

Promoting Wellness among Foster Youth Trainers:

An Evaluation of the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project Wellness Retreat Program



November 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project (Youth Offering Unique Tangible Help) is part of a collaborative effort of current and former foster youth, social work professionals, academics, foundations, and others committed to empowering California's foster youth. Since its inception in 2000, the Project has trained, employed, and supported more than 75 current and former foster youth to educate more than 6,000 child welfare professionals on the needs, desires, and cultural experience of transition age foster youth. Meanwhile, the Project has expanded its educational reach through speaking engagements, dissemination of digital stories, and ongoing technical assistance to other organizations working with and on behalf of foster youth.

In 2008, the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project received a grant from the Zellerbach Family Foundation to develop and deliver a one-year program of intensive training retreats to support the mental health, wellness, and leadership abilities of the organization's cadre of current and former youth trainers, all transition-age foster youth. The Wellness Retreat Program consisted of four, three- to four-day weekend retreats engaging 11 to 23 youth at each: **Retreat One:** Professional and Financial Wellness (December 2008), **Retreat Two:** Mental Health (May 2009), **Retreat Three:** Physical Health (June 2009), and **Retreat Four:** Spiritual Health (August 2009).

The Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project designed retreat topics, themes, and activities in direct response to the needs of the youth trainers, with goals for participants

including *experiences and knowledge* to enhance:

- ▶ health
- ▶ sense of wellbeing
- ▶ confidence, and
- ▶ professional development.

THE WELLNESS RETREAT PROGRAM — FINDINGS

While each wellness retreat centered around a specific wellness goal, certain themes were embedded within each retreat, including: **when and how to access mental health services in the community, how to identify and draw upon each youth trainer's internal resources, team-building strategies, and the importance of self-care.** Evaluation data were gathered from post-retreat surveys, a follow-up survey three months after the first retreat, an interview following the last retreat, and key informant interviews with project staff.

Program Expectations

Staff and youth trainers had several expectations for the Wellness Retreats, including:

- ▶ Community building and team building.
- ▶ Personal growth and exploration.
- ▶ Critically-needed support for youth facing multiple life-challenges.
- ▶ Giving-back to youth who are currently serving as trainers or who have done so in the past and remain connected to the organization and do work with other youth.
- ▶ Replenishing internal resources of staff.

The below evaluation results show that many of these expectations were met, to lesser and greater degrees.

Retreat One: Professional and Financial Wellness

A group of 24 youth trainers, representing a diverse mix of ethnicities, sexualities, and genders, participated in the retreat. The retreat presented topics related to **speechmaking, public speaking, and financial well-being**. This retreat gave youth trainers confidence in all of the skills presented, especially in their public speaking skills. Three months after the retreat, a large majority of the 13 participants surveyed had used their new skills, most of them crediting the retreat with this use. **Even 10 months later, youth trainers identify elements of the first retreat that they have incorporated into their lives.** While they found much of the retreat interesting, they most appreciated learning about *how to deliver a speech* and *how to manage finances*. Project staff also see evidence of youth trainers integrating the financial tips and public speaking skills learned at this retreat, perhaps even more than the youth realize.

Retreat Two: Mental Health

A diverse group of 16 youth trainers attended the second retreat, which addressed intense inner challenges, including **how thoughts and feelings affect the way one experiences difficult situations, how to understand and deal with rage, how to act with forgiveness and compassion for oneself and others, and how to tolerate intense emotions without shame or blame**. While youth trainers indicate increased understanding in all of the retreat's training topics, they show greatest gains in *understanding their own*

rage, learning how their thoughts and feelings can help or hinder them, and learning how to respond to others with compassion. Youth trainers use adjectives like, "helpful," "powerful," and "transformative," to describe this retreat.

Many say they have changed the way they deal with their feelings as a result, and they continue to integrate what they learned into their lives five months later.

Youth trainers and staff members, alike, identify this retreat as one that was particularly effective in promoting strong interpersonal connections, trust, and community among the participants and between participants and project staff.

Retreat Three: Physical Health

Seventeen youth trainers participated in retreat three, which addressed **the impact of stress; the connections between nutrition, physical exercise, and mental health; and the importance of being compassionate with oneself**. The retreat included a camping trip, a 20-mile bicycle ride, and a 10-mile canoe trip. **Perhaps more than any of the other retreats, this retreat challenged people's perceptions of their own abilities.** At the same time, participants clearly saw the importance of self-care in the face of such intense activity. The topic that youth trainers came to understand most afterwards is *"the importance of stopping to rest, recover, reflect, and be quiet."* Participants also cite strong gains in *"the relationship between mood and physical movement"* and *"how environmental and psychosocial stress impacts well-being."*

Many youth trainers report incorporating changes in their physical health practices following this retreat, which they are keeping up even four months after the

retreat. One or more of them report that they are:

- ▶ More committed to an exercise routine.
- ▶ Eating regularly.
- ▶ Eating new foods.
- ▶ Reducing consumption of unhealthy foods and exposure to harmful substances.
- ▶ Quitting smoking.
- ▶ Changed perception about health and nutrition.
- ▶ Researching the health impact of different foods.
- ▶ Using physical activity and good nutrition as stress reducing strategies.

A project staff member notes that there was “good, critical feedback” about this retreat. In fact, two youth trainers did not feel the speakers and topics were as useful as they would have hoped. At the same time, a project staff member continues to see an impact from this retreat, noting that many who attended are making healthier choices about their food intake.

Retreat Four: Spiritual Health

Many foster youth are compelled to adopt the religion of the home in which they are living, or else they may experience religion in the form of organizations providing food and other basic needs. Retreat Four aimed to present spirituality as something that individuals could tap into in unique and personal ways. The retreat **introduced some tenets of different faiths, explored ways of finding the spiritual in everyday and creative activities**, and spoke to the **importance of developing a non-judgmental observer inside oneself.**

Post-training survey results show that this retreat met its primary goal, namely,

conveying the many activities not typically associated with organized religion that can be part of a spiritual practice.

The 11 youth trainers participating in this retreat gave the highest possible average rating when describing their understanding of *how creativity can be a spiritual practice*, and very high ratings to *understanding how several activities can be spiritual*, as well as *the importance of stopping to rest, recover, reflect and be quiet*. While some youth trainers were less enthusiastic about the relevance of this retreat to their lives — one, for instance, had hoped to learn more about other faiths — as one staff member observes, “There wasn’t anyone who thought there was nothing there for them.”

In the weeks since attending this retreat, youth trainers have adopted practices and attitudes that reflect a commitment to nurturing their own spirituality. The changes include:

- ▶ Staying “in the moment” to help keep anxiety at bay.
- ▶ Focusing on oneself or one’s current activities.
- ▶ Internalizing spirituality, rather than seeing it as externally imposed or directed.
- ▶ Getting a massage.
- ▶ Journaling.
- ▶ Meditating.
- ▶ Recognizing the importance of resting and healing.
- ▶ Reading books recommended at the retreat.
- ▶ Researching spirituality and different religions.
- ▶ Sharing spiritual resources with others.
- ▶ Being open to others’ perspectives on spirituality and faith.

Overall Impacts of the Wellness Retreat Experience

While each Wellness Retreat had a particular focus as described above, Y.O.U.T.H. Training project staff were committed to weaving several key themes throughout all four retreats, including: self-care, professional development, community, and personal growth.

SELF-CARE *(cited by all nine youth trainers interviewed)*

Youth describe incorporating new self-care practices as a result, in part, of the retreat series:

- ▶ They feel they can access mental health resources.
- ▶ They are drawing on inner resources.
- ▶ They are adopting new wellness habits.

