



Youth Participatory Action Research as an Intervention to Promote a Pathway for

Economic Mobility: Pilot Data from the *YouthRISE* Summer Program

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Executive Summary

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) is a community-based social justice research approach that centers youth expertise and perspectives as vital resources for identifying and solving community problems, positioning youth themselves as change agents. In addition, YPAR can be used as the foundation for intervention programming aimed at improving well-being and career/college readiness, two important foci on the pathway to economic mobility. This policy brief discusses YPAR and introduces *YouthRISE*, a 10-week summer program developed to center Black youth's perspectives about economic mobility in Forsyth County. This brief highlights the core principles and phases of YPAR, discusses project implementation in East Forsyth County and findings from the pilot study examining pre and post differences in well-being (life satisfaction; eudaimonic well-being), educational aspirations (how far youth want to go in school), and sense of community agency (youth social responsibility; beliefs about individual action and social change; aspirations to contribute to the community) among the 20 youth program participants (grades 8 through 12; $M_{age} = 15.12$). Pilot data from summer 2019 and summer 2020 implementation indicated a significant increase in mean scores of measured outcomes, except youth social responsibility, on the post-program survey as compared to the pre-program survey. This brief ends with policy implications for using YPAR-based programming as a mechanism for creating community change, facilitating a pathway for economic mobility, and aligning the interests of youth, businesses, and government in Forsyth County.

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The views are those of the author and do not represent those of Winston-Salem State University, Center for the Study of Economic Mobility or the University of North Carolina System.

In Forsyth County, North Carolina, the odds of economically marginalized children rising to another rung on the socioeconomic level ladder are extremely low.¹ Because Forsyth County is amongst the worst counties in the country for income mobility for children in economically marginalized families, the Center for the Study of Economic Mobility (CSEM) aims to investigate pragmatic solutions that provide positive incentives for residents, businesses and government to work across sectors to increase opportunities for economic mobility. One potential mechanism for aligning the incentives of these three segments to increase opportunities for economic mobility is through the implementation of community-based programming such as youth participatory action research (YPAR).

What is Youth Participatory Action Research?

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) is a community-based social justice research approach that frames youth expertise and perspectives as critical resources for identifying and solving community problems, thereby positioning youth as change agents². The core principles guiding YPAR include:

- A focus on collective, rather than individual inquiry about community problems
- Privileging of insider knowledge from those living in the community
- Centering the voices traditionally silenced in research; and
- Willingness to engage in action to address a community problem².

Essentially, YPAR broadens who has the expertise to produce knowledge— not just professional adult researchers, but young people who are living the issues being studied. YPAR, then, is an approach to the creation of knowledge by which researchers do not merely conduct studies on community youth, but create knowledge with youth. Researchers partner with youth to identify issues of local importance (e.g., economic mobility), study them in their socio-historical context, select research methodologies together, co-own and co-interpret the results, and collaboratively develop prosocial action plans based

¹ Chetty, R., & Hendren, N. (2018). The impacts of neighborhoods on intergenerational mobility I: Childhood exposure effects. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 133(3), 1107-1162.

² Rodríguez, L. F., & Brown, T. M. (2009). From voice to agency: Guiding principles for participatory action research with youth. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 123, 19-34.

upon the results³.

YPAR has 4 phases: 1) Problem identification; 2) Data collection; 3) Data analysis, and 4) Social action. In the problem identification stage, youth assess their environment, identify a particular problem of interest, form specific research questions, and develop a study design⁴. The data collection stage involves designing research tools, and gathering information⁴. The data analysis stage consists of critically examining the data, comparing findings, and identifying major themes⁴. Lastly, the action stage involves transforming the findings into strategic actions to address the particular social issue⁴. Consequently, students' recommendations and actions for change are based in data as well as their own life experiences. During the action phase, youth share their findings with community peers and adults, and advocate for change with adults who hold power regarding their issue. For example, when considering the issue of economic mobility in Forsyth County, elected officials, business owners, and school/community stakeholders are the adults with whom youth share their research findings. Youth are then provided the space to be viewed as, and to view themselves as, resources with expertise to contribute to the improvement of their (and their peers') economic conditions.

