

The Belizean Leadership Youth Summit August 11<sup>th</sup> -28<sup>th</sup>, 2014  
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## **Section I: Project Overview**

### **Our Mission:**

The Belizean Leadership Youth Summit (BLYS) sought to mitigate the circumstances leading to Belize's 6<sup>th</sup> highest homicide and incarceration rate by targeting the issue of gang violence. BLYS used an action based workshop model to promote positive practices in discourse and proactive forms of social engagement. These workshops provide a practical alternative to gang involvement and a method for solving problems that does not include violence.

### **Programming Logistics:**

The program began with a two month social media and on-ground marketing campaign centered on the concept of "Building-Up from Within." Through these efforts, we recruited a core fellowship of 15 young people from diverse backgrounds across Belize City and the outer districts. These 15 students participated in an intensive 2-week workshop series that began promptly at 10 a.m. and ended at 3:30 p.m. from Monday- Thursday. On all days of programming, students were provided with air conditioned space, and two full meals, along with benchmark rewards for outstanding projects and participation.

During their first week, students learned how to dissect social issues and sculpt solutions that address the interests of multiple stakeholders. The cornerstone of this week was gaining strategies for engaging in positive and productive forms of discourse. Over the course of a week students engaged in several negotiation activities which scaled up in rigor as the week progressed. Our main goal for these activities was to change participants' social understanding of debate; debate needed to be understood not as competition for what voice is right and what is wrong, but as an opportunity to understand and appreciate unique and valid perspectives. Our main objective for using negotiation as a form of social engagement was to teach students to identify the interests of their opponents and challenge them to create solutions that creatively and thoroughly addressed the interests of all identified stakeholders.

In order to build upon these concepts, we introduced case studies of organizations that seek to solve issues within their community. We used these case studies to introduce an approach toward problem solving that begins with research, continues with the identification of a mission, then a thorough vision that addresses the root cases of the issue, and lastly, engages in constant evaluation and revision. Students used this framework to inform team efforts in creating development plans through the aid of visual and verbal presentations. Students were required to create a plan for the development of a new Caye that served the interest of both the Tourism and Agriculture industries as well as their multiple stakeholders (government, citizens, and businesses).

The second week centered on strengthening presentation skills and lending practical tools toward the development of the entrepreneurial mindset. The entrepreneurial mindset is one that allows the individual to identify opportunities and use the resources at hand to sculpt a profitable situation. Students were guided through the development of one social enterprise and one business idea which they presented, revised, and re-presented to the group. In total, fellows participated in 5 negotiations, developed 4 business plans, created 3 marketing plans, strategized 4 budgets and fundraising plans, and gave 12 presentations.

The core fellowship ended with a closing ceremony in which two students were awarded \$1,000 scholarships toward further development. We continued our work by carrying out day versions of our program to students from Ocean Academy in Caye Caulker, Belize. Caye Caulker is a place where some students simply ended their education after the primary level until the establishment of this high school. It was important to expand our reach to these areas, because resourcefulness and entrepreneurship are highly beneficial on this island due to small population, limited resources, and the domination of the tourism industry. In total, our school tour served 60 additional students who created 12 more development plans and spread the value of social and political engagement and inclusive activism to a new area in the country.

Overall, our program was most successful in its curriculum design and media reach. We conducted bi-weekly evaluation interviews with students who appreciated this style of learning and showed marked improvement in creative and strategic thinking, as well as in public speaking. Our program was aired on all major television news outlets as news features, interviews, and segment guests. Our main challenge was targeted outreach in the months prior to our arrival in Belize (August 9<sup>th</sup>) and the beginning of the Summit. Given lack of on the ground access to students and communities, we were unable to construct an effective grassroots outreach campaign. This limited our ability to serve as many at risk youth as we had planned. Our core program consisted of around 60% middle class students and 40% at risk or lower-income, but served 12 females and only 3 males. Given that the issue of gang involvement is highly male dominated, a higher male participation rate would have addressed our mission more completely. Going forward we plan to arrive on site at least a month in advance of programming, incorporate an outreach campaign that reaches a larger number of at risk youth, and connect with and learn from our target population to a higher degree.

## **Section II: Ushering Peace**

Peace is not the absence of conflict; it is the knowledge that conflict does not have to pose a threat to the safety or stability of individuals or peoples. What we sought to teach our students was to fearlessly engage in disagreement but to present rational and founded arguments and respect and acknowledge the arguments brought up by others. Peace is about incorporation and mutual respect; it is about a form of disjointed harmony that allows multiple and conflicting voices to be heard but still produce a beautiful outcome.

The Belizean Leadership Youth Summit has promoted Peace in the short term by equipping youth, the group who has the most potential to create change, with the tools necessary to examine what situations threaten peace and engage in challenging those situations without disrupting peace themselves. The ability to speak up, engage in discourse, and also work in a team toward a communal goal are powerful weapons for both restoring and preserving peace. In the long term, we hope to create peace by building an army of people more knowledgeable and more affected by gang violence in Belize to promote a better kind of change than what we, coming from a more privileged point of view that is removed from the Belizean context, can offer. We hope to make the Belizean Leadership Youth Summit an annual program that grows every year and refine our curriculum to reflect more of what is relevant to the Belizean people.

“This project, above all, has taught us that there is no master plan, and that our best hope is not to claim to have the answers. It has taught us that our best hope is in building the capability of the Belizean people to knowledgably advocate for the types of changes they want to see.” – Shanice A. Sanchez

Additionally, this project has taught us about the power of discourse to change both ourselves through the sense of empowerment gained from a voice, and the world, through the empowerment gained from changing and/or correcting stories. We opened our program with a speech. In this speech we quoted Margaret Meade who said it better than we could. She said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

We hope that through the Belizean Leadership Youth Summit, we have created a space for the thoughtful minds of Belize to initiate their country's journey towards peace.

Project Images

