Final Report for P280 - Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism
Cypress Adventures Youth Leadership
Social and Emotional Learning, Life and Leadership Skill Development for Adolescents

An incubator of youth leaders, Cypress Adventures (CA) develops adolescents' emotional, social, and physical well-being, empowering them with the skills necessary to reach their highest potential. We are dedicated to creating a challenging and supportive environment accessible to all. Through experiential learning and boundaryless thinking, we meet our youth where they are and position them to create vibrant futures for themselves and their communities.

We specialize in Positive Youth Development (PYD) for at-risk adolescents in Darlington County (DC). Key factors distinguishing PYD programs from other "prevention" programs is the focus on youths' assets and empowerment to apply developing skills to create and own the programs and services they desire and need, preparing them for the workforce and all aspects of adult life.

Our program bridges the critical gap between school and home life. During out-of-school time, we provide evidence-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), life, and hands-on skill-building opportunities in adolescent-appropriate environments. We are the only after-school leadership development program in DC. Our Youth Leadership Program (YLP) includes free afterschool courses in partnership with the DC schools in addition to summer programming provided in partnership with other youth serving programs and organizations. Our services are designed to meet adolescents' unique physical, cognitive, & socio-emotional needs and support academic achievement, social development, and career readiness.

CA is the only organization in SC offering free, experiential education for adolescents. Everything we do prepares students for the workforce and academic success through our unique education approach. We have coupled life, leadership, and SEL skills development with career readiness skill-building opportunities. Our Leadership 101 course lays the SEL foundation. Leadership 201 gives students career discovery opportunities, and the Youth Council provides project-based learning and hands-on work opportunities.

Our data indicates our students gain life skills essential to the workplace, improve SEL outcomes, including academic self-efficacy, and advance in all areas of career readiness measured.

GOALS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED

Increase in the number of students served by summer and afterschool programs to 200 during the grant term.

We achieved this goal by serving a total of 213 adolescents during the grant period. During this grant period, our foundational Leadership 101 course served 72 students; our new Leadership 201 course (launched in Spring 2024) served 29 students; and our project-based Youth Council course served a total of 53 students. During summer 2024, we provided evidence-based SEL curriculum to 59 adolescents in partnership with college Upward Bound programming and a local group foster home.

SUCCESS MEASURED

Increase in Social & Emotional Learning of Cypress Students - measured by formal 3rd-Party Evaluation & Hello Insight (HI) Evaluation Tool
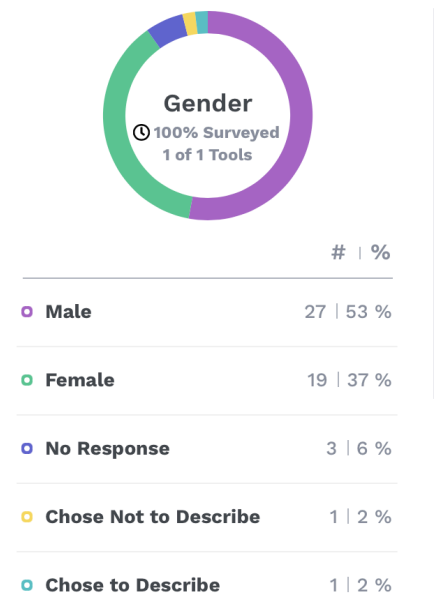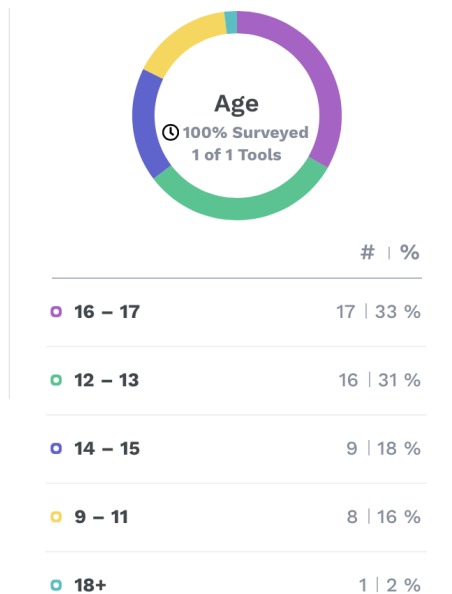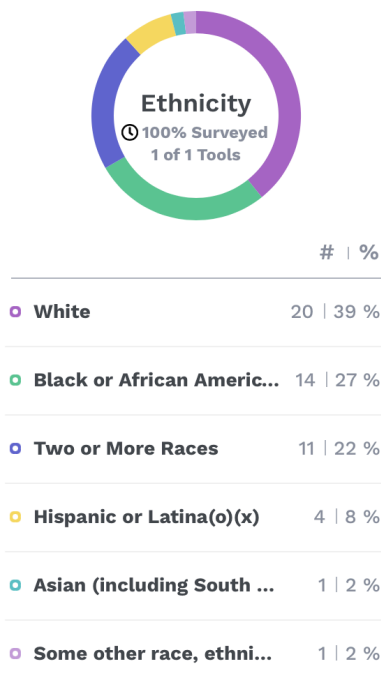
Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which young people develop the soft skills they need to get along as they grow up and engage with the world. SEL helps young people to build and maintain positive relationships as well as to treat setbacks and challenges as learning experiences for their own growth.

