

# **YO! Baltimore Internship Program Evaluation**

## **Executive Summary**

The Baltimore Youth Opportunity System (YO! Baltimore) has offered youth enrolled in the program on-the-job opportunities to improve their labor market skills. This opportunity offers paid work experience jobs, referred to as internships by the program. The full scope of the internship program requires that the youth first prepare for work through group and one-on-one preparation classes. Additionally, the youth attended on-going job retention classes on a regular basis while working at the internship.

The internship program was evaluated using feedback provided by the youth interns' supervisors. Since most of the YO! interns lacked any significant prior work experience, positive supervisors' reports on the youth would provide a strong indication of the overall effectiveness of the YO! program in preparing the youth for the labor force. Negative reports from the supervisors would indicate the program was not successful with those particular youth.

Starting in April of 2002 YO! Baltimore initiated an employer internship evaluation process. Since that date, 375 youth have taken part in the internship program and have been evaluated by their worksite supervisors. With over 68.5% of all the supervisors reporting that the YO! participant was "very good to excellent" and less than 10% reporting that the youth was "unsatisfactory," the responses provided a strong indication that the program effectively prepared youth for work.

The indication of a positive program impact on youth's on-the-job performance is supported via the second set of data on the supervisor's evaluation form. A question designed to test the work-site supervisor's willingness to hire or retain the YO! participant has two positive ("Would Like To Hire" and "Would Like To Extend Internship") and one negative choice ("Needs To Work On Job Readiness"). In terms of the breakout of the responses of those who completed this part of the form, 237 were positive while 129 provided feedback as to a specific area(s) that the youth could use to improve their on-the-job performance.

Collectively, this employer/supervisor feedback is a powerful indicator of positive program impact relative to successful preparation for the labor force.

## **Background**

Since the second year of program operations, the Baltimore Youth Opportunity System (YO! Baltimore) has offered youth enrolled in the program with actual on-the-job opportunities to improve their labor market skills. This opportunity came through a program activity that offers paid, work experience jobs – called internships by the program -- with Baltimore City employers. Essentially, this program activity offers youth (predominately out-of-school youth with no or limited previous work experience) with a limited duration (typically three months) entry-level training job. These jobs, which are funded by the program, pay at least minimum wage and have sometimes paid higher wages. Jobs range from indoor positions, such as office work positions and day care staff, to outdoor positions, such as recreation workers and grounds maintenance labors. In some instances – usually associated with one of the private sector employers who took part in the program -- specialized types of work experiences were also provided.

Callahan Consultants, Inc. was asked to review the internship program and provide input as to if the data available indicated that the program activity was effective. While there are many potential definitions of the term “effective”, it was decided to define effectiveness in terms of the positive impact of the program activity on assisting youth participants to prepare for entry into the labor force. For purposes of this review, the qualitative measurement of this impact would be determined via evaluations from supervisors of the youth who participated as interns.

Through a detailed analysis of program data, as well as discussions with staff and program administrators, Callahan Consultants, Inc. has been able to both assess the internship program and identify several key factors that appear to play a significant role in the overall effectiveness of the program activity. The remainder of this paper provides a snapshot of the information learned about the program activity and offers an opinion as to its “effectiveness”.

## **How Does the Program Activity Work?**

Youth are recruited for the program activity directly from the YO! Baltimore ports. Aside from meeting all legal age and working condition requirements, the only additional formal program requirement for participation in this activity was that youth had to complete some job preparation training/class (called JBS in the program) that would start the process of preparing them for the world-of-work. Each YO! Baltimore port was given the flexibility of designing their own JBS program content, but all ports typically included a cadre of similar program content. In both classes and individual sessions youth who were scheduled to enter the internship program were briefed on topics that spanned areas such as: work habits, work expectations, work attitudes, and related life skills and on-the-job survival skills.

While JBS was the only formal program requirement, in many instances the youth who were selected to participate in the internship program were YO! members who had participated in other activities in the program. Program staff reported that they often used prior successful participation to informally prioritize how internship opportunities – which were generally well received by the youth due to the inclusion of a wage – were offered to youth. During the time frame examined, less than 30% of all YO! members participated in the internship activity.