A large majority of participants at each retreat indicate learning ways to access their own inner resources. At the same time, while some say they are more aware of mental health resources and more willing to use them as a result of the retreats, the percentage that felt they learned about these resources at each retreat varied from a low of 19 percent (at Retreat Two) to 100 percent (at Retreat Four). Several indicate that they are “not sure” if they learned about mental health resources, and it is certainly possible that others simply missed that topic for one reason or another. Nevertheless, the wide range in percentages by retreat may indicate the need to address an apparent gap in learning and/or confidence in information about mental health resources.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT *(cited by all nine interviewees)*

Youth’s participation in the retreat series contributed to them feeling better able to engage professionally. They indicate:

- ▶ New self-awareness helps them work more effectively.
- ▶ They have better work habits.
- ▶ Increased confidence helps them work to their potential.

It is notable that, with only one retreat specifically devoted to teaching professional skills, as youth trainers gained in this area as did in the area of self-care, the explicit purpose of the Wellness Retreat Program. A staff member’s story illustrates how the series of retreats can translate into professional development by giving the youth trainers an understanding of ways to not let emotional turmoil undermine communication and decisions at work.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY *(cited by eight interviewees)*

The retreats seemed to facilitate deeper connection and community among the participants:

- ▶ They feel closer to their teammates.
- ▶ They learned to trust one another more.
- ▶ They are handling conflicts constructively.
- ▶ They are more forgiving of others.
- ▶ They are more open-minded and compassionate.

Project staff see a clear connection between the strong sense of community the retreats created and the youth trainers’ abilities in other areas, telling the story of an individual who drew on her connection to the community to develop a training

curriculum and overcome past personal patterns to follow through on delivering that training at the last retreat.

PERSONAL GROWTH *(cited by six interviewees)*

Youth also appear to have expanded a number of personal horizons:

- ▶ They are trying new foods.
- ▶ They are not afraid to do new things.
- ▶ They are more willing and open to new experiences.

Project staff share similar observations of youth trainers' gains in personal growth, pointing out that a feeling of acceptance can support them in overcoming many internal challenges and develop a sense of value about themselves.

The comments of the youth trainers and staff illustrate how the Wellness Retreat Program, as a whole, transcends the explicit purpose of each individual retreat.

Further, staff members talk about the importance of being present for the retreats, both in terms of building trust between themselves and the youth trainers and in terms of support for their own wellness and overall self-care, which, in turn, allows them to give their best selves to their work with transition-age foster youth.

Recommendations from Youth Trainers and Project Staff

Retreat participants and project staff have several suggestions for strengthening the retreat experience. These include strategies to make the retreats more enjoyable and relevant, help participants review what they have learned at a later date, make retreats accessible to more people, and simplify the

experience. There were also suggestions for 13 more or deepened topics to cover in future retreats. Some of these have a professional focus, some a personal focus, and others are specific to the needs of transition-age foster youth.

EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations may further strengthen the Wellness Retreat Program and broaden its reach and impact:

- ▶ The most enthusiastically-received retreats contained multiple opportunities for activity and hands-on learning. While some topics lend themselves to this training style more than others, it was noted that even the financial and speechmaking trainings would have been improved by more time to “practice.” Look for opportunities to bring experiential and hands-on learning into every topic whenever possible.
- ▶ Experiment with different logistical formats, in terms of the length and location of the retreats, to see if this makes them accessible to more youth trainers.
- ▶ Since staff participation is a vitally important component of the retreats, explore the possibility of having more staff or volunteers helping out so that no staff member would need to miss a significant portion of a retreat because of taking care of logistical matters.

CONCLUSION

The Wellness Retreat Program is a unique and important opportunity for the

Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project to deepen the support and capacity-building it provides transition-age foster youth. The program promotes inner growth, healing, community-building, professional development, and positive life choices through both focused topics and broad, unifying themes. Youth trainers and project staff see ample evidence of the success of

this program in changed habits, strengthened relationships, confidence, and openness to new ideas and experiences. The findings of this evaluation point to many strengths and benefits and a few ideas for creating an even more positive and accessible experience for youth trainers and project staff in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project (Youth Offering Unique Tangible Help) is part of a collaborative effort of current and former foster youth, social work professionals, academics, foundations, and others committed to empowering California's foster youth. When the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project launched in 2000, its primary purpose was to empower current and former foster youth to educate child welfare workers on the needs, desires, and cultural experience of transition age foster youth. Since its inception, the Project has trained, employed, and supported more than 75 current and former foster youth. It has conducted trainings for more than 6,000 child welfare workers, supervisors, and managers. Meanwhile, the Project has expanded its educational reach through speaking engagements, dissemination of digital stories, and ongoing technical assistance to other organizations working with and on behalf of foster youth.

In 2008, the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project received a grant from the Zellerbach Family Foundation in order to develop and deliver a one-year program of intensive training retreats to support the mental health, wellness, and leadership abilities of the organization's cadre of current and former youth trainers, all transition-age foster youth.^{1*} The Wellness Retreat Program consisted of four, three- to four-day weekend retreats serving 11 to 23 youth at each:

Retreat One: Professional and Financial Wellness (December 2008)

Retreat Two: Mental Health (May 2009)

Retreat Three: Physical Health (June 2009)

Retreat Four: Spiritual Health (August 2009)

Retreat topics, themes, and activities were designed in direct response to the needs of the youth trainers, with the following goals for participants:

- ▶ Experience mental health stabilizing/enhancing activities.
- ▶ Report an enhanced sense of wellbeing.
- ▶ Increase their knowledge of mental health resources in the community.
- ▶ Increase their knowledge and capacity to tap into their own internal mental health resources.
- ▶ Report career- or job-related benefits from the professional skills learned.
- ▶ Report increased confidence in trying out new tasks.
- ▶ Report an increased capacity as trainers and leaders in the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project as a result of participation in the retreats.

The Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project contracted with the independent evaluation firm of Korwin Consulting to design an evaluation in order to assess the impact of the Wellness Retreat Program and the experiences and insights of participating youth trainers and project staff.

* Between 73 and 88 percent of participants at each retreat were active youth trainers. Current and former youth trainers participating in retreats are referred to as "youth trainers" throughout this report.

THE WELLNESS RETREAT PROGRAM — FINDINGS

Each wellness retreat centered around a specific wellness goal — professional and financial wellness, mental health, physical health, or spiritual health. At the same time, certain themes were embedded throughout all four retreats, including: when and how to access mental health services in the community, how to identify and draw upon each youth trainer’s internal resources, team-building strategies, and the importance of self-care.

Using a mixed-methods evaluation design including post-retreat and 3-month follow-up surveys as well as interviews with youth and staff, this evaluation captures not only the process but the outcomes resulting, in part, from these wellness retreats.

HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR THE WELLNESS RETREAT PROGRAM

Staff and youth trainers had several hopes and expectations for the Wellness Retreats, including:

- ▶ Community building and team building.
- ▶ Personal growth and exploration.
- ▶ Critically-needed support for youth facing multiple life-challenges.
- ▶ Giving-back to youth who are currently serving as trainers or who have done so in the past and remain connected to the organization and do work with other youth.
- ▶ Replenishing internal resources of staff.

Youth trainers saw the retreats as an opportunity for “friendship and camaraderie,” “gaining tools” to help “stay more balanced and alleviate stress,” to re-connect with other youth trainers, to have fun, and to “learn about holistic healing.” One youth saw the retreats as a chance to “help others do different things by sharing my experiences.” Another hoped to “gain more resources, not only for myself, but for the clients I work with in my role as a mental health worker.”

Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project Director Jamie Lee Evans describes the significant demands the organization’s youth trainers face: “We’re asking young people with traumatic backgrounds to dive into those experiences to present to social workers about the needs of transition-age foster youth. They’re dealing with all the things that other transition-age foster youth are dealing with — getting enough money, connecting with family, finding housing and work, taking care of physical and mental health, getting through school, and other basic needs.” While it seeks to have a positive impact in the child welfare field, the Project also takes very seriously its role of providing a community “that is regenerative and, in some ways, healing to the young people that work on our team, as well as the staff.” She sees the Wellness Retreat Program as “a good opportunity to come together and be well.”

RETREAT ONE: PROFESSIONAL AND FINANCIAL WELLNESS

This first retreat — scheduled during the winter holiday season, which is often a lonely and challenging time for foster youth — presented topics related to speechmaking, public speaking, and financial well-being.

A group of 24 youth trainers, representing a diverse mix of ethnicities (77% of whom are youth of color), sexualities (47 percent self-identify as other than heterosexual), and genders, participated in the retreat, held in December 2008. More than half (57 percent) were 22 years old or younger, and two were under 19. The majority (61 percent) was female. *(Please see Appendix for detailed tables on this and all other data referred to in this report.)*

Immediately following the retreat, youth trainers felt they had increased their knowledge in all of the topics covered:

- ▶ **Speech Making**

- Why give a speech?

- Preparing yourself for giving your speech

- Constructing the right variety of content in your speech

- Finding your focus

- ▶ **Public Speaking**

- Delivering a speech that is well-organized and memorable

- Understanding your own strengths and weaknesses

- Directing your physical fundamentals

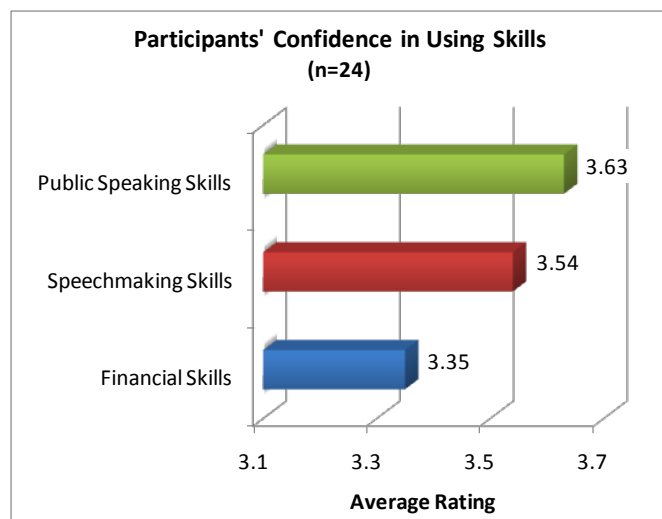
- ▶ **Financial Wellbeing**

- Strategies to support your financial well-being

- The country's economic crisis.

The chart to the right illustrates the confidence youth had after the retreat that they could use the skills pertaining to each of the main topic areas, with the greatest confidence being in public speaking skills (3.63). The highest possible rating is “4.00”.

Three months after this retreat, a large majority of the 13 participants surveyed had used these new skills, most of them crediting the retreat. For instance, 77 percent of participants say they have tried new financial skills. Of those, 91 percent attribute their use of these new skills specifically to the retreat. The chart that follows shows what proportion tried new skills in each of the three main topics of the retreat, and what percentage of those trying new skills credit the retreat with their doing so.



Type of Skill	Tried New Skills (n=13)	Tried New Skills because of Retreat (n=10)
Financial	77%	91%
Public Speaking	77%	73%
Speechwriting	69%	90%

Even 10 months later, youth trainers identify elements of the first retreat that they have incorporated into their lives. While they found much of the retreat interesting — including learning about the stock market; tips for buying a car; how to bring knowledge, spirit, and passion into a speech; and refreshers about public speaking and facilitation skills — they had the most to say about their take-aways from the session on how to deliver a speech and how they manage their finances. For example,

- ▶ In their **speechmaking and public speaking**, youth trainers report writing differently, using strategies to connect with their audience, and including story-telling in their presentations. One youth trainer notes of a presenter at the training, “He uses his charisma and personality while facilitating, and that’s something I usually don’t do. I’m being more myself now.” Another says that now, “I make sure I accommodate my crowd,” and one other learned, “You have to find out what people want to learn” and “be as direct as possible” in a presentation.
- ▶ They believe they have become **better leaders**. In fact, 82 percent say that this retreat strengthened their skills as a Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project trainer. One youth trainer explains, “I didn’t recognize how competent I was myself until I went into the training. I started coaching other people, using my expertise to help other co-trainers.” Another says this retreat contributed to a feeling of being a stronger leader because it, “allowed me to identify weaknesses and work on them.”
- ▶ In the realm of **finance**, they have adopted savings plans, are setting budgets, and have started living *below* their means. One says, “I made big-time changes in how I manage my finances. I started to look at my budget and update it more frequently. I started to cut down on excess expenses, on things that I didn’t really need.” Another says, “I did finally start saving. It’s always thrown out there that you should save, but it’s never put into a context of being a requirement.”

Y.O.U.T.H. Training project staff members see positive results from this retreat. One staff member sees value in the “solid skills” offered there and the fact that two former foster youth led it. **She believes youth are integrating the financial tips from this retreat more than they realize.** She explains that one of the youth trainers attending the retreat recently talked about working on finances and stopping a habit of compulsive shopping. This individual “didn’t mention the retreat, but mentioned all the things that were talked about there.”

Another project staff member notes that for some participants, writing their speech was a way for them to tell their story as foster youth for the first time. “For some, it was like an emotional catharsis to be able to let it all out,” she explains. This same staff member sees how useful the retreat was in a particular youth trainer’s “personal and professional development as a staff

person” at a new job. She also remembers that one youth trainer who was always shy, wrote a speech during the first retreat, boosting his confidence enough to volunteer to be a keynote speaker at a subsequent training.

RETREAT TWO: MENTAL HEALTH

The retreat on mental and emotional wellness addressed some of the intense inner challenges the youth trainers often have in common, covering how thoughts and feelings affect the way they experience difficult situations, how to understand and deal with rage, how to act with forgiveness and compassion for oneself and others, and how to tolerate intense emotions without shame or blame. In a sign of what resonated most for several participants, a number of them refer to this as “the rage retreat.”

A diverse group of 16 youth trainers attended this retreat. Three-quarters are youth of color (76%), and more than half (62 percent) were over 22 years old, and none were under 19. Half (50 percent) self-identify as heterosexual. As with the first retreat, the majority (63 percent) was female.

With a highest possible rating of “4.00,” youth trainers indicate an increase in understanding in all of the topics covered in the retreat, with the greatest gains in understanding their own rage, learning how their thoughts and feelings can help or hinder them, and responding to others with compassion. The chart below shows their gains in understanding these and other topics.



Many youth trainers say they have changed the way they deal with their feelings as a result of this retreat — and they continue to integrate what they learned into their lives five months later. They use adjectives like, “**helpful,**” “**powerful,**” and “**transformative,**” to describe the retreat. Their comments include:

- ▶ “The retreat helped me identify how I handle anger and rage. It gave me tools to identify anger and where it is coming from.”
- ▶ “Learning how to better my boundaries with people” was helpful.
- ▶ “Knowing my rage style helps me work with youth better.”
- ▶ “It was a very powerful retreat. It helped me look at negative things as a challenge.”
- ▶ “This particular retreat helps to fortify the connections we already have with each other.”
- ▶ “It helped me deal with depression and stress and learn how not to let those emotions control my life.”
- ▶ “This was my first introduction to journaling. It was really helpful, and I continued it in my life.”
- ▶ “I use everything I’ve learned from the retreat.”

A project staff member discusses the significance of this retreat for the youth trainers: “It was all about personal growth and dealing with rage and grief. There was a time for self-reflection that is not usually available to them.” Another staff member says that this retreat “was very successful in terms of its intended purpose. We learned some lessons in terms of letting go of rage and letting go of your past. And a couple of youth trainers still quote our teacher.”