All Hello Insight tools measure key SEL capacities that have been well-researched and shown to be developmentally appropriate for young people. These capacities are proven to contribute to longer-term gains such as thriving, decreased negative risk-taking behaviors, and increased academic performance. Hello Insight tools also examines the degree to which young people have experienced promising practices that have been shown to promote growth in these capacities.

The data used to produce this report was collected via statistically validated surveys from one or more Hello Insight tools. Young people take these surveys at the beginning and end of their participation in a program. Listening to young people through these surveys allows us to learn more about them, how they grow, and which experiences are most beneficial to their success. Additional program evaluation data is available upon request.

Of the 72 students served by the Leadership 101 course during this grant cycle, 51 students completed the HI SEL pre- and post-surveys, representing 70% of total students served being represented in this report.

Demographic Data

Ethnicity 100% Surveyed 1 of 1 Tools	#	%
White	20	39 %
Black or African Americ...	14	27 %
Two or More Races	11	22 %
Hispanic or Latina(o)(x)	4	8 %
Asian (including South ...	1	2 %
Some other race, ethni...	1	2 %

Age 100% Surveyed 1 of 1 Tools	#	%
16 – 17	17	33 %
12 – 13	16	31 %
14 – 15	9	18 %
9 – 11	8	16 %
18+	1	2 %

Gender 100% Surveyed 1 of 1 Tools	#	%
Male	27	53 %
Female	19	37 %
No Response	3	6 %
Chose Not to Describe	1	2 %
Chose to Describe	1	2 %

Measured Capacity	%age of students who grew in capacity
Core SEL An encapsulation of several SEL capacities which are all interdependent and positively affect the development of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral factors in young people's lives	63%
Self Management The ability of a young person to regulate their emotions and behavior, take positive risks, and persist through life's challenges	73%
Contribution A young person's desire to engage with and contribute to family, community, and society	64%
Academic Self Efficacy A young person's motivation and perceived mastery over their own learning, school performance, and potential to attain academic success	67%
Positive Identity A young person's internal sense of who they are and confidence to explore the multiple facets of their identities	65%
Social Skills The ability of a young person to take others' perspectives into account, and to develop a sense of caring and empathy	63%

Social Capital is a young person's access to a web of relationships they can mobilize in order to help them improve their lives and achieve their goals. When young people have at least three adults in their life who support them it promotes SEL development.

53% of students surveyed reported an increase in the number of adults in Social Capital. Further, the following table reports the percentage of students surveyed reporting 3 or more adults in the respective categories.