Typically, youth worked four to five days a week for four to six hours. A part of the program included a class session every other Friday. During these sessions youth came back to the YO! Baltimore port and participated in program instruction called “Retention Training.” Again, as with JBS, each YO! Baltimore port was free to customize its own retention training course content. Again, there were similarities as to what was provided to the participants by the ports. Along with simple labor market information, youth were exposed to information such as employee / employer relations, dealing with work issues and stress, coping with diversity, managing personal issues and other types of work related life skills issues. The last noteworthy feature of the program was the efforts of the YO! Job Coaches. These YO! Baltimore staff visited the worksites regularly-- sometimes as often as once a week -- to ascertain how the YO! participant was faring on the job and to provide assistance to the worksite supervisor if so requested. Job Coaches essentially provide an ongoing program support lifeline for the youth designed to assist them to stay on-the-job, to be productive, and to deal with issues and crises situations.

## **The Employer/Work Site Supervisor’s Evaluation Form**

While a great deal of information was obtained from the program staff, a rich source of objective data on this program was provided by the “Employer Internship Evaluation Form”. Starting in April of 2002 the YO! Baltimore initiated an employer internship evaluation process and form for all youth who participated in either a public or private sector youth internship. Since that date, 375 youth have taken part in the internship program and have been evaluated by their worksite supervisors. The evaluation form is a simple, one page form which was not designed for research purposes but to specifically provide the YO! program staff with information that would assist them to work with the YO! participant to improve skills and work-related habits. At the conclusion of the internship, employers (specifically, the work site supervisor) were asked to provide an overall rating of the interns performance on the job. The rating categories span from “Excellent” to “Unsatisfactory” (see copy of rating form which is included as attachment A). In addition, supervisors are asked to analyze the youth in labor market terms. Specifically, they are asked to select one of three specific responses:

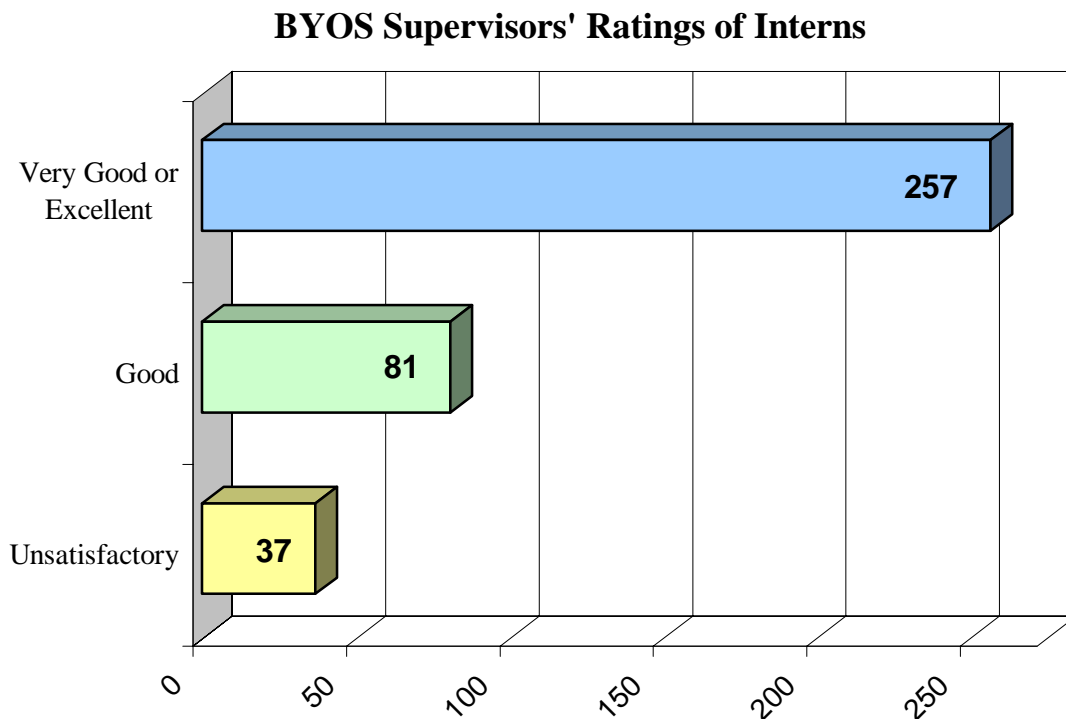
1. Would Like To Hire
2. Would Like To Extend Internship
3. Needs To Work On Job Readiness (and a list of 5 choices are offered where the employer can identify one or multiple specific improvement areas ranging from attitude, attendance, punctuality, written/verbal skills, and to people skills)

While the form was not specifically designed for research purposes, there is data that can be used from these evaluation reports which provide indications of how the YO! program

is succeeding with its goal of assisting youth to become more employable. A summary of the data from these evaluations and a discussion of what the information means in terms of the effectiveness of the program activity is provided below.