YPAR: A Sustainable and Scalable Pathway to Economic Mobility

In recent years, there has been accounts of YPAR and youth organizing projects in which young people have engaged in the process of challenging and, and in many cases, changing inequitable conditions in their communities (e.g., ^{2, 5}). As such, YPAR has the potential to serve as a sustainable and scalable pathway for system-level changes that improve economic mobility. In addition to system-level changes, research has documented positive impacts of YPAR on youth. For example, qualitative research indicates that youth's participation in community reform projects has been linked to enhanced sense of community agency, competence and sense of belonging⁶. There is also strong theoretical and empirical

³ Bautista, M. A., Bertrand, M., Morrell, E., Scorza, D. A., & Matthews, C. (2013). Participatory action research and city youth: Methodological insights from the Council of Youth Research. *Teachers College Record*, 115(10), 1-23.

⁴ Ozer, E. J. (2017). Youth-led participatory action research: Overview and potential for enhancing adolescent development. *Child Development Perspectives*, 11(3), 173-177.

⁵ Kirshner, B. (2007). Supporting youth participation in school reform: Preliminary notes from a university-community partnership. *Children Youth and Environments*, 17(2), 354-363.

⁶ Mitra, D. L. (2004). The significance of students: Can increasing " student voice" in schools lead to gains in youth

evidence suggesting that participation in YPAR can strengthen qualities central to positive youth development such as opportunities for meaningful participation, support for efficacy, “mattering,” and subjective well-being⁴. Furthermore, there is a growing body of research literature surrounding YPAR and its promise for supporting students’ academic engagement, motivation, and achievement (e.g., increased test scores, graduation rates, school engagement;⁴), intergenerational networks⁷ and professional networks⁸, all factors important for career and postsecondary success, and economic mobility. Furthermore, research indicates that YPAR may lead to shifts in the composition of youth’s social networks which helps to close existing opportunity gaps (e.g., cultural capital) related to economic mobility. Ultimately by allowing students to actively participate in their community, during the data collection and action phases of YPAR, this research approach can be used as an intervention tool for Forsyth County to develop individual and collective agency, particularly in economically marginalized communities where opportunities for agency may be absent². Also, YPAR empowers youth to challenge exclusionary practices and push back against the deficit forms of thinking that often emerge when researchers and policymakers attempt to find solutions to challenges faced by marginalized communities while being an outside member of said community⁹.

The Current Study

The goal of the current study was to assess individual-level outcomes for young people who participated in our 10-week YPAR-based summer program called Youth **R**esearch in **S**ustaining **E**conomics or *YouthRISE*. This pilot data advanced the mission of CSEM by providing research evidence regarding how our YPAR-based youth program might serve as an intervention to improve subjective well-being, educational aspirations and sense of community agency – factors that can provide a critical pathway to

development?. *Teachers College Record*, 106, 651-688.

⁷ Mitra, D. L. (2005). Adults advising youth: Leading while getting out of the way. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(3), 520-553.

⁸ Rubin, B. C., & Jones, M. (2007). Student action research: Reaping the benefits for students and school leaders. *NASSP Bulletin*, 91(4), 363-378.

⁹ Bautista, M. A., Bertrand, M., Morrell, E., Scorza, D. A., & Matthews, C. (2013). Participatory action research and city youth: Methodological insights from the Council of Youth Research. *Teachers College Record*, 115(10), 1-23.

economic mobility. Consistent with prior research evidence (e.g.,^{10, 11}), we expected that involvement in YPAR would positively impact youth along these measured outcomes.

Methodology

Participants

In summer 2019, 11 Black youth (6 girls, 5 boys) ranging in age from 13 to 17 ($m_{age} = 14.33$ years) participated in *YouthRISE*. Youth were enrolled in grades 8 through 12 and attended Carver High School ($n = 4$), Winston-Salem Preparatory Academy ($n = 1$), Atkins Academic and Technical High School ($n = 2$) and Quality Education Academy ($n = 3$). This sample size was chosen based on research recommendations regarding YPAR programming (e.g.,¹²). In summer 2020, 9 Black youth ranging in age from 13 to 16 ($m_{age} = 15.45$ years) newly participated in *YouthRISE*. Youth were enrolled in grades 8 through 11 and attended Carver High School ($n = 7$) and Quality Education Academy ($n = 2$). In addition, four youth from the 2019 cohort returned to participate with the summer 2020 cohort. Across both cohorts, 19 students identified as Black/African American and 1 student identified as Afro-Latina.

