

Annual youth entrepreneur camp fosters entrepreneurial spirit

An entrepreneurial camp sponsored by the UW-Extension Small Business Development Center on the UW-Madison campus teaches youth how to start a business. The day-camp fosters entrepreneurial spirit by building skills in management, communication, team-building, and business etiquette. Students also learn how to negotiate for materials and recognize business opportunities.

Situation:

Middle school age youth in the Madison area have limited opportunities for making money, learning about business, and the world of work. Too young for most jobs and unable to drive yet, they are still ready and eager to become more independent and earn money. At the same time, most youth at this age lack the basic knowledge of how businesses operate and how to manage finances.

Response:

The Youth Entrepreneurship Camp is held for one week every year in June on the UW-Madison campus for about 30 youth who learn real-world business skills through an interactive curriculum and field trips. Frank Kennedy, president of MagicBiz, Inc. an entrepreneurship education company, is a frequent instructor. Kennedy has more than 10 years experience in youth entrepreneurship, and is a motivational speaker and expert on youth starting their own businesses. Barry Roberts, Education Program Manager, UW-Madison Small Business Development Center, has 15 years of training and consulting experience and is a certified youth entrepreneur educator. The Camp included classroom instruction, interactive activities, computer lab and field trips to local businesses. Students set up personal savings accounts at a local bank and created business plans for an actual business start-up.

In order to attract a diverse audience, the camp was marketed on web sites, the Wisconsin State Journal's special youth program section, and in brochures sent to middle schools and local libraries. Ads were placed in The Madison Times, a minority community weekly newspaper; Simpson Street Free Press, a newspaper produced by teens in South Madison; UMOJA, another minority community newspaper; and La Nacion, in Spanish.

Twenty-three youth enrolled in the 2004 Camp. Of these, 17 were male, six were female, and three were non-white. One scholarship was awarded through the SBDC and three through the Department of Public Instructions Minority Scholarship Program. Students spent several hours in the computer lab this year, designing their own business cards in Microsoft Word. They also participated in two on-line business simulations. Students completed business plans that they presented to the class.

Impacts:

A pre- and post-test of business knowledge and a measure of entrepreneurship attitudes assessed how well the students learned and if the class influenced their attitudes. Post-test results showed 87% improved their knowledge levels of business by an average of four points (range: -3 to +12). The opinion questions that measured their attitude towards entrepreneurship showed on average a six-point increase in a positive attitude by 91% of the group (range: -8 to +19).

Success Story:

In a follow-up survey of parents of camp students, parents said their son or daughter was using some of the ideas and skills learned in the camp. Comments included:

“She is applying what she learned when she’s dreaming of her future.”

“He would like to continue his business.”

“He continues to make plans for his own business and to save money for it, and to contact people (i.e., Bankers) for support.”

“He is working on his plan to start his own business and has made some phone calls to connect with resources.”

“She’s working on it. Using ideas for getting word out on her business.”

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