

Case Study

Night Owl Bakery

Night Owl Bakery is a new type of workforce development program for underserved young adults that focuses on the positive change catalyzed when individuals are supported within a caring, forward-thinking, educational environment. With an interest in hands-on project-based learning, the curriculum integrates social, ethical, and environmental concerns with various learning methodologies to establish a responsive, holistic mindset for students.

Principal Investigators

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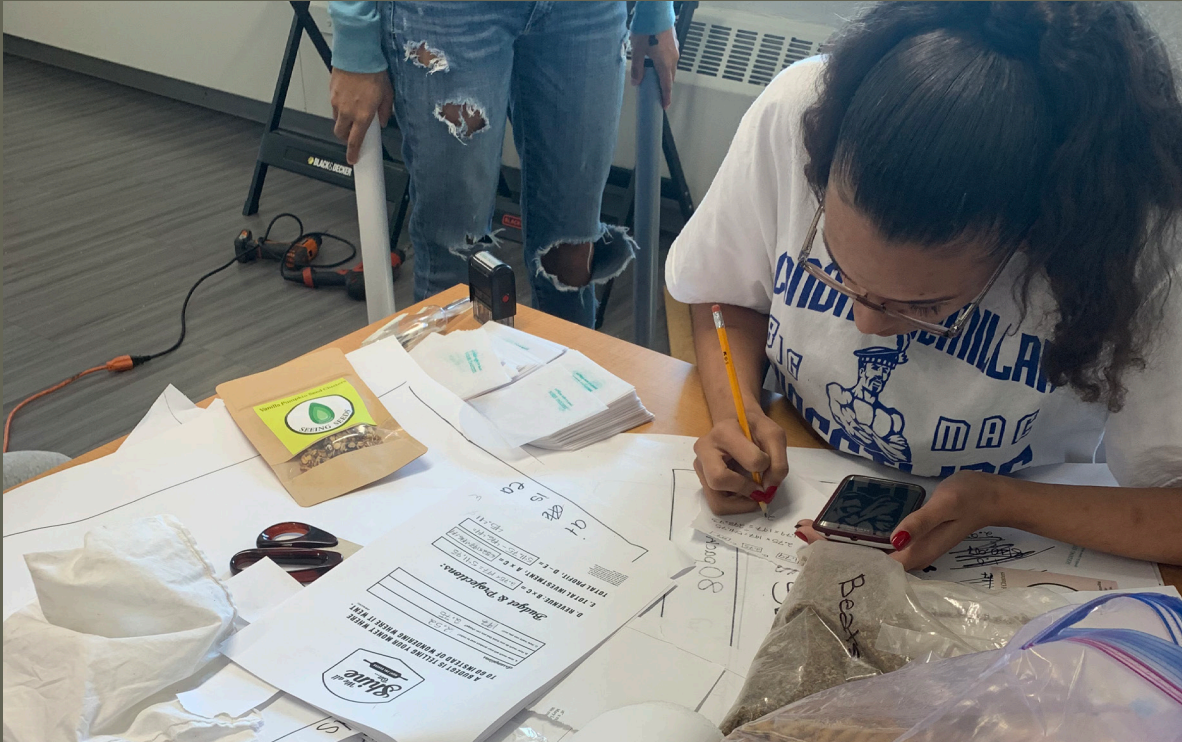
90%
Retention

400
Pounds of flour

2+
Years running

New
Support networks

22
Diverse communities



We work with students to discover the common language between kitchen and financial literacy. Learning is sequential—integrating simple math used in the kitchen into business logic and financing.

Opportunity

Night Owl Bakery (NOB) aims to help young adults triumph over the systemic problems that result in social and racial inequities. Intending to improve young adults' future outcomes, NOB cultivates economic and social development opportunities through multidirectional learning experiences. Several external factors perpetuate inequality and lack of civic engagement, including access to quality education and engaging out-of-school learning experiences. We also know fewer out-of-school resources for

teens in underserved communities, and reaching these youth is daunting. At the same time, our region needs a workforce with 21st-century skills and knowledge.