One youth trainer’s reflections give a vivid example of how much the support provided by this retreat is needed. She explains that after this retreat, a family member died, and “If it had been before the retreat, I would have shut myself off from everyone. Now, I remember the good things about her, rather than forgetting everything and just moving on. I am not depressed.” This trainer continues, “I used to have melt-downs at least a few times a year. Since the retreat, I haven’t. I need time to deal with emotions rather than closing myself up.”

A constant throughout all of the retreats was the desire to foster strong interpersonal connections, trust, and community among the participants and between participants and project staff. Youth trainers and staff members, alike, identify this retreat as one that was particularly effective in promoting those qualities. One project staff member describes a youth trainer as being able to talk about ways he was keeping himself apart from others at this retreat, coming to understand his motivations for doing so, and ultimately overcoming that behavior. The retreat, this staff member explains, “forced him to be in a community and be a member of that community and come to terms with what that meant for him.” Another staff member tells of two former friends for whom the work on rage and grief opened a door to begin to trust and talk to one another again.

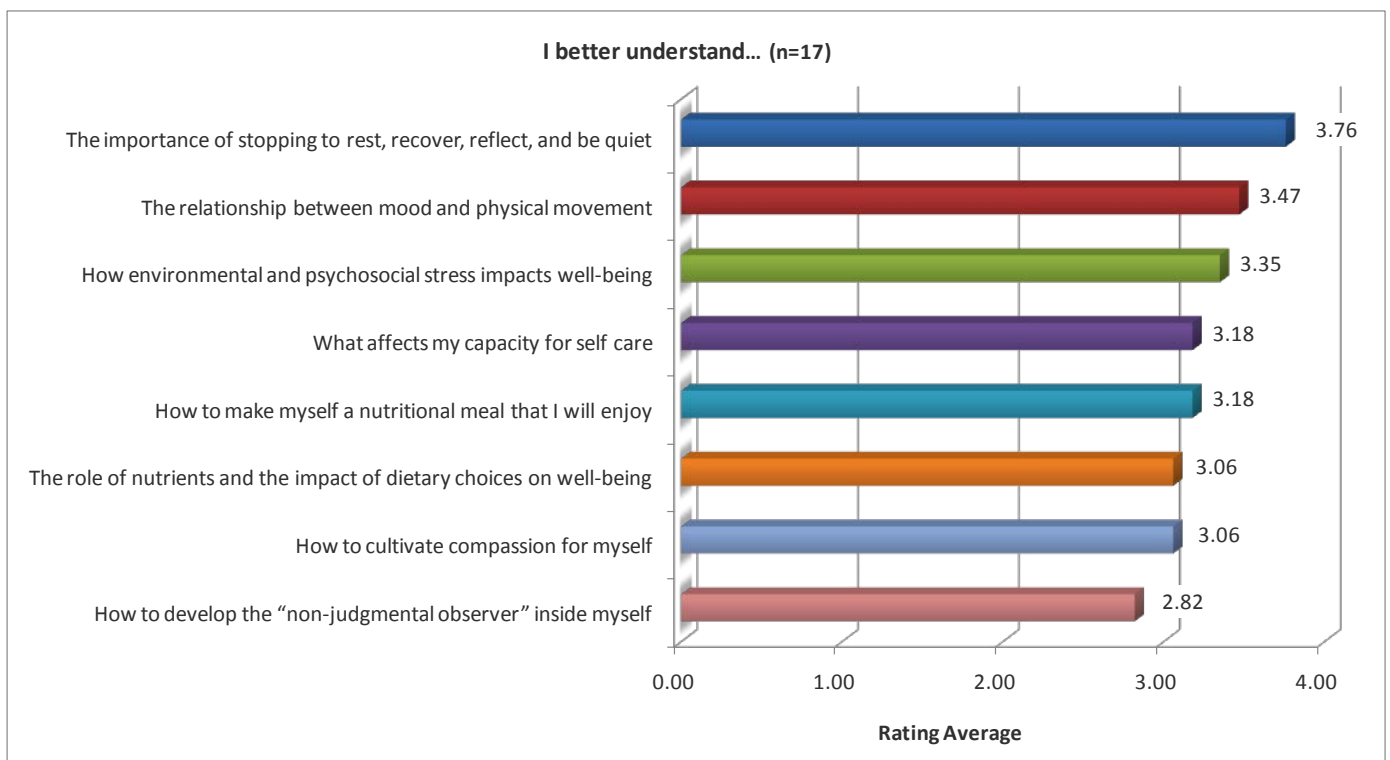
RETREAT THREE: PHYSICAL HEALTH

This retreat addressed the impact of stress; the connections between nutrition, physical exercise, and mental health; and the importance of being compassionate with oneself. It

included a camping trip, a 20-mile bicycle ride, and a 10-mile canoe trip. **Perhaps more than any of the other retreats, this retreat challenged people’s perceptions of their own abilities.**

Seventeen youth trainers participated in this retreat, with a similar mix of ethnic and sexual diversity as the previous two retreats, although, unlike at the first two retreats, the majority (71 percent) does not self-identify as heterosexual. As at the second retreat, slightly more than three-quarters (77%) were youth of color, the majority (71 percent) was over 22 years old, and none were under 19. Genders were more evenly distributed in this retreat than the previous two, with 44 percent male, 31 percent female, and 25 percent transgender.

Interestingly, given the intense physical demands built into the structure of this retreat, the topic that youth trainers came to understand most afterwards is “the importance of stopping to rest, recover, reflect, and be quiet.” Although this concept was touched on in all the retreats, it clearly was felt to be especially relevant to the participants of this one. Participants also cite strong gains in “the relationship between mood and physical movement” and “how environmental and psychosocial stress impacts well-being.” The chart below shows the average gains in understanding youth trainers identify for several topics of this retreat. (As before, a score of “4.00” would indicate the greatest possible gain.)



A recurring theme in reflections on this retreat is that of **exceeding preconceived personal limits**. Several youth trainers and a couple of staff members surprised themselves at this retreat. Some had never ridden a bicycle before; several had not canoed. Youth trainers say:

- ▶ “I had doubts as to whether I could do it physically. I was surprised to learn how much our mindsets can stop our abilities.”

- ▶ “I tipped over in my canoe and thought I would drown, but I learned I wouldn’t drown.”

They also pushed themselves to **try new foods**. They explain:

- ▶ “We did a food tasting. That was really cool, because most of us didn’t have that experience of tasting cross-cultural food.”
- ▶ “I enjoyed the tasting of vegetables and fruit.”

Participants were able to meet their challenges and enjoy themselves, thanks at least in part to the **support and companionship** of their colleagues and leaders.

- ▶ “We had all the support we needed from friends and volunteers.”
- ▶ “We had so much teamwork and support.”
- ▶ “I remember the camaraderie.”
- ▶ “I really enjoyed the team-building we had while canoeing and biking.”
- ▶ “I liked sitting around the campfire with people and spending time with them.”

They came to some **important realizations** about themselves, their health, and the way they approach life. Sharing their new learnings, they say:

- ▶ “I loved that retreat. The most helpful thing was the bike ride and the processing afterward. When you think you’re going on a 20-mile ride, you think that’s too much, but when they push you, you see that you can do it. That’s a metaphor for life. I really think about that a lot.”
- ▶ “The little things you do to be healthy can add up. Even if you are not very active, little things like taking the stairs instead of the elevator and eating an apple instead of a cookie can help.”
- ▶ “The health educator had a big impact on my life. I am now reading food packages and seeing what I am putting into my body.”
- ▶ “I realized that in order to be happy and comfortable, I need to be healthy.”
- ▶ “The debrief session after the retreat was better than at any other retreat; we were relating it to our professional work and our personal life.”

