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## Introduction

In 2019 only 19.3% of persons with a disability in the US were employed compared to over 66% employment rates for those without disabilities. Lack of employment and the associated socioeconomic disempowerment is a serious barrier to improving the quality of life for many individuals with disabilities. The Youth Employment in the Parks (YEP) program is a novel disability intervention founded in Juneau, Alaska which engages local youth with disabilities (ages 16-19) in a summer job experience doing trail and park maintenance. The program, a collaboration of both the local Independent Living center and community youth center, aims to provide youth with disabilities a safe environment to learn and practice the job skills they will need to attain future employment. The program also emphasizes long-term community integration for the teens through programming centered on relationship building and gaining knowledge of local history and culture.

## Objectives

While the YEP program is only in its 5<sup>th</sup> year, the Juneau community is already seeing anecdotally positive benefits of the program as well as program replication throughout Alaska. This research looked to provide more robust data surrounding the program efficacy by administering a survey throughout the program to look for participant identified growth in numerous categories.

## Materials & Methods

A five-level Likert based survey was administered three times – at the beginning, middle, and end of the six-week program – to the full cohort of 12 teenagers. Survey questions attempted to capture the youth’s opinions of their job skills, future career confidence, and sense of contributing positively to the community. In addition, open ended questions sought to further understand self-identified skill growth.

Question list:

- I have all the skills I need to be a good employee
- I contribute to a positive Juneau community
- Being a part of a team is important to being a good employee
- I am going to have a full-time job in the future
- I am excited about having a job in the future
- I feel safe in my current work environment
- Staff want me to succeed at work
- I have a new friend or mentor because of YEP

## Results

Statement	Pre YEP intervention score	Post YEP intervention score	P value
I have all the skills I need to be a good employee	3	3.58	.02
I am going to have a full time job in the future	2.92	3.58	.01

A statistically significant ( $p = .05$ ) increase was seen in participant agreement to the statements “I have all the skills I need to be a good employee” ( $\mu = 3, 3.58, \sigma = .603, .493$ ) and “I am going to have a full-time job in the future” ( $\mu = 2.92, 3.58, \sigma = .669, .493$ ).

Statement	Participants agreeing/strongly agreeing	Total number of participants	Percent in agreement
Staff want me to succeed at work	12	12	100%
I have a new friend or mentor because of YEP	12	12	100%

All 12 participants unanimously agreed or strongly agreed with the statements “Staff want me to succeed at work” and “I have a new friend or mentor because of YEP.”

Participants most identified work ethic, ability to follow directions, and being supportive coworkers as their most acquired skills.

## Conclusions

Analysis suggests that the YEP program helps youth with disabilities gain both job skills and relationships which may positively impact their future ability to gain employment. Future research hopes to follow participants longitudinally into the workforce in years to come.

## References

Bureau of Labor Statistics

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