Area of Support from Adults	%age reporting 3+ adults	%age who had an increase in adults
Expect to Explore Their Interests	73%	33%
Can Be Counted on for Help	71%	27%
Believe That They Will Succeed	76%	20%
Pay Attention to Their Lives	71%	20%
Expect to Do Their Best	80%	16%

Cypress Adventures' Youth Leadership Program uses a Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach to leadership development. Program evaluation results provide evidence of the effectiveness of our program in promoting SEL.

Positive Youth Development Experiences are not a set of activities or curriculum, rather; it is a way of working with young people that has been proven to promote SEL (social emotional learning) and can be used in a wide variety of interventions and programs. Foundational Experiences are those that are critical to develop and bolster all of the others. Fortifying Experiences build upon foundational experiences, working in targeted ways to meet the specific needs of young people. Hello Insight uses advanced analytics to predict which Fortifying Experiences promote growth for this specific group of young people.

This section highlights the percent of young people who engaged in each PYD experience. The implementation score provides detail about the percent who experienced each research-based practice.

Foundational Experiences: Engage Authentically & Promote Peer Bonds

ENGAGE AUTHENTICALLY (89/100 implementation score)	
Research Based Practices	**Young People Received**
Help young people feel safe and supported by consistently and purposefully applying their recommendations.	84%
When young people share thoughts and opinions, let them know how much you value their ideas.	92%
Carve out time in your day to learn about and listen to young people.	90%
Take the time to really understand young people and their lives outside the program.	78%
PROMOTE PEER BONDS (83/100 implementation score)	
Research Based Practices	**Young People Received**
Create opportunities for young people to work together and help one another.	84%
Create a sense of team or group identity.	84%
Create an environment in which young people feel safe and supported by one another.	82%
Create opportunities for young people to work in small groups to solve problems.	80%

Fortifying Experiences: Expand Interests, Challenge Growth, Manage Goals, & Share Power
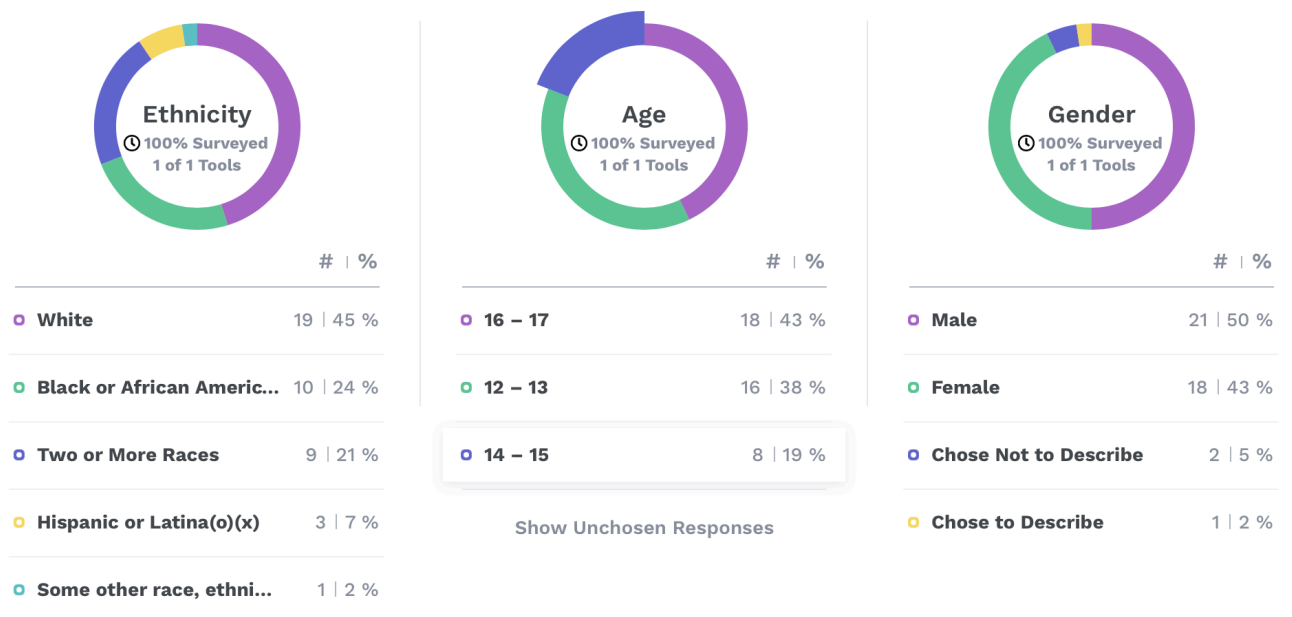
EXPAND INTERESTS (82/100 implementation score)	
Research Based Practices	**Young People Received**
Provide opportunities for young people to meet and connect with new people.	90%
Ensure that young people have the opportunity to engage in activities they like to do.	88%
Encourage young people to take a risk and try something new, even when it seems difficult to do.	88%