YouthRISE Program and Study Procedures

Youth were selected to participate in the summer program based on referral from school administrators, teachers, community residents and the Piedmont Triad Regional Council NextGen Youth Services. Snowball methods were also used such that recruited youth referred peers for participation. Students who met the following criteria were able to participate: 1) self-identified as a racially minoritized youth 2) enrolled in grades 8 – 12; and 3) lived in east Winston-Salem for at least three years. Parents of prospective participants were contacted to discuss the purpose of the *YouthRISE* program and written consent for program and research study participation was obtained. University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to all study procedures.

The *YouthRISE* summer program curriculum was developed by the primary researcher with the

¹⁰ McIntyre, A. (2006). Activist research and student agency in universities and urban communities. *Urban Education*, 41(6), 628-647.

¹¹ Smith, L., & Romero, L. (2010). Psychological interventions in the context of poverty: Participatory action research as practice. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 80, 12-25.

¹² Stillwell, C. (2016). Challenges to the implementation of youth PAR in a university-middle school partnership. *ie: inquiry in education*, 8(1), 1-24.

assistance of three undergraduate research assistants (URAs) using existing YPAR curricula (e.g.,¹³) and adapted to serve the East Winston-Salem community in ways that were culturally appropriate and to center the focus on economic mobility in Forsyth County. The primary researcher and URAs also served as program facilitators and met once a week for a three-hour time block for 10-weeks with participant youth, following the program schedule provided Table 1 below. The program was held at the Carl H. Russell Sr. Recreation Center (a city of Winston- Salem recreation center located on Carver School Road), given its close proximity to community youth (i.e., walking distance) and ease of accessibility to the center by Winston-Salem Transportation Authority. Youth were incentivized for program participation with a free meal each week from Simply Soul, a local business owned by a Black, Carver High School and WSSU alumnae, and a \$100 gift card. During summer 2019, Winston-Salem Transit Authority passes were provided to youth participants. During 2020, COVID-19 safety precautions such as a COVID-19 screening and temperature check, mask requirement, physical distancing, and outside activities were followed, and no public transportation vouchers were provided. Students completed pre-YPAR and post-YPAR surveys to capture demographic data and quantitative data about subjective well-being, career/educational aspirations, and sense of community agency. Youth were compensated \$10 for each survey completed.

¹³ Ozer, E. J., Tam, P. L., Hubbard, E., & Piatt, A. A. (2015). YPAR HUB. Retrieved from <http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/>.

Table 1. YouthRISE Summer Program Curriculum and Alignment with Common Core State Educational Standards (CCSS)

Week/ Topics*	Objective	Common Core State Standard ^{14, 15}
Research-Based YPAR Foundation: 1) Problem Identification	Skills Gained: Critical thinking- students obtain information from a variety of sources, critically viewing existing documentation.	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8
Week 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Team-Building ▪ Setting Ground Rules ▪ Introduction to Research ▪ Introduction to Participatory Action Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To create a space that allows participants to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, beliefs, and experiences ▪ To get a sense of what participants already know about and how they feel about research ▪ To set a basic framework of research ▪ To co-construct an informal definition of Participatory Action Research ▪ To assemble an initial idea of the process our group might follow during the program 	
Week 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who is My Community? ▪ Principles and Practices of Community Partnerships ▪ Barriers to Working Together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To define your community ▪ To recognize communities that you are and are not a part of ▪ To develop a working understanding of principles and practices of community partnerships in YPAR ▪ To address barriers to working together toward common goals 	
Week 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Imagining your Dream Community ▪ Comparing Your Neighborhood to an Ideal ▪ Identifying Community Issues and Assets ▪ Economic Mobility and Community Opportunities for /Barriers to Education and Employment ▪ Local Business, Government, Decision-Making, and Power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To visualize the group’s ideal community ▪ To identify key issues and assets in the community ▪ To understand economic mobility and its significance ▪ To identify factors that influence economic mobility ▪ To identify knowledge (and knowledge gaps) about disparities in education, employment and wealth ▪ To determine opportunities for and barriers to education, employment and wealth attainment ▪ To determine who has power in decision-making processes ▪ To grasp the importance and power of government ▪ To think critically about the significance of “power” and its absence ▪ To introduce the idea of mutually beneficial solutions to community problems 	
Week 4: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personal Connection with Issue ▪ Defining the research question ▪ Hypothesis Development ▪ Understanding Photovoice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To identify a personal connection to an issue related to economic mobility ▪ To identify the issue of interest to be researched ▪ To develop hypotheses about the relationships between independent and dependent variables ▪ To experience different research methods ▪ To understand the pros and cons of photovoice 	

