

CONTACTS

Nanda Prabhakar (Adult Partner),
Shamya Smith (Youth Partner)

PROGRAM

Elevating Youth Voice

DRIVER

**College Knowledge &
Career Exposure**

What student outcome(s) were you aiming to impact this year?

NANDA

Through our collaboration with SSN this year, we hoped to increase students' engagement in our post-secondary readiness programming. By "engagement," I mean not only that young people attend and participate in programming, but that they are invested in the process and thoughtful regarding the reality of what "college readiness" means for themselves and their peers in the transfer schools. Creating opportunities for our young people to take a critical look at their needs, the services Mission provides, and identify programming gaps is part of building this kind of engagement. After incorporating student feedback, we expected the quality and "fit" of our programming for our young people to improve.

Being able to have our young people participate in the SSN Elevating Youth Voice project was a natural extension of our work at Mission, and was an invaluable experience particularly for our youth, whose specific needs are often overlooked in the post-secondary readiness world because of their status as transfer school students. Ultimately, we want all of our young people to understand the value of their lived experience, and that using their voices to share their stories and thoughts can be transformational, powerful and impactful.

What practices did you try to impact that outcome?

SHAMYA

We hosted a career panel because the results from our post-survey showed that the students at NYC Missions felt that the organization wasn't helping them find their career passion or brainstorm ideas for after graduation. We brainstormed and figured that the best way to help students do this is to host a career panel, which had 4 guest speakers in various fields, from education to theatre. After the career panel, we created a social lunch hour that allowed NYC Missions students to further their conversations with the professionals and get any other details they wanted.

We introduced and planned college trips at NYC Missions because many of the mentors at NYC Missions are college and career advocates, and as graduating seniors, college is a next option for most of the people around us. We felt that the students need the experience of visiting a college so they will be encouraged to attend a college and gain perspective on what a campus looks like and how it feels to be on campus. We focused on colleges in the CUNY or SUNY system, as they are the most accessible for students at our organization. It was important for students to get a feel on what they could be missing out on in life. It was also important that we encouraged students to get out of the environment around them — and college campuses allow for students to go out of their comfort zone and explore.

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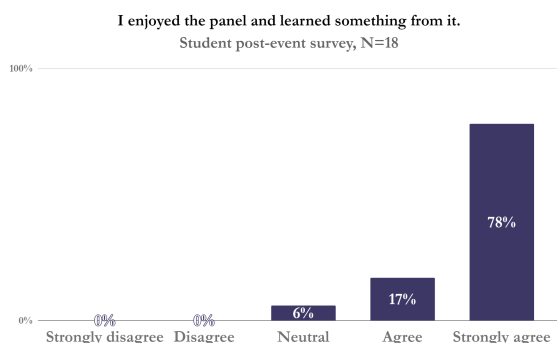
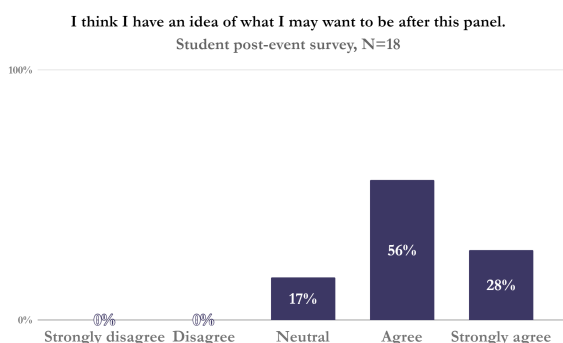
**College Knowledge &
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What did you learn?

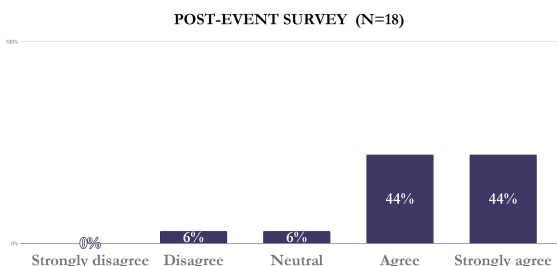
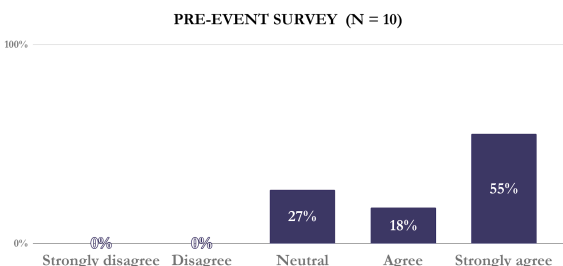
SHAMYA

Something learned through bringing the career panel to NYC Missions is that the students definitely took a liking to it. Their enjoyment was definitely reflected in our post-survey, which we distributed after the panel was over. When compared to the pre-survey data, the growth in student knowledge on career opportunities after graduation was substantial. There were many positive effects of the panel reflected in the survey data. It also seems that this career panel gave students something to look forward to when they graduate, showing them that they have options in whatever they choose to pursue and that there's no limit to the possibilities.

Selected Post-Event Charts



Pre-Post Survey: Youth currently play a role in decision-making at NYC Mission Society.



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Through the college trips planned by students, we learned that students tend to ask very important and knowledgeable questions — they have many curiosities when it comes to college. It seems that they're constantly fascinated with the different programs, financial aid opportunities, and other resources available on a college campus. Students also seem to admire the college campuses and any staff and students we see. Mission students were always excited when being able to explore different options for their future. Their reactions on the college trips were positive and they always asked questions for clarity — demonstrating a strong sense of engagement. The college tours gives students a better understanding on the real world and what they need to do to be prepared for it.

Personally, my experience with SSN has shown me and given me essential tools to network. It also showed me attributes that I have that I didn't notice in myself before. I think because I had such a great experience this should be something that NYC Mission Society should partake in again.

NANDA

The most important thing that we learned from the SSN Elevating Youth Voice project is that our young people exceed even our own high expectations and opinions of them. We were overwhelmingly impressed with the level of commitment our team showed throughout the project, the analytical skills they used to develop the college trip and career panel and their ability to challenge themselves as individuals and as a team. Going forward, we would like to create more opportunities for our young people to take on leadership roles and create student-led projects and programming. We currently do a fair amount of this, but prior to this year have tended to work on student-led initiatives that are bound to only one site. This experience has shown us that we should be thinking bigger and creating opportunities for young people across our six sites to work together. These kinds of projects build confidence, project management skills, analytical skills, and give our young people an inside look into how Learning to Work programs at Mission operate.

An additional benefit of our SSN collaboration was introducing our young people to the idea of networking and how to present themselves and their ideas to different stakeholders, through participation in an SSN funder dinner. Shamya and Joshua were able to attend both the SSN dinner and Mission's annual gala, two social situations that they perhaps would have been uncomfortable with prior to this year. They were both amazing representatives of both of our organizations, as they spoke with board members, organizational leadership, supporters and others about themselves, their goals, and their work as student leaders. It is my (Nanda's) personal goal to create more forums for Mission's leadership and board to interact with our young people and program staff. The heart and foundation of Mission is our youth and our program staff. Having an academic understanding of our programs and participants cannot compare to the experience of hearing directly from staff and young people.