Support young people to learn about one another, both their similarities and their differences.	86%
Create opportunities for young people to try new things they have never done before.	80%
Create activities that reference or include things young people enjoy.	78%
Provide opportunities for young people to explore their own passions, cultures, identities, and histories.	62%

CHALLENGE GROWTH (84/100 implementation score)	
Research Based Practices	**Young People Received**
Express often to young people that you expect them to try hard and do their best.	92%
Frequently remind young people that you believe in them and their ability to succeed.	86%
Encourage young people to work through difficult problems.	84%
Support young people to reflect on their progress toward goals.	80%
Support young people to envision their future.	76%

MANAGE GOALS (67/100 implementation score)	
Research Based Practices	**Young People Received**
Provide opportunities for young people to set individual goals.	70%
Provide opportunities for young people to set group goals.	67%
Provide opportunities for young people to pursue various strategies to meet their goals, reflecting on progress along the way and shifting gears when necessary.	62%

SHARE POWER (67/100 implementation score)	
Research Based Practices	**Young People Received**
Create opportunities for young people to make choices and have a voice.	76%
Create opportunities for young people to work on group projects that they have defined.	71%
Collaborate with young people to develop group agreements for how you will work together.	69%
Step back and make space for young people to lead.	52%

Increase in Career Readiness - measured by Hello Insight Evaluation Tool

Of the 82 students served by the Leadership 201 and Youth Council courses during this grant cycle, 42 students completed the Hello Insight Career Readiness pre- and post-surveys, representing 51% of total students served being represented in this report.

Demographic Data

Ethnicity — 100% Surveyed, 1 of 1 Tools	#	%
White	19	45 %
Black or African Americ...	10	24 %
Two or More Races	9	21 %
Hispanic or Latina(o)(x)	3	7 %
Some other race, ethni...	1	2 %

Age — 100% Surveyed, 1 of 1 Tools	#	%
16 – 17	18	43 %
12 – 13	16	38 %
14 – 15	8	19 %

Show Unchosen Responses

Gender — 100% Surveyed, 1 of 1 Tools	#	%
Male	21	50 %
Female	18	43 %
Chose Not to Describe	2	5 %
Chose to Describe	1	2 %

Measured Capacity	%age of students who grew in capacity
Adaptive Mindset An encapsulation of Goal Orientation and Growth Orientation, two capacities that are critical for career readiness	73%
Growth Orientation A young person's ability to persist through and adapt to challenges by trying their best, believing that mistakes help them learn, and asking for help	71%
Goal Orientation A young person's capacity to envision a positive future and set a path forward to achieve their dreams	73%
Applied SEL An encapsulation of collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity, four capacities that are related to career readiness.	71%
Communication A young person's ability to articulate thoughts and ideas using oral, written, and nonverbal techniques	64%
Critical Thinking A young person's ability to reflect critically on learning experiences and to solve different kinds of unfamiliar problems in both conventional and innovative ways	55%

Collaboration A young person's ability to work as part of a team toward a common goal or purpose, engage in problem solving in groups, and listen to and respect others' opinions	67%
Creativity A young person's ability to generate, elaborate, refine, analyze, and evaluate their own ideas in order to improve and maximize their creative efforts	64%

Career Knowledge and Skills

Young people were asked to reflect on their knowledge related to job searching, the application process, and career/workforce skills before and after the program. This chart shows how many young people had good or great knowledge before and after. The change in percentage points or number of young people illustrates gains in their career readiness skills. In order to be career ready, young people must learn about their various employment options and weigh how each fits their educational, emotional, and financial needs. Additionally, they need to learn about various ways of applying for jobs and presenting themselves professionally. This set of measures shows you whether this group is helping to increase young people's knowledge and skills in these areas.