The integrative approach of NOB reflects the complex nature of this stage of adolescent development and the various social determinants of health that can either widen or bridge the gap regarding individuals' current and future economic mobility.

Approach (in-process)

By design our program blends core 21st-century skills, creativity, problem-solving, and innovation, with a focus on educating the whole person—preparing them to be active citizens with skills to enter the workforce and plan a future with purpose. Beautifully baked bread, healthy snacks, and other accoutrements might be the most tangible outcome of the NOB's program, but our goal is to leave our participants with expanded networks of support, a strong sense of economic and social justice, new pathways to self-sufficiency and concepts of overall well-being, and real on-the-job training.

We have built our learning goals off of Jacques Delors' 4 Pillars of Education: Learning to Be, Learning to Work Together, Learning to Do, Learning to Know. As a result of their experience with Night Owl Bakers, participants will engage with their immediate community—and beyond—in ways that show their awareness of different values, cultures, and perspectives, including indigenous knowledge and worldviews; their interest in building alternative futures for themselves and peers; their value for work and the work of others; and their prioritization of goal setting, critical reflection, creative thinking, and a sense of

mastery in planning their future (immediate, short-term, long-term).

Methods

Our programming centers around a baking kitchen, but also incorporates a multitude of learning experiences in two distinct modules dubbed the Kitchen Lab and the Social Lab. The goal of the Kitchen Lab is to engage participants in the basics of cooking and baking, while also facilitating conversations and activities that allow them to think more critically about where their food comes from, how



Participants explore the science and art of playing with ingredients, as well as discuss cultural influences on flavor, style, and baking technique.



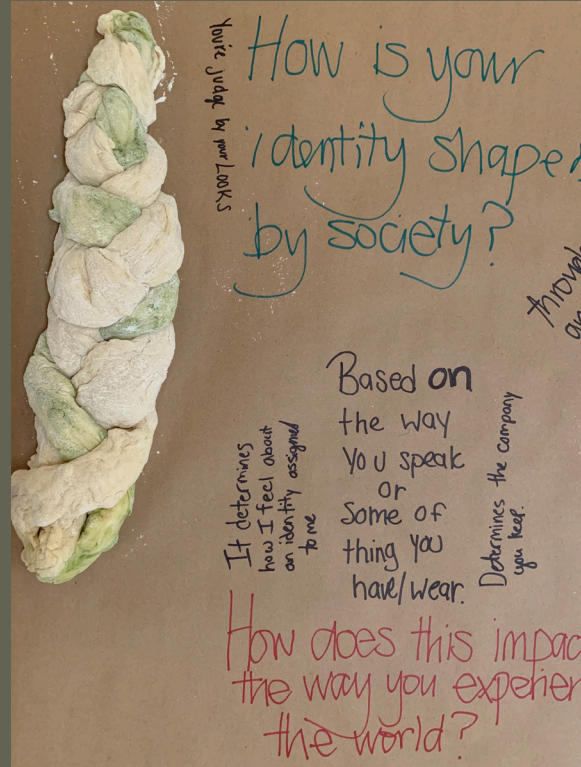
NOB's brainstorm ideas for their new food product. Team building helps to break down barriers, so learning and doing happen side by side.

much energy and resources are used to produce it, and the relationship between diet, food, and the environment. Participants are also introduced to food protocols, including kitchen cleaning, hand washing, personal hygiene, and food-borne illnesses.

The Social Lab serves as space for participants to think more deeply about and express (visually, orally, and in writing) the ingredients that make up who they are. It encourages alternative coping strategies for handling stress by introducing practical approaches to self-care. We spend a

great deal of time discussing our relationships with money and teach participants about basic financial literacy so that they can gain better control over their finances in the face of the biases built into our larger economic systems.