Not everyone had a positive experience at this retreat. Unlike after other retreats, when the comments are generally regarding logistics, some of the feedback on this retreat was more substantive. One youth trainer says, “I didn’t find the speakers that helpful,” pointing out, “I think sometimes the topic of healthy food can be a great conversation about classism. Depending on your financial status, you don’t always have access to healthy food.” Another says, “It wasn’t as useful as it could have been: I’m so busy with school, I can’t implement those things.”

Many youth trainers report incorporating changes after this retreat, which they are maintaining even four months after the retreat. One or more of them report that they are:

- ▶ More committed to an exercise routine
- ▶ Eating regularly
- ▶ Eating new foods (e.g., beef, pork, vegetables, fish, etc.)
- ▶ Reducing consumption of unhealthy foods and exposure to harmful substances (like plastics)

- ▶ Quitting smoking
- ▶ Changed perception about health and nutrition
- ▶ Researching the health impact of different foods (that may not be as safe as they seem)
- ▶ Using physical activity and good nutrition as stress reducing strategies

One youth trainer elaborates, “This is the first time I’ve actually listened to my own body. I reacted well to using physical activity for stress reduction, and I now incorporate physical activity and good nutrition into my lifestyle. I’ve seen a lot of improvement.” Another says, “After this retreat, it made me think I want to take care of myself overall, like I would take care of someone else.”

Staff are especially enthusiastic about this retreat. One explains that this retreat was more difficult to get through than the others, including arguing and “bad moods.” In the end, though, she feels this was actually the most successful retreat, because “it showed people what it means to be part of a community and how to get through not getting along.” She continues, “A lot of the participants, myself included, don’t put a lot of priority on our physical wellness.” After the retreat, she says, “We were all very excited, and a lot of people committed to doing that in their life for physical wellness and other activities — trying something they didn’t think they could do.”

One staff member says, “It seemed like people did a great job of encouraging each other. It was a good team-building activity. In the debrief, people were saying, ‘I didn’t think I was strong enough to do it.’ It changed their thinking about their bodies and what they were capable of doing.” She also notes that, after this retreat, several people have mentioned that they are “getting more into exercise,” and that they can challenge themselves more physically.

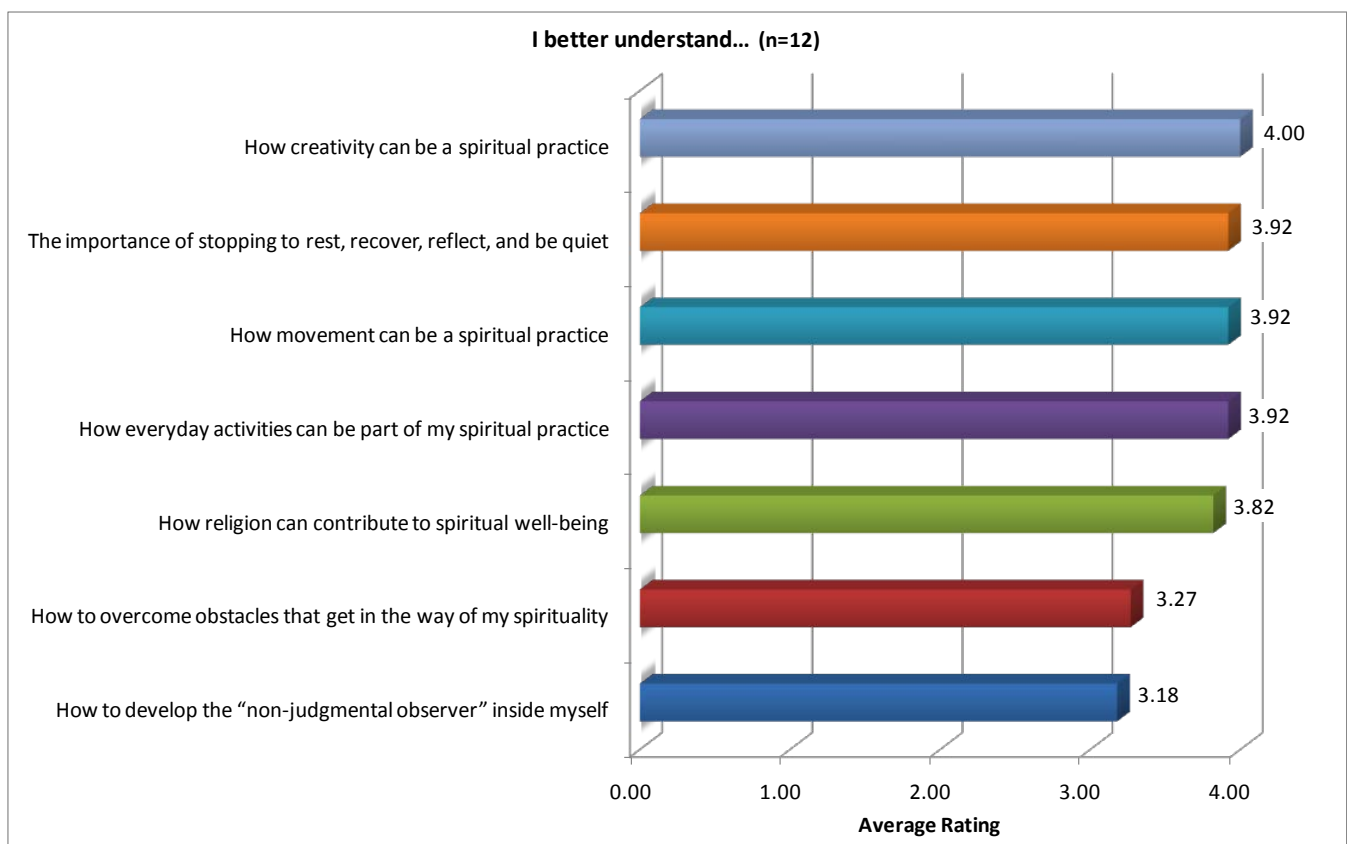
Another member of the staff explains that there was “a lot of good, critical feedback” after this retreat. She notices that youth trainers who attended the retreat are now making healthier choices about what and how much to eat, elaborating, “Some youth are really low-income, so when they come to a Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project event, they feel they need to get everything they can get their hands on, and sometimes they eat themselves sick. I’ve noticed changes in the way they order their food and the way they’re eating.” She also sees changes in terms of self-confidence and trust, describing one youth trainer who had panicked after getting into a canoe (because of a lack of confidence in swimming skills) but felt so supported by others around her that she now helps others get past similar fears.

RETREAT FOUR: SPIRITUAL HEALTH

As Sandra Estafan, the staff member largely responsible for the design of the spiritual health retreat, explains, many foster youth have religion “forced on them, depending on who runs the home” in which they are staying. Others rely on religious organizations for food and other basic needs. The purpose of this retreat, then, was to show how “spirituality can be something apart from religion,” and that “they can claim it through things that may not be thought of as spiritual: art, writing, music, or a hike in nature.” The retreat introduced some tenets of different faiths, explored ways of finding the spiritual in everyday and creative activities, and spoke to the importance of developing a non-judgmental observer inside oneself.

Eleven youth trainers participated in this retreat. The majority (64 percent) was over 22 years old, with 27 percent between 19 and 22 years old, and one person under 19. They were an ethnically diverse group—three-quarters of whom are youth of color, and the majority (64 percent) does not self-identify as heterosexual. An equal number of young men and women attended, with one transgender individual.