93% of young people reported leaving the program with Good or Great career knowledge and skills

Knowledge or Skill Measured	Before	After	Change in Percentage Points
Public Speaking	29%	64%	**36%**
Time Management	48%	81%	**33%**
Job Interest Exploration	43%	74%	**31%**
Networking	38%	67%	**29%**
Working Independently	57%	83%	**26%**
Career Options	45%	69%	**24%**
Application Process	31%	55%	**24%**

Career Readiness Experiences Measured

The following evaluation results provide evidence of the areas in which our program is achieving our goals and reveals areas for improvement in our program design.

Career Exploration: Envision a Positive Future & Support Networking

ENVISION A POSITIVE FUTURE (74/100 implementation score)	
Research Based Practices	**Young People Received**
Support young people to set goals for their future	92%
Encourage young people to explore different options for their future	83%
Help young people envision what a successful career looks like	61%
Engage young people in creating a plan towards achieving their future vision	61%
SUPPORT NETWORKING (83/100 implementation score)	
Research Based Practices	**Young People Received**
Connect young people with adults or older peers who do the type of work they are interested in exploring in the future	56%
Work with young people, directly or by matching them with mentors or older peers, to help them understand what is needed in order to apply for a job	51%
Help young people maintain positive relationships with staff and mentors that last beyond the program	51%
Create opportunities for young people to practice job interviews	35%

Positivity Youth Development: Broaden Possibilities, Foster Reflection, Build Relationships

BROADEN POSSIBILITIES (77/100 implementation score)	
Research Based Practices	**Young People Received**
Ensure that young people have the opportunity to engage in activities they like to do	85%
Provide opportunities for young people to meet and connect with new people	85%
Encourage young people to take a risk and try something new, even when it seems difficult to do	79%
Create opportunities for young people to try new things they have never done before	78%
Create activities that reference or include things young people enjoy	72%
Support young people to learn about one another—both their similarities and	67%

their differences	
FOSTER REFLECTION (87/100 implementation score)	
Research Based Practices	**Young People Received**
Create an environment where mistakes are celebrated as an opportunity to learn and grow	90%
Learn about young people's strengths and areas of growth	90%
Create opportunities for young people to reflect on what's going well and what isn't	88%
Create opportunities for young people to reflect on how to improve	87%
Let young people know how important it is to review and work on their goals	80%
BUILD RELATIONSHIPS (85/100 implementation score)	
Research Based Practices	**Young People Received**
Carve out time in your day to learn about and listen to young people	88%
When young people share thoughts and opinions, let them know how much you value their ideas	85%
Take the time to really understand young people and their lives outside the program	85%

HOW THE PUBLIC BENEFITS

If we ensure that all young people have caring adults (social capital) and quality programs that provide research-based PYD experiences, they will develop SEL (short-term outcomes) proven to promote thriving, including academic success, college readiness, career and workforce readiness, civic engagement, as well as health and well-being (long-term outcomes). As the data in HI SEL grows, this theory is constantly tested and retested, so that our community continues to learn about what works, for whom, and in what context.

Cypress Adventures' Youth Leadership Program is an evidence-based SEL program, providing Positive Youth Development for middle and high school aged youth during out-of-school time. During this grant period, 213 adolescents who otherwise would not have had anything developmentally appropriate to do during out-of-school time, in Darlington County, a county with high poverty and youth involvement in violent crime, received PYD experiences that provide social and emotional development.