

In Their Own Words

The final version of this publication was a collaborative effort of the Office of Disability Employment Policy, Concepts, Inc., and the youth and facilitators of seven different youth programs across the country. Careful time and attention was taken to ensure that youth, between the ages of 14 - 21, from all different backgrounds had the opportunity to experience and contribute to the soft skills pilot activities over a five-week period of time. Changes were made to the original manuscript, based on both youth and facilitator feedback. Here is what some program participants and youth facilitators had to say:

Youth Participants

Interview in 2 hours, I need to get ready
 But I'm so nervous, my hands ain't steady
 Body got shivers, what should I do
 Grabbed my notebook and started to skim through
 Remember eye contact, firm handshake
 Take no calls, put phone on vibrate
 Speak clear, big smiles, don't show no fear
 Give the boss good reasons for working here
 Don't forget collared shirt, black slacks and low heels
 Turns out I got the job
 THANKS SOFT SKILLS
 (J'laan H.)

Soft Skills make a difference because they will help you deal with situations in everyday life, such as job interviews, getting along with others, and just communication with people. Soft skills also help you find yourself...and really make a difference because they help you to think critically. (RaeMisha Sierra)

When students are writing or talking in class or at an interview they sound like they are on the streets talking to a friend, who would want to hire someone like that? And that's where I feel soft skills should come in for young people. [We] never learn about these things. I feel the younger people are when they learn these skills, as they get older it won't be a problem. (Jessica Alexis)

Be open-minded because if you just go with it (these activities) you can learn a lot about being successful in the workplace. (Giselle Padilla)

I can't think of just one thing that we did because I enjoyed everything. (LaShondra Neely)

It was an experience going beyond my dreams. (Brandon Pursley)

I was putting things in my text messages that I shouldn't have and I learned about it during the ODEP project. It was fun because I didn't know that people text that way. (Shionte Davis)

I like the hands on, building the spaghetti tower was the best. (Chavario McQuay)

I liked the projects because I learned how to be team leader. (Jasmine Turner)

I learned so many new things. (Raylaysha Daniels)

The journals help you work on a better you. (Youth Participant)

I like Soft Skills because I got to do activities with my classmates and teacher. (Rachael Washington)

I liked Soft Skills because it gave me an opportunity to interact and engage with my peers. (Michael Francis)

My favorite activity was the one that talked about failures. It was interesting to learn about how Mickey Mouse was created. (Justine Thomas)

How I felt about Soft Skills is GREAT! It teaches people how to get along with each other. My favorite activity was when we had to build the tallest structures made out of marshmallows. (Troy Booker)

I liked the Soft Skills program. My favorite activity was acting out the skits. (Tyrone Hunter)

Soft Skills had different activities to help you talk more about how you feel. (Brittany Prue)

Facilitators

These activities were great in getting students to think about how they would react or respond to various situations that could arise in the workplace. It also helped them to recognize that a job can entail a lot more than just showing up. They began to recognize that teamwork, attitude, communication, networking and problem solving and critical thinking are all crucial components or to success both in the workplace and outside of the workplace. (Jamie Youngblood, CO)

The ODEP Pilot Program was one of the best projects that we have participated in. The students learned so many skills while developing team building and leadership skills through fun filled activities. The activities addressed areas that everyone could benefit from while providing new exciting ideas. (Mary Coody, FL)

I was delighted to hear about the curriculum as well as see how much the students were enjoying the program. It was evident by their conversations that they were learning a lot about how to apply the skills to their everyday lives. (Dr. Dierdre Williams, DC)

I have not enjoyed teaching a program this much in my over 25 years of working with students that have an intellectual disability. Soft Skills curriculum is a marvelous teaching tool that is able to reach ALL students wherever they may be in their learning process. (Lisa Haynes, DC)

I think that the students really enjoyed the ODEP Pilot Program. The students responded well to the group activities and I found it to be very educational and informative. (Jean James, FL)

I found the activities to be very energizing and adaptive for any age group. (Mike Radel, FL)

We finished the workshop with a lighthearted activity called A Super Ball and a Raw Egg. Each student had the opportunity to throw a bouncy ball and a raw egg at a giant bull eye drawn on a vinyl table cover. After observing the effects on the objects being thrown and the wall covered by the tablecloth, we asked the students if they knew what this symbolized in relation to their outlook on life. Are you a raw egg or a bouncy ball? we asked them. When you hit a barrier in your plans, do you shatter? Or do you bounce back stronger and faster than ever? Our students were still debating the meaning of the activity as we cleaned up the eggshells and ended the workshop. An hour and half had never flown by so quickly! We knew it was one of the best workshops Gainesville Area HS/HT has had this year! (Stephanie Weeks, FL)

At first the students were a little skeptical about the activities and the corresponding paperwork [associated with the Pilot], but once I explained that they had the opportunity to give their input for a publication that will be distributed across the nation, they were very excited and eager to tell me what they thought! They really impressed me with their feedback (about what they liked and did not like). We enjoyed the activities so much, that before we knew it, we had gone over our allotted workshop time. Gainesville HS/HT is excited to be involved in this special opportunity and we look forward to completing the rest of the activities with our students! (Mellissa Merrill, FL)

The Soft Skills [activities] are fabulous. They cover the five areas that are desperately needed in today's workforce. Soft Skills used to be taught at home, however, in today's world it is our obligation to teach our young folk what is need to succeed in life and in work and these Soft Skills fit the bill. (Virginia Dever, KY)

The [Success or Failure] lesson provided our students with the opportunity to see firsthand that even those who are now viewed as highly successful people were once in a tough space as well. (Facilitator, RI)

The Interview Role Play allowed students to see what a good interview looked like versus one that needed some critiquing. This particular activity was interactive and held the students attention the entire time. It also generated conversation that kept the group thinking while having a good time. (Facilitator, RI)

As the facilitator of the activities, they were definitely very useful and meaningful because they truly educated and informed students in a way that helped them take personal responsibility for their skills or lack thereof, instead of an adult telling them what they need to do or know.

From the exploring of their attitudes and how they respond to instruction and authority, to communication styles, teamwork, and networking; these activities gave them some real life practical experiences that they could learn from, but presented in a way that was fun and educational. I think the communication activities were really insightful, because students had to explore their forms of communication and what messages it could be sending that are not always intentional.

I also enjoyed the activities on listening and asking questions because this showed them that it was okay to ask a question, which they seldom don't want to because afraid of looking dumb. Through this activity it showed them the necessity of using this skill in the workplace and how impactful it could be on their success in the job.

The Success or Failure Activities were also very helpful and insightful because students could see that the road to success is not an easy climb, and that everyone starts at the bottom and it takes time and plenty of failures before you make it, but that's okay, as long as you don't quit.

Overall, I think the students really learned a lot and were challenged by exploring and addressing skills and styles of communicating that could not be articulated or explained, but now have meaning and comprehension that will help them be more successful in the workplace; because keeping a job is just as a successful as getting one. (Victoria West, WA)

It was really great to see how the students began the class with one outlook, and at the end of the sessions - I could see how their perceptions had changed. Many of them believed that once they interviewed for a position and obtained the job that they no longer had to make themselves presentable.

A lot of them also didn't realize that they have been networking or that networking was an important component when trying to get ahead. Many of the group activities were also eye openers for the students. They all loved the power ball and the raw egg activity. I think that particular session stood out to them. They learned that when things happen it's okay to fall apart, but it is more important to get back up and learn and live!!! (Kiana Davis, WA)