¹⁴ Common Core State Standards. (2015). *English language arts standards*. corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/CCRA/R/. Retrieved 1 Oct 2018.

¹⁵ Kornbluh, M., Ozer, E. J., Allen, C. D., & Kirshner, B. (2015). Youth participatory action research as an approach to sociopolitical development and the new academic standards: Considerations for educators. *The Urban Review*, 47(5), 868-892.

Research-Based YPAR Foundation: 2) Data Collection and 3) Data Analysis	Skills Gained: Revisions- Students assess whether their research methodology exhibits strong construct validity; Utilize Evidence to Support Claims- Students establish their main findings by providing supportive evidence from the collected data; Analysis- Students group together findings across multiple sources and mediums of information	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.87
Week 5: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Using Research for Grassroots Change ▪ Institutional Change ▪ Community Organizing ▪ Win-win-win solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To understand how research can help you advocate or make a better argument ▪ To see how other groups have used research to make change ▪ To learn about historic success stories of grassroots organizing ▪ To craft a mission, vision, and name for our group ▪ To build understanding of institutional change ▪ To brainstorm actions to reflect institutional change ▪ To understand community organizing, the range of actions we can take, and what they can change ▪ To learn about the importance of developing solutions that result in incentives for individuals, businesses, and government 		
Week 6: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth-researcher work time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To collect and analyze data based using photovoice 		
Week 7: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth-researcher work time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To collect and analyze data based using photovoice 		
Research-Based YPAR Foundation: 4) Social Action	Skills Gained: Collaborative Partnerships- Students must adapt and alter their communication for stakeholder buy-in, making connections, and sustaining partnerships with diverse groups with varying interests; Multi-media fluency- Student develop skills in digital media and gathering competencies in depicting research findings.	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.5	
Week 8: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth-researcher work time and completion ▪ Seeking Allies ▪ Win-win-win solutions (again) ▪ Directions for action ▪ Preparation for community presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To collect and analyze data based on selected research method ▪ To determine who will be allies for your project ▪ To establish goals and expectations for allies ▪ Propose solutions, based on research findings, that result in incentives for individuals, businesses, and government, ▪ Develop a strategic plan for action based on research findings ▪ To practice public speaking skills ▪ To prepare for community presentation 		
Week 9: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Speaking to Powerful People 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To practice speaking and negotiating with people in positions of power ▪ To practice public speaking skills ▪ To prepare for community presentation 		
Week 10: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community Presentation 	To present research findings and program reflections to invited guests: Community residents (adults and youth), activists, business owners, stakeholders, and local government, K-12 educators, and the academic community <i>**refreshments provided by locally-owned Black business</i>		

Measures

In accordance with CSEM's interest in capturing different aspects of well-being, two aspects of subjective well-being were measured: 1) life satisfaction and 2) eudaimonic well-being.

Life satisfaction was assessed with the Student Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS¹⁶), a 7-item self-report measure that examines youth's global life satisfaction. Sample items included, "My life is going well" and "I would like to change many things in my life"; response range is 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 6 = *Strongly Agree*). Average scores were calculated to provide an overall index of life satisfaction. Prior research has demonstrated adequate reliability and validity of the scale among racially/ethnically minoritized adolescents (e.g.,¹⁷).

Eudaimonic well-being was assessed with the Questionnaire for Eudaimonic Well-Being (QEWB³⁷) which measures perceived development of one's best potentials, sense of purpose and meaning in life (Sample items: "I believe I know what my best potentials are and I try to develop them whenever possible"; "I can say that I have found my purpose in life; response range is 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*). Average scores were calculated to provide an overall index of eudaimonic well-being. Past research has reported high internal consistency for the scale and adequate validity among racially/ethnically minoritized adolescent samples (e.g.,^{18,19}).

