: Young people were pictured only as consumers by society, and the expectation for them was only to persuade them to buy things. Our founder, Ward Chenny felt that young people were disconnected from the land and they needed to find a place in the universe, be a part of something larger than themselves. TFP believes that land connects young people. The food that they help us grow is used to serve the needy. Land has a calming effect as well.

I: What is the theory behind TFP?

G: We used what the Bridgespan study found about our theory of change: XX basically was every one needs to eat, and needs food to live, so we were encouraging young people to take care of somebody's basic needs.

I: What is a particular characteristic of TFP program?

G: In the USA young people are segregated by class, race and society so TFP tries to break that pattern and bring them together.

I: How does TFP manage to create this program?

G: With very clear and structure activities, a clear structure environment.

I: Does TFP have unsuccessful stories?

G: Yes, I remember the case of one boy. We really tried hard but at the end, he was involved in violent activities in his community and now he is in jail. But in the same scope, there is the example of another girls graduate with honor from medical school how choose that instead of working in a suburban hospital, she chose to work in a urban one.

I: How do you put it together?

G: The program logistic is complicate, we need to stay organized, basically been in control of the whole environment.

I: If I ask you what is the TFP youth development model in few words what would you say?

G: We believe young people are capable, they make a difference and we need them. We consider that TFP is a self-advocacy program, a self esteem program. We teach youth skills because they need them because they will produce a contribution, and they can make things happen. They are agents of change.

I: Why do you pay them?

G: Well it is hard to engage people without paying them, the economical remuneration is very needed.

I: Should any corporation hire young people during the summer to teach them skills?

G: It depends. A big organization tried to hire our youth to work with them, but the project was a failure. They did not recognize youth needs while they were with them, for example youth need time to play, they will mistakes if the task is not clearly expressed. Some working environments find it hard to have things going that way.

## Appendix 4

### **Catholic Relief Service**

**Mr. Jose Luis Perez**

**Date: June 13<sup>th</sup> 2007**

**Location: CRS offices, San Salvador**

M: What is the work that CRS is doing to decrease youth involvement in gangs?

JL: We are working with the deported people, people that are sent back from the United States for being illegal. There is a misconception that all the people they deport are violent people that have committed crimes but that is not true.

M: What specific programs do you work on?

JL: We work with these people in workshops that would allow them to emerge again in El Salvadorian society, in two ways finding jobs and adjusting to our culture traditions.

M: Has the governmental or private sector helped?

JL: At the beginning in the 90's and early 00's ANEP, UCA and Governance were interested supporting them, but eventually they lost interest.

M: Has the government helped these deportees return to the labor market?

JL: Well no, mostly because they only invest in infrastructure projects not in development programs that need time and commitment. We do a community diagnosis and a viability analysis. We also work with the immigrants to protect their human rights.

M: Have you done any documentation in order to prevent youth violence?

JL: Yes, we work with the "Connivances Manual." That document was a guideline to develop workshops, and prevent violence.

M: What do you think the country needs to do with youth involved in gangs?

JL: We need to face the problem in two ways, the first, with punitive justice and the second, with an intervention that fosters reintegration in to the society.

## **Appendix 6**

### The Food Project VISIONS' Guidelines

#### ***Try On***

The only way to learn and grow is to try new thoughts, habits, and points of view. A metaphor is that you might go to a clothing store with clear ideas of what you do/do not wear. Trying on new clothes does not mean you have to wear them but at least you went outside of what you customarily would wear for a moment.

#### ***No Blame, Shame or Attack***

It is not okay to do any of these to others or yourself when in a discussion. If you act this way towards others or yourself you will shut down conversation, create defensiveness, and destroy any 'safe space' that has been created.

#### ***OK to Disagree***

Disagreement is not a bad thing, even though it can be uncomfortable. Not everyone can or should share the same point of view. Agreeing to disagree allows people to be honest in a dialogue.