Participants’ ratings after the retreat show that it did indeed meet its goal of conveying the many activities not typically associated with organized religion that can be part of a spiritual practice. As the chart below shows, they gave the highest possible average rating to describe their understanding of “how creativity can be a spiritual practice,” and very high ratings to several related concepts, as well as to describe their understanding of “the importance of stopping to rest, recover, reflect and be quiet.”



Several youth trainers cite this as their favorite retreat. Their comments show how much they were able to stretch themselves and explore activities and concepts that were new to them:

- ▶ “It was an awesome experience for creative expression. It was also very reflective and expressive.”
- ▶ “This retreat confirmed that writing is something I love to do. I learned how to free-write and not judge my writing.”
- ▶ “I don’t like being touched. I had a massage for the first time and opened up my comfort zone.”

- ▶ “There was an explanation of mindful eating and mindful cleaning. I learned to be more present and focus on the moment.”
- ▶ “I struggle with religion and sexuality. I was able to come to a place of internal reflection of spirituality. It’s an individual thing, and not always an external religious thing where you’re always trying to please family, church, and this god you believe in.”
- ▶ “I learned that spirituality gives you purpose in life.”

While some youth trainers were less enthusiastic about the relevance of this retreat to their lives — one, for instance, had hoped to learn more about other faiths — as one staff member observes, “There wasn’t anyone who thought there was nothing there for them.”

In the weeks since attending this retreat, youth trainers have adopted practices and attitudes that reflect a deep commitment to nurturing their own spirituality. The changes include:

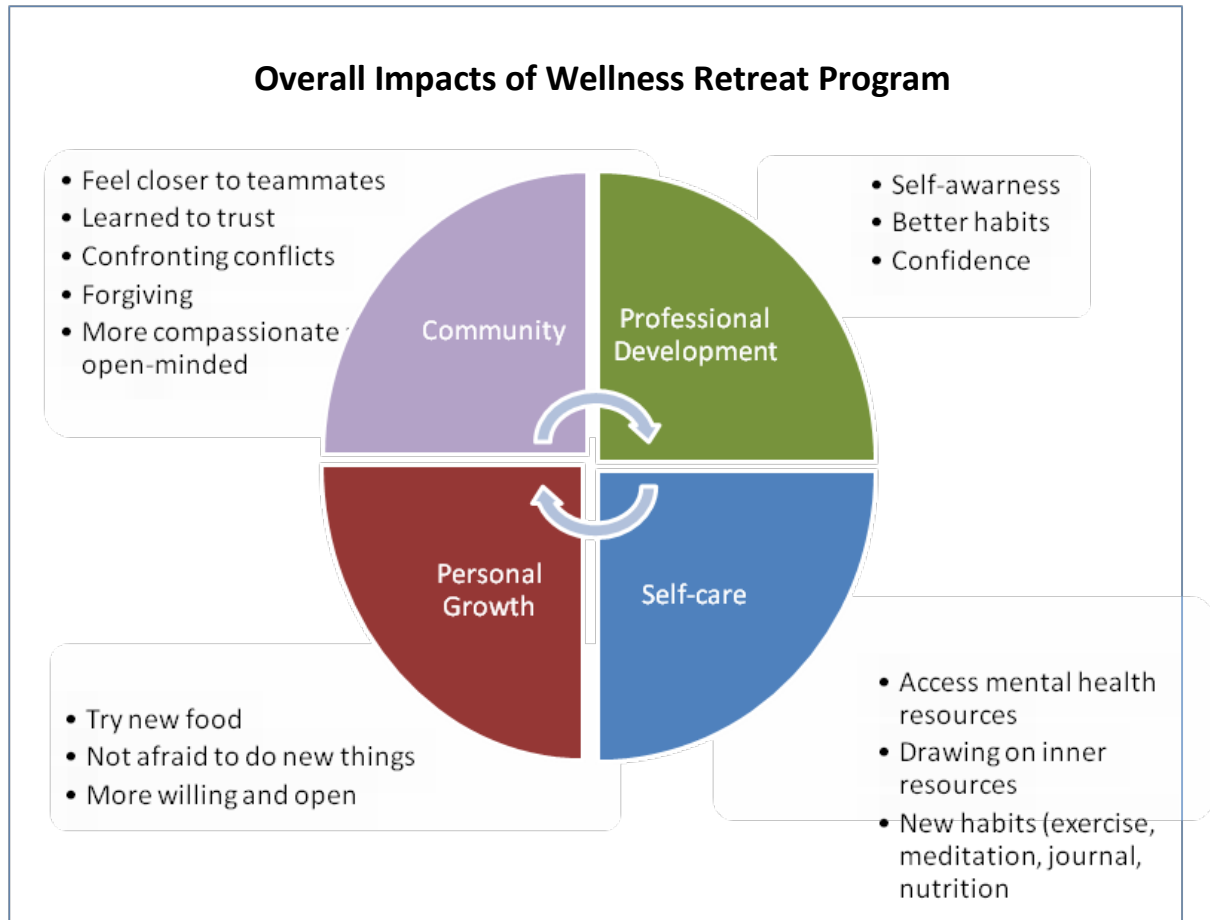
- ▶ Staying “in the moment” to help keep anxiety at bay
- ▶ Focusing on oneself or one’s current activities
- ▶ Internalizing spirituality, rather than seeing it as externally imposed or directed
- ▶ Getting a massage
- ▶ Journaling
- ▶ Meditating
- ▶ Recognizing the importance of resting and healing
- ▶ Reading books recommended at the retreat
- ▶ Researching spirituality and different religions
- ▶ Sharing spiritual resources with others
- ▶ Being open to others’ perspectives on spirituality and faith

Project staff are seeing changes in youth trainers since the retreat, too. One notes that “definitely, youth are meditating now,” and “People are talking about stillness and quiet, and they didn’t do that before.”

OVERALL IMPACTS OF THE WELLNESS RETREAT EXPERIENCE

While youth trainers were able to select as few as one and as many as four retreats to attend, those who attended three or four were able to reflect on the cumulative experience of being exposed to the common themes unifying the Wellness Retreat Program. They identify four major categories: **self-care, professional development, community, and personal growth.**

The chart that follows shows these four major categories of impact youth trainers discussed, along with the main themes they identify in each category.



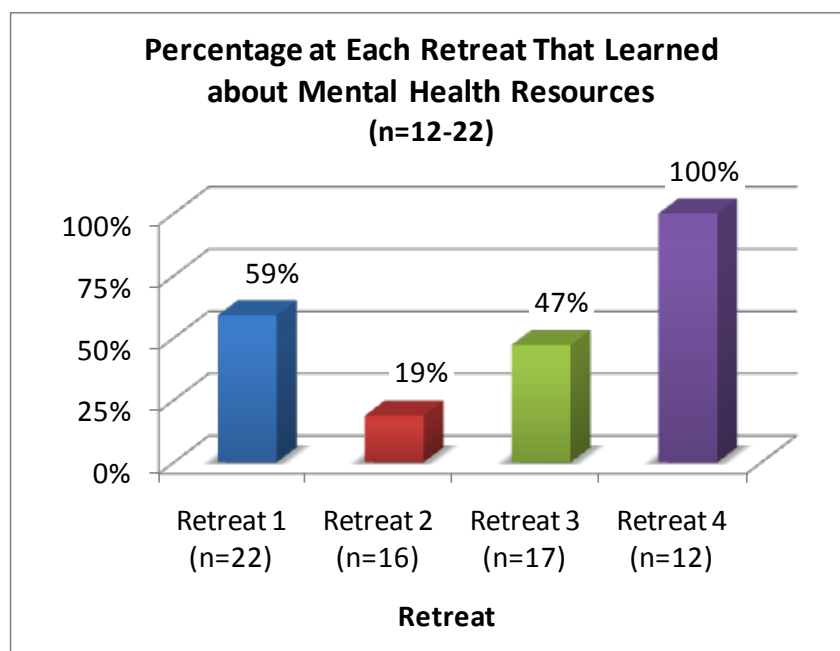
As the arrows in the center indicate, these categories are interrelated. The representative comments that follow elaborate on some of these overall gains from the Wellness Retreat Program and some of the ways in which progress in one area can feed into progress in another.