Educational aspirations were measured by one item commonly used in national surveys with adolescent youth⁴²: "If you could do exactly what you wanted, how far would you like to go in school?" This question was rated along a 10-point scale, ranging from 9th to 11th grade, to doctorate/law degree/medical degree. Previous research has used this item with a racially diverse sample of high school

¹⁶Huebner, E. S. (1991). Initial development of the student's life satisfaction scale. *School Psychology International*, 12(3), 231-240.

¹⁷Lyons, M. D., Huebner, E. S., Hills, K. J., & Van Horn, M. L. (2013). Mechanisms of change in adolescent life satisfaction: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of school psychology*, 51(5), 587-598.

¹⁸Waterman, A. S., Schwartz, S. J., Zamboanga, B. L., Ravert, R. D., Williams, M. K., Bede Agocha, V., ...& Brent Donnellan, M. (2010). The Questionnaire for Eudaimonic Well-Being: Psychometric properties, demographic comparisons, and evidence of validity. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 5(1), 41-61.

¹⁹Areepattamannil, S., & Hashim, J. (2017). The questionnaire for eudaimonic well-being (QEWB): Psychometric properties in a non-western adolescent sample. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 117,236-241.

students (e.g.,²⁰).

Several measures were used to assess youth's sense of community agency and desires for civic engagement. Average scores were calculated for an overall index score for each measure below.

The *Youth Social Responsibility* scale⁴³ included 10 items that focused on youth's response to injustice, beliefs about helping, and beliefs about youth political and social knowledge. Sample items included, "Young people have an important role to play in making the world a better place" and "It's important for young people to speak out when an injustice has occurred" (response range is 1= *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*). This measure has been shown to be valid and reliable among adolescent youth (e.g.,²¹).

The *Beliefs about Individual Action and Societal Change* scale⁴⁴ included 5 items assessing how much youth believe they can positively impact their community. Sample items included, "Even if it is hard, I still believe I can change my community" and "I have an obligation to give back to the community" (response range is 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*). This measure has demonstrated adequate reliability and validity in past research (e.g.,²²).

The *Aspirations to Contribute to the Community* scale⁴⁵ asked youth about the importance of community involvement when thinking about their "life and future" using 7 items (response range is 1 = *Not At All Important* to 5 = *Very Important*). Sample items included, "To help people in need" and "To work for the betterment of society." Prior research has shown adequate reliability with these items(e.g.,²³).

Data Analysis Strategy

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS. Tests were two-sided and statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. To test the effectiveness of the intervention, the mean scores on pre-and-post measures

²⁰ Wang, M. T., & Eccles, J. S. (2012). Social support matters: Longitudinal effects of social support on threedimensions of school engagement from middle to high school. *Child Development*, 83(3), 877-895.

²¹ Pancer, S. M., Pratt, M., Hunsberger, B., & Alisat, S. (2007). Community and political involvement in adolescence: What distinguishes the activists from the uninvolved?. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 35(6), 741-759.

²² Gurin, P., Nagda, B. R. A., & Zuniga, X. (2013). *Dialogue across difference: Practice, theory, and research on intergroup dialogue*. Russell Sage Foundation.

²³ Crocetti, E., Jahromi, P., & Meeus, W. (2012). Identity and civic engagement in adolescence. *Journal of adolescence*, 35(3), 521-532.

on study variables were compared using the paired-samples *t*-tests bootstrapped with 10,000 samples.

Effect sizes, as an indicator of practical significance, were calculated for each *t*-test and can be interpreted following guidelines established by Cohen for small (.20), medium (0.50) and large (0.80) effects.²⁴

Results

Table 1. Pre and Post Program Mean Scores of Measured Outcomes

Measured Outcome	Pre-Program Mean (<i>N</i> = 20)	Post-Program Mean (<i>N</i> = 20)
Life Satisfaction (range = 1-6)	4.15	4.62
Eudaimonic Well-Being (range = 1-5)	3.59	4.64
Educational Aspirations (range = 1-10)	8.63 (4-year college degree)	9.79 (Graduate school degree)
Youth Social Responsibility (range = 1-5)	3.79	3.81
Individual Action/Societal Change (range = 1-5)	3.62	4.73
Aspirations to Contribute to Community (range = 1-5)	4.19	4.87