#### ***Self-Focus***

Avoid the use of 'you' or 'we' statements. Keep the focus of your thoughts on your own personal opinions, feelings, and beliefs versus trying to represent the opinions of others. Use 'I' statements whenever possible and notice how that keeps you honest.

#### ***Practice Both/And Thinking***

The dominant way of thinking is to pose everything as 'either/or'. This leads to things always being considered right or wrong, good or evil, with no recognition that some of both could be true. Instead of answering a person with 'yes, but...' try 'yes, and...'. Holding two parts of something as possibly true can be difficult, but it can increase the complexity and richness of discussion.

#### ***100% Responsibility***

It is easy to sit back and blame others for what is not going well in a training or discussion. This guideline asks people to take responsibility for their learning, participation, and behavior.

***Intent/Impact***

Often people intend one thing when they speak or act, but their words or actions often have a different impact on the recipient. If a speaker recognizes and takes responsibility to explain the intent of their words, and if the listener is honest about the impact, dialogue can be deepened and people can learn more about each other.

***Confidentiality***

What is said in a workshop stays in the workshop. If there is agreement around confidentiality it can allow people to take risks, share more deeply, and not fear how it could come back to hurt them. Even if someone was in the same workshop, it is good to check out first whether they want to talk about what they said in the workshop. Do not presume people will always be willing to talk about the same issue after the workshop has ended.

**Source: VISIONS, Inc.**

**Office at Visions-Inc.com**

## Appendix 8

### Straight Talk Rules

#### Part II - Straight Talk

Growing Together, 2000, p. 46.

#### **SAY IT!**

**Be kind:** Your intention in “Straight Talk” is to contribute to your team and to each individual member.

Contributions that make a difference require thoughtfulness, care, and kindness. Only if you deliver your message with these qualities can someone else hear it. Speak to others the way you hope they will speak to you when it is your turn to receive “Straight Talk”.

**Call it as you see it:** Think carefully and deeply about the other person, and identify things about him or her that you believe are strengths and areas for improvement. Tell the truth, even if it may be hard for the other person to hear it.

**Speak the details:** Push yourself to recall particular incidents, moments, and examples that illustrate the point you want to make. People learn best about themselves when they can recall the situation and consider your perspective about it. Do not generalize, because generalities are hard to believe, remember, and understand.

**Balance the scales:** People will find it easier to hear your message if you provide a balance of affirmations and constructive criticism. All people have talents and gifts as well as weaknesses. Find a way to acknowledge both. When you do this, people remain open because they know you are seeing them as whole people and not just the parts you think could improve.

**Pick and choose:** Talk about only what is most essential. Less can be more and can help people focus on one or two areas for improvement.

**Read the listener:** When people are receiving “Straight Talk”, they are taking a risk. Watch them carefully as you speak, to see if they are still able to hear you. Be with them as if in a personal conversation, not as if you are a reporter. Make eye contact.

#### **HEAR IT!**

**Open up:** Use receiving “Straight Talk” as an opportunity to learn more about who you are through the eyes of others. Self-knowledge gives you power, and often other people are the key to learning more about yourself. Remaining open while receiving “Straight Talk” is not

easy for anyone. Notice if you begin shutting down. Try not to get defensive; it only distracts you and stops your learning.

**Look up:** While the other person is speaking to you, make eye contact with him or her. This may feel embarrassing or awkward, but without it the speaker won't know if you're hearing the message. As a result, the speaker may feel that he or she is wasting time.

**Listen up:** Good listening during "Straight Talk" takes practice. You have to stop your inner voice so that you can hear the other person's words. Do not allow yourself to get distracted. If you listen well, you will learn more about yourself—and that gives you power.

**Store it up:** When giving you "Straight Talk", people will be telling you important information. Pay attention and remember what is said. After "Straight Talk" is over, think back on what you heard. Absorb it, and ask the comment givers for clarification if you need it.

**You decide:** People will say what they honestly believe. Some parts of what they say will ring true for you, and other things will not. Remember: You are the one who gets to decide what feedback you want to act on. Be honest and courageous. Use "Straight Talk" to strengthen who you already are.

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