All nine youth trainers interviewed include increased self-care as a result of their participation in the Wellness Retreat Program. As the representative comments below show, this may include a greater willingness or follow-through on accessing mental health resources, a new understanding of their own inner resources, or the adoption of new habits and attitudes.

- ▶ “I started going back to therapy.”
- ▶ “I would access mental health services if I needed them.”
- ▶ “I am a lot more forgiving of myself. I am not as hard on myself as I used to be.”
- ▶ “Now I am putting my emotions first instead of putting other people’s drama first.”
- ▶ “I’ve accessed resources that incorporate positive mental health development: I joined a swim team and started sewing.”
- ▶ “Valuing my alone time is very different now. I sort of honor myself and give myself the opportunity to be alone without judgments.”

- ▶ “Now I am able to discuss old issues from my past with other people. I wasn’t able to before. I am starting to cope with my past.”
- ▶ “I have changed my habits in working out, saving money, and the way I deal with spirituality. It has changed how I treat myself.”
- ▶ “I have always read, but now, I try to read about religion and spirituality.”
- ▶ “When I am preparing meals, I am more mindful of what I put in it. “
- ▶ “In the past, I used to avoid thinking by staying busy. Recently, I am trying to face problems I am going through and trying to breathe, be silent, and go to sleep. I try to analyze my own issues before going to someone else.”
- ▶ “I have a greater self-awareness now. This helps me change some of my patterns.”
- ▶ “I’d never been big on writing. When I was in group homes, they made us journal and then they’d read them. I’ve been journaling more, though.”
- ▶ “I’ve gotten a more positive outlook because I’m active.”

Between 70 and 100 percent of youth trainers say they learned ways to access their own inner resources at each retreat. However, while some youth trainers say they are more aware of mental health resources and more willing to use them as a result of the retreats, the percentage that felt they learned about resources at each retreat ranges between 19 and 100 percent. (See chart at right.) (Some youth trainers indicate that they are “not sure” if they learned about mental health resources, and it is certainly possible that others simply missed that topic for one reason or another.)



There may be a need to address a gap in learning and/or confidence in information on accessing mental health resources. As one youth trainer commented, “I don’t know where to go. Asking for help is really embarrassing and shameful. I had a bad experience with mental health services in the foster care system before. I think other resources would do a good job, but I think having a training like the retreat is better.” While this same individual does talk about drawing on inner resources and exploring spirituality, it is worthy to note that negative past experiences with mental health providers are hindering the use of this kind of community resource in the present.

Professional development is also cited as a result of participation in the Wellness Retreat Program by all nine youth trainers interviewed. Their comments show that they are making connections between different types of skills and wellness habits and their ability to work to their best potential, both within and outside the context of being youth trainers with the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project.

- ▶ “I was working non-stop and going to school. There is a major shift now. I have quiet time, downtime, and I make time to do physical exercise. That has changed my job a lot because I am not overworked and stressed all the time. I have also established my boundaries, recognizing what I can and can’t do.”
- ▶ “I think I give myself more credit now. I acknowledge that I am great at what I do as a trainer. The retreats helped me focus, and I created curriculums. I hope to be able to use my public speaking skills gained from the retreat and share these curriculums with people from around the world.”
- ▶ “I think a lot of people view our work world as separate from our personal world, but I see this relationship is not that different after the retreats. I realize that my neglect of my own wellness affects my work and professional life. The retreats helped me prioritize, and that helped my job. Now, I have no problem doing the work on time and feeling calmer and being less stressed about it.”
- ▶ “I think I am a much better trainer at work now. I used to let other people’s comments affect my feelings in trainings and then shut them out. Now, as a trainer, I am more open to my co-workers, because I feel like it makes me a better trainer.”
- ▶ “I have information on resources, activities, and food that I can provide to my clients. I’m better able to serve them.”
- ▶ “These retreats have helped me to learn to react a little better when I’m disappointed about things, how to use more self control, and how to communicate my needs or wants in the moment.”
- ▶ “I definitely feel like my skills have improved. The main thing I was missing was the group cohesion. I feel more connected to my supervisors and my peers who were at the retreats.”

It is notable that, with only one retreat specifically devoted to teaching professional skills many youth trainers gained in this area as did in the area of self-care, the explicit purpose of the Wellness Retreat Program. A staff member’s story illustrates how the series of retreats can translate into professional development: “There was one youth I counseled who was having trouble in a new job. Because we had the opportunity to do these retreats, I had a different framework to walk with her. We had a different starting point. I said ‘You need to leave the emotional part of you at home today and go talk to your boss.’ I think there was a general sensibility about being aware of your emotional self and not letting that run you.”

Eight youth trainers talk about a stronger feeling of community as a result of attending the trainings. Building community is one of the most important goals underlying the development of the Wellness Retreat Program, and youth trainers’ feedback on the experience seems to confirm that it is succeeding in this area. This includes being better able to connect with and

relate to others — usually other youth trainers and project staff, but sometimes also with other friends and family — because of greater trust, empathy, and self-value. The comments below illustrate their experience:

- ▶ “What I felt was the overarching benefit of the retreats was the sense of community. Having retreats like that develops the relationship more within the whole group.”
- ▶ “The people at the retreat were almost always the same people. We became a community. We learned to trust people more.”
- ▶ “My approach is different when I confront conflict with people. It is not a selfish act anymore. It is not just about me, but how can we both walk away with peace.”
- ▶ “I am a lot more understanding of other people. Everyone has their own journey. I still hold them accountable for what they do but I am a lot more understanding.”
- ▶ “I am much more forgiving than in the past. Forgiving people is very hard. Before, if you hurt me, you would have to jump through a lot of hoops to regain my trust but, recently, I am a lot more forgiving.”
- ▶ “The better person I am, the better I can be for my family and friends. The better I am, the better I can be in relationships.”

Two staff members tell a success story that makes the explicit connection between the strong sense of community the retreats created and the youth trainers’ abilities in other areas. They cite a young woman who “has a lot of good ideas,” but had a history of not bringing them to implementation. In response to what this youth trainer saw as some challenging team dynamics and a lack of bonding at the retreats, she created a strengths-based activity to deliver at the last retreat that would help people address their issues with one another and become a stronger community as a result. “She really did follow through with the curriculum, and I saw a professionalism that I hadn’t seen before,” explains one staff member. Another explains, “One of the strongest reasons she felt she could do that was the level of comfort that came through those retreats. This improved her skills as a trainer — that she could identify needs and develop a curriculum and then present it.

Six youth trainers articulate changes resulting from the retreats that are best described as personal growth. As the following sample comments show, they include a more positive outlook and a willingness to move beyond old patterns and habits.

- ▶ “I realized I can try new things and not be afraid.”
- ▶ “I gained insight on myself from the retreats. I learned that we are our own worst critics. I realized that I have a lot of strengths that I didn’t acknowledge before. I learned about my boundaries (physical, emotional, and mental) and what can pull down my self-esteem. The information was powerful beyond measure.”
- ▶ “I have been a little bit happier since the retreats. The training made me realize that I am not alone. We all go through the same things. It feels liberating now that I can share my inner self with others, and I feel happier.”

Project staff also describe youth trainers’ gains in inner growth. One talks about a young woman overcoming addictions — “Every event she can go to that makes her feel accepted is a

big part of her recovery” — and a young man who found the retreat community to be “such an accepting space and a de-stigmatizing community that he would do anything we could get him into.”