Significant increases were found in pre and post scores for life satisfaction [$t=4.97(18)$, $p=.04$, $d=.34$], eudaimonic well-being [$t=1.93(19)$, $p=.02$, $d=.23$], educational aspirations [$t=1.69(19)$, $p=.01$, $d=.91$], beliefs about individual action and societal change [$t=2.14(18)$, $p=.02$, $d=.52$], and aspirations to contribute to the community [$t=3.19(18)$, $p=.04$, $d=0.52$]. However, there was no significant pre to post change for youth social responsibility scores [$t=1.52(19)$, $p=.24$, $d=0.34$].

Discussion

The present study's primary aim was to provide preliminary evidence regarding the impact of *YouthRISE*, a YPAR program developed to mitigate low economic mobility in Forsyth County. YPAR has demonstrated positive effects resulting in both systems-level change^{2, 5} and individual outcomes^{2,4,8}. Pilot data from the current study explored the effectiveness of *YouthRISE* in addressing individual outcomes, specifically, well-being, educational aspirations, and sense of community agency and desires for civic engagement. To my knowledge, *YouthRISE* is the first of its kind to use YPAR to specifically address low economic mobility in Forsyth County. Statistical analysis of pre and post responses highlight

²⁴ Sullivan, G. M. & Feinn, R. (2012). Using effect size – or why the P value is not enough. *Journal of Graduate Medical Educatio*, 4(3), 279-

increased life satisfaction, eudaimonic well-being, educational aspirations, beliefs about individual action and societal change, and aspirations to contribute to the community.

These results are particularly promising given the ever burgeoning literature on addressing community issues using YPAR programming. Nonetheless, this study has limitations that affect the generalizability of the findings. Cohort effects could have manifested given that the program was implemented amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic for new participants in cohort 2 whereas the inaugural program cohort experienced the program pre-pandemic. However, the data were analyzed for cohort effects by pulling apart pre and post means for the two cohorts and none were found. However, this study lacked a control group which is necessary to rule out important non-intervention related influences on the outcome variables and to improve confidence in the conclusion that the improvements in scores are due to the intervention and not other factors, such as the passage of time, regression to the mean, or expectancy effects. Also, youth were recruited via referral and the snowball method; therefore, participants might not be representative of the economically marginalized youth residing in Forsyth County. Future research should include a larger sample size to offer a more definitive, well-powered test of the current promising findings.

Policy Implications

The *YouthRISE* summer program can be used as a model of a sustainable and scalable YPAR-based intervention program that serves as a catalyst for economic mobility by supporting Forsyth County youth's well-being, career development, and community agency:

Well-being. Systemic oppression damages the well-being of economically marginalized youth by effectively silencing them within dominant cultural and political life²⁵. This silencing is accomplished in multiple ways. For example, Black and Brown youth and poor communities are largely physically excluded (i.e., not present and invited to spaces where policy is developed and written) from full democratic participation as citizens²⁵. Well-being is an important outcome in itself and higher levels of

²⁵ Smith, L. (2010). *Psychology, poverty, and the end of social exclusion: Putting our practice to work*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

youth well-being are associated with better mental health, fewer risky behaviors, and higher school engagement – which are all linked to better life outcomes²⁶ Additional research has suggested that poor well-being may be a barrier to economic mobility²⁷ and that well-being should be placed at the center of economics.²⁸

Educational Aspirations. Even when the opportunity to gain necessary skills is available, some youth do not envision themselves pursuing postsecondary education and/or professional/vocational careers. Through YPAR, youth can eventually see themselves as consumers and producers of knowledge, and thus may begin to imagine themselves as someday being members of a postsecondary campus community and/or working professionals. Furthermore, a fundamental aspect of YPAR is the instruction in and practice of research, a set of skills that can help prepare youth for the workforce and college admission process itself. Students are taught about the gathering of data, the synthesis and interpretation of results, and the presentation of findings in a clear and precise fashion. In the process, students not only learn these valuable academic and practical skills, but are given the opportunity to see themselves as successes in real time. Forsyth County community stakeholders should consider using YPAR as an intervention that might inherently encourage youth's aspirations to seek postsecondary education and build their academic skillset, both of which have the potential to translate into participation in the labor force, wage gains and access to non-wage compensation such as employer provided health-insurance and retirement plans.²⁹

Sense of Community Agency and Desire for Civic Engagement. Although civic engagement previously has not been framed as a mechanism for economic mobility, in recent years scholars and policymakers have recognized that opportunity for civic engagement and agency provides economic

²⁶ Park, N. (2004). The role of subjective well-being in positive youth development. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591(1), 25-39.