Ultimately, sessions enable trust-building, identity framing, and reframing—providing the necessary scaffolding to talk about challenging topics like perceptions of self and self-worth. And notably, help to establish a foundation of enhanced executive functioning, interpersonal skills, and



Hands-on activity, like weaving bread makes having difficult conversations about identity, life experiences, etc., less threatening.

strategies for collaborating with peers. Examples of activities include drawing self-portraits, interviewing peers, yoga, group juggling, and role-playing. Deeper conversations about race, discrimination, and social injustice take place in group settings helping us all gain a better understanding of our differences and ways we can communicate with greater authenticity and intention.

Outcome

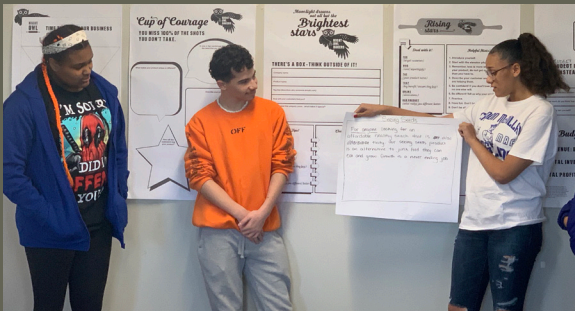
We have run three successful pilot programs, working closely with forty underserved young adults, co-

designing a multipronged program that exposes them to new learning ways. As a result, what emerged is an exciting model for afterschool programming. The material covered in educational terms is ambitious. It includes introducing broad topics such as food science and health; body politics and economic systems; contemporary forms of communication; and design.

With each pilot, we learned that by equipping participants with new educational development tools, they gain confidence in their ability

to confront real-world challenges. Participants' successes were evident in their descriptions of the transformative effects of their experience at Night Owl Bakers. They were empowered by the knowledge they gained, their relationships, and the expansion of their horizons. We also noted the positive effects of creating a space for young adults to connect with their peers. Students learned to rely on and trust peer-to-peer input, creating opportunities for participants to address—and identify—solutions to essential issues. Participants

showcased their awareness of different values, cultures, and perspectives and expressed an interest in building alternative futures for themselves and their peers. There was also an increased investment in building an equitable future for themselves by participating in a banking system. And, lastly, they came to value their work and the work of others, and learned to prioritize goal setting, critical reflection, and creative thinking as they gained a sense of mastery in planning for their future.



NOB's present their business proposals to a team of experts, highlighting skills that they had been developing over the course of the program.



Here is an example of "Inspire Kindness Coupons" that were distributed by NOB to their peers. Coupons were used to purchase NOB products.

Voices of the Night Owl Bakery

“At first, it was intimidating. I realized that financial literacy is a heavy topic. What makes sense to me, doesn’t make sense to them... I spoke about my story. How I got to this country. I learned everything for myself. I had to show them that I was in the trenches. Then I started talking about making a budget and tied it to their weekly budget. This is how we made a connection.”

Hemi Braunstein

Mentor who became NOB Teacher

“I learned our ideas can come to life. In school they be like okay ‘Who do you want to be when you’re older?’ And then you would say something. And they be like ‘okay, open up your books. But here, the first day, we opened up our box, I not going to lie, like, we looked at each other like where’s the rest of it. It was literally planks of wood...we were shown that nothing is limited if we really wanted to not be limited...”

Participant

“Well, one of my struggles was not really communicating with other people...But since this program came along, I started talking to more people... Something that I need to work on—that I don’t want to work on—is speaking in public, because I just stutter... The hardest challenge is presenting in front of everybody, because I don’t like talking in front of people... But it’s gotten easy.”

Participant

“And the social —what’s it called? Social circle? That’s what I’m gonna call it— Ok, social circles, interacting with each other, getting to know more about each other, and um, yeah, it’s all pretty cool. And you get paid to do stuff, to learn, so... it’s better than school. Yeah...in this community there has been a lot of focus on self-awareness and understanding that everyone faces low points or challenges and high points where things are going great.”

Participant

Learn more about the Night Owl Bakery

Project Partners

CMU School of Business
Propel Schools
Community Kitchen of PGH
Bloomfield Garfield Corp.
Earthen Vessels
Community Volunteers
The Mattress Factory
Center for Creative Inquiry

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