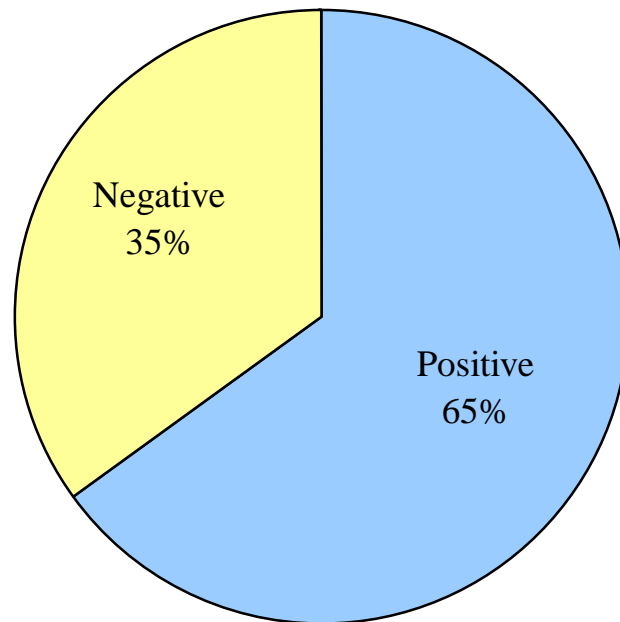
## Evaluation Data

As visually displayed on the following bar graph, the overwhelming majority of work site supervisors indicated that their YO! participant did exceptionally well at the work site. Over 68.5% of all the supervisors reported that the YO! participant was “very good to excellent” and less than 10% reported that the youth was “unsatisfactory”.



The indication of positive program impact on youth’s on-the-job performance is supported via the second the form’s second set of data. Termed “Final Analysis of Our Intern” on the form, this data set was designed to test the work site supervisor’s willingness to hire or retain the YO! participant at the work site. In this rating area, employers are offered positive (“Would Like To Hire” and “Would Like To Extend Internship”) and negative choices (“Needs To Work On Job Readiness”) with an opportunity to identify where the young person needs to improve their on-the-job efforts. Three hundred and sixty-six (366) worksite supervisors opted to complete this part of the survey. As the graphs which follow show, the overwhelming majority of supervisors indicated a willingness to keep the YO! participant on the job, with 65% selecting the “Would Like To Hire” or “Would Like To Extend” (which are grouped in one of the graphs and labeled “Positive”), and only 35% selected the “Needs Improvement” option, which we labeled “Negative”. Interestingly, while employers had no obligation to hire the participant, more than half of the youth whose supervisors responded, “Would Like To Hire” were retained by the employer in an unsubsidized job.

## Final Analyses of Interns



### Summary

Considering that less than 20% of all YO! enrollees have any significant level of work experience and that all of the interns were high school dropouts, the expectation is that the internship learning activity would result in a significant – if not a majority – of unsatisfactory experiences in terms of work site supervisor’s assessment of the participant. The fact that this did not occur appears due to three formal program interventions that are a part of the internship activity -- the pre internship JBS instruction, the ongoing program support of the Job Coach, and the Retention Training that the program offered during the internships. One must keep in mind that the work site supervisors were advised by program staff that this activity was a learning opportunity for the youth. In many ways they were encouraged to provide frank criticism, which the program could use to point out work habits, and attitudinal deficits that the participant would need to address in order to achieve ultimate labor market success. Taken in this context, the overwhelming positive feedback can be viewed as an even stronger indication that the YO! internship experience – and the program components associated with this activity – are effective tools for assisting the participants to establish the critical foundation skills – often called SCANS skills -- that are critical for long-term workplace attachment. The bottom line is that this program activity and the activities that are a part of the entire process appear to be effective program approaches.