²⁷ Butler, S. M., Beach, W. W., & Winfree, P. L. (2008). *Pathways to economic mobility: Key indicators*. Economic mobility project.

²⁸ Pouw, N., & McGregor, A. (2014). An economics of well-being: What would economics look like if it were focused on human well-being?. *IDS Working Papers*, 2014(436), 1-27.

²⁹ Johnson, H. P., Mejia, M. C., & Bohn, S. (2018). *Higher education as a driver of economic mobility*. Public Policy Institute of California.

benefits to communities and the individuals participating. Specifically, an emerging body of literature suggests that civic engagement activities such as socio-political involvement can help facilitate connections and develop skills that may influence participants' employment and income statuses^{30, 31}. More recent research has found links between multiple forms of civic engagement and educational attainment and income over time³². Implementing YPAR-based interventions provides a platform for youth to discover and use their own voices, and be heard by others within the community while engaging in civic action that changes inequitable conditions that result in low economic mobility.

YPAR programming works at multiple levels by conferring individual-level gains in skills and benefits as indicated in the presented pilot data, and through potential system-level changes that then help the community. Modeling intervention programming in Forsyth County after *YouthRISE* has the potential to increase profits for local food businesses (via food incentives for YPAR participants) and generate revenue for the city of Winston-Salem (via community center rental for YPAR programming and purchase of bus fare for participants). To this end, the *YouthRISE* summer program serves as a sustainable and scalable model of a mutually beneficially YPAR intervention. Individuals “win” with YPAR program participation, monetary and food incentives, and positive youth development outcomes, businesses “win” through the patronizing of local businesses for the YPAR program’s catering needs, and government “wins” with additional revenue through the paid use of the city’s recreation centers and public transportation. Readers are encouraged to review the Summer 2020 policy brief³³ that highlights the participant youth’s perceptions of opportunities and barriers to economic mobility in Forsyth County and the themes that emerged throughout the *YouthRISE* program implementation.

³⁰ Spera, C., Ghertner, R., Nerino, A., & DiTommaso, A. (2013). *Volunteering as a pathway to employment: Does volunteering increase odds of finding a job for the out of work?*. Office of Research & Evaluation, Corporation for National and Community Service.

³¹ Wilson, J. (2012). Volunteerism research: A review essay. *Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly*, 41(2), 176-212.

³² Ballard, P. J., Hoyt, L. T., & Pachucki, M. C. (2019). Impacts of adolescent and young adult civic engagement on health and socioeconomic status in adulthood. *Child Development*, 90(4), 1138-1154.

³³ Griffin, C.B. (2020). What are the perceptions of economic barriers and opportunities in Forsyth County, NC? Amplifying Black Youth Voice. *Center for the Study of Economic Mobility Policy Brief*, 2 (1), 1-18.

Actionable Next Steps

The city of Winston-Salem should partner with CSEM, Winston-Salem State University and other organizations, such as Winston-Salem Foundation and Piedmont Triad Regional Council NextGen Youth Services, so that YPAR-based interventions can be more widely adopted and scaled up to implement beyond the Carl H. Russell Recreation Center. Potential locations for implementation to ensure program access to youth most marginalized in Forsyth County might include the Minnie Lee Davis Harris Recreation Center, Martin L. King, Jr. Recreation Center, and the Rupert Bell Recreation Center. Scaling up is challenging (see Figure 1 below). The presented *YouthRISE* summer program has been *introduced* and piloted across a two-year time period. During this time, the research team learned factors necessary for its successful local application and contextualization in Forsyth County, and included numerous program features that aligned with best practices from the YPAR literature^{3,4} (e.g. convenient location for participations, incentives for surveys and program participation, meals, use of local business owned by Black graduate of the same high school as many of the participants, transportation passes). As partnerships between CSEM, the city of Winston-Salem, and other organizations evolve to increase geographic coverage of the intervention, scale-up can move to an *early expansion* phase. In this phase, needs for capacity-building can be identified and the intervention can be refined based on evidence from additional pilot experiences. As the intervention implementation broadens and enters the *mature expansion* phase, issues of institutionalizing the intervention (e.g., expanding the program to brick and mortar schools within Winston-Salem/Forsyth County rather than just community-based locations) and maintaining quality and fidelity become the most crucial considerations. The reader is encouraged to further consult³⁴. This research team and the CSEM is well-poised to build on project learnings to lead local efforts integrating YPAR-based programs with youth in Forsyth County and beyond.

³⁴ Smith, J. M., de Graft-Johnson, J., Zyaee, P., Ricca, J., & Fullerton, J. (2015). Scaling up high-impact interventions: How is it done?. *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics*, 130, S4-S10.

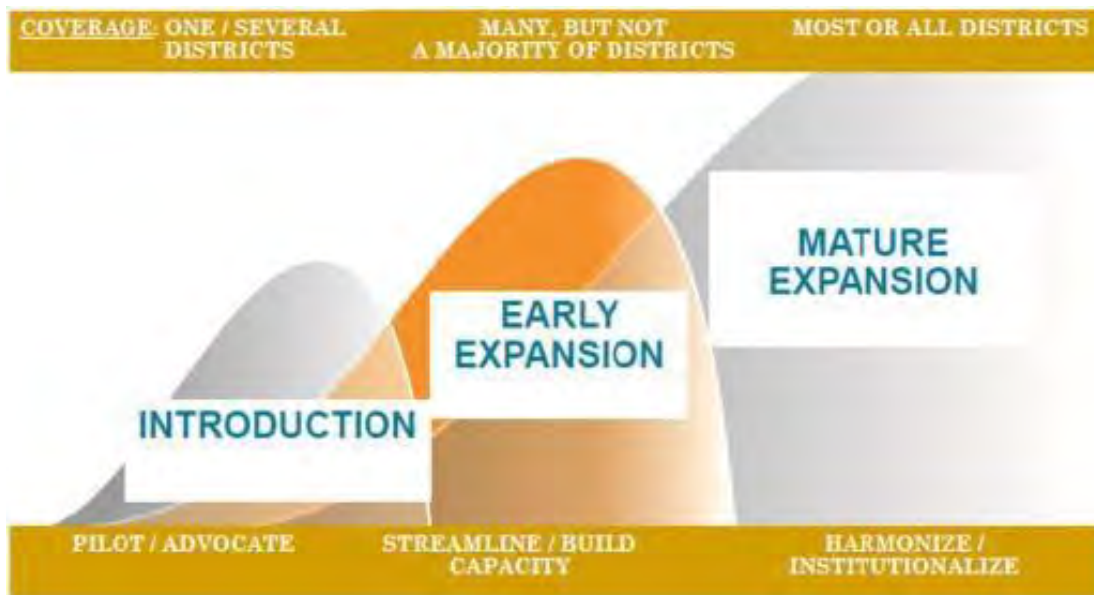


Figure 1. Phases of the scale-up process³²

Conclusion

YPAR is designed to reduce or eliminate marginalization resulting from intersecting identities, for example, race and social class. Implementing YPAR-based interventions, such as the *YouthRISE* program, can help bridge cultural gaps among the Forsyth County youth, community stakeholders and local government. Through the action research process youth will learn skills linked to K-12 learning priorities and that are necessary for workforce/career and/or college readiness. Taken together, YPAR-based intervention programming, such as the *YouthRISE* summer program, can engage youth as change agents in their community while also *simultaneously* implementing a novel, sustainable intervention that addresses well-being and career/college readiness – two important foci on the pathway to economic mobility as highlighted by CSEM. Finally, in addition to individual- and community- level benefits, YPAR-based intervention programming can increase profits for local businesses and generate revenue for the city of Winston-Salem. Thereby, providing a mutually beneficial intervention for individuals, businesses and government.

Recommended Reading

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