The comments of the youth trainers and staff illustrate how the Wellness Retreat Program, as a whole, transcends the explicit purpose of each individual retreat. A staff member discussed the value of being self-reflective, “being present,” and providing the opportunity to make connections for transition-age foster youth. She explains that the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project community is “transformative,” giving youth “a different view of what’s possible in the world.” Another describes the friendships that develop during the retreats as “phenomenal,” explaining, “A lot of them have been stigmatized. When they’re accepted, that reflects in their attitude from that point forward.” A third says, “I do think the series helped. I think it’s really necessary to do wellness programming for people who’ve been in foster care, because a lot of them haven’t had opportunities to explore what it means to take care of the self, because they’re used to being in survival mode.”

A further note about the impact of the retreat series relates to staff participation. All three staff members interviewed talk about the importance of being present for the retreats, both in terms of building trust between themselves and the youth trainers and in terms of support for their own wellness and overall self-care. **As one explains, “It’s important for us as staff and trainers to be grounded, because that’s the only way we’ll be effective.”**

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM YOUTH TRAINERS AND PROJECT STAFF

Retreat participants have several suggestions for strengthening the retreat experience, and staff members have a few, as well:

General Recommendations

Youth Trainers Suggest:

- ▶ Handouts with key points from the retreats (so they can be used for review of important learnings)
- ▶ More time to practice the financial wellness and public speaking lessons
- ▶ Remove camping from the already-demanding physical health retreat
- ▶ Simplify and reduce the demands around meal preparation when camping
- ▶ More frequent retreats (so more trainers have the opportunity to participate)
- ▶ Retreats for other youth (three youth trainers made this suggestion) and child welfare professionals

Staff Suggest:

- ▶ More youth-led presentations
- ▶ Expanded staff or volunteer presence (so that no one has to miss a retreat because they are working behind the scenes the whole time)
- ▶ Addressing each topic more broadly and holistically
- ▶ Locations that are simple to get to (so less time and effort are spent getting people to the trainings)

- ▶ Improvement in the preparation process so less time and energy is spent planning retreats
- ▶ Collaboration with other groups to deliver retreats.

Recommendations for Future Topics

Youth Trainers Suggest:

- ▶ Romantic relationships
- ▶ Spirituality — more in-depth
- ▶ Mental and emotional health — more topics (e.g., forgiveness and grief)
- ▶ Being a resilient former foster youth (i.e., responding to requests from agencies, nonprofits, and individuals to share your story)
- ▶ Family relationships (i.e., dealing with demands from members of family of origin that want to be involved in your life and want your help, now that you are more successful)
- ▶ Goal-setting — Determining your goals, “as opposed to what people have encouraged you to do and what you feel you owe to someone else”
- ▶ Nutrition — more
- ▶ Cooking
- ▶ Grant writing for work with nonprofit organizations
- ▶ Curriculum development

Staff Suggest:

- ▶ Financial wellness — more relevant to the age group
- ▶ Team-building and the development of a professional community
- ▶ Healing — natural, non-Western-medicine

EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations may further strengthen the Wellness Retreat Program and broaden its reach and impact:

- ▶ The most enthusiastically-received retreats contained multiple opportunities for activity and hands-on learning. While some topics lend themselves to this training style more than others, it was noted that even the financial and speechmaking trainings would have been improved by more time to “practice.” Look for opportunities to bring experiential and hands-on learning into every topic whenever possible.
- ▶ Experiment with different logistical formats, in terms of the length and location of the retreats, to see if this makes them accessible to more youth trainers. This may also reduce the amount of staff time and money needed to plan each retreat, which could, in turn, make it possible to offer more.
- ▶ Since staff participation is a vitally important component of the retreats, explore the possibility of having more staff or volunteers helping at retreats. That way, no staff member would need to miss a significant portion of a retreat because of taking care of logistical matters.

CONCLUSION

The Wellness Retreat Program is a unique and important opportunity for the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project to deepen the support and capacity-building it provides transition-age foster youth. The program promotes inner growth, healing, community-building, professional development, and positive life choices through both focused topics and broad, unifying themes. Youth trainers and project staff see ample evidence of the success of this program in changed habits, strengthened relationships, confidence, and an openness to new ideas and experiences. The findings of this evaluation point to many strengths and benefits and a few ideas for creating an even more positive and accessible experience for youth trainers and project staff in the future.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

METHODS

The tools for evaluating the Wellness Retreat Program include:

Post-retreat Survey: Wellness retreat participants completed an evaluation form at the end of each of the four retreats to measure training satisfaction and changes in knowledge, understanding, and confidence resulting from the retreat experience. The percentage of youth trainers completing a survey at each retreat was: *Retreat One: 23 of the 25 youth trainers (92 percent), Retreat Two: 16 of the 16 youth trainers (100 percent), Retreat Three: 16 of the 18 youth trainers (89 percent), and Retreat Four: 11 of the 12 youth trainers (92 percent).*

Retreat One Follow-up Survey: Youth trainers who participated in Retreat One were asked to complete a follow-up survey three months after their training. The survey asked about what new skills they had implemented, whether they felt more connected with others, and what mental health and internal resources they had accessed since and because of Retreat One. Of the 25 participants, 13 responded (52 percent). Because of the low response rate in spite of staff efforts, it was decided not to administer further follow-up surveys.

Youth Trainer Interviews: Ten youth trainers who attended at least three of the four retreats were interviewed about their expectations and experiences, the impact of the retreats, and their feedback and suggestions for future planning. *This number represents 30 percent of the 33 unique individuals who attended the retreats.*

Staff Interviews: Interviews were conducted with three staff members of the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project — Jamie Lee Evans (Director), Sandra Estafan (Project Assistant), and Laura Forrest (Administrative Assistant) — in order to learn about their expectations and observations about the Wellness Retreat Program process and impacts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT KORWIN CONSULTING

Korwin Consulting, an evaluation and planning firm, advances social justice solutions by identifying community strengths, building organizational capacity, and evaluating impact. More information on Korwin Consulting is available at www.korwinconsulting.com.

Lisa Korwin of Korwin Consulting is the primary evaluator of the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project. Robin Horner, associate with Korwin Consulting, is the primary author of this report.

CUMULATIVE RETREAT DATA

- ▶ **Demographic Information**
- ▶ **Involvement as Youth Trainer**
- ▶ **Repeat Retreat Attendance**
- ▶ **Accessing Mental Health Resources**
- ▶ **Accessing Inner Resources**
- ▶ **Confidence and Connection**
- ▶ **Satisfaction with Retreat Trainers**
- ▶ **Satisfaction with Training Topics**
- ▶ **Retreat One Three-month Follow-up Findings**
- ▶ **Satisfaction with Retreat Logistics**

Demographic Information

What is your gender?	Retreat 1 (n=23)		Retreat 2 (n=16)		Retreat 3 (n=16)		Retreat 4 (n=11)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Male	8	35%	4	25%	7	44%	5	45%
Female	14	61%	10	63%	5	31%	5	45%
Transgender	2	9%	1	6%	4	25%	1	10%
Other	0	0%	1	6%	1	6%	0	0%
answered	23	N/A*	16	100%	16	N/A*	11	100%
no response or n/a	1		0		1		1	

*Total percentage is >100 because one or more individuals selected more than one gender category.

What is your age?	Retreat 1 (n=23)		Retreat 2 (n=16)		Retreat 3 (n=17)		Retreat 4 (n=11)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
16-18 years	2	9%	0	0%	0	0%	1	9%
19 – 22 years	11	48%	6	38%	5	29%	3	27%
over 22 years	10	43%	10	62%	12	71%	7	64%
answered	23	100%	16	100%	17	100%	11	100%
no response or n/a	1		0		0		1	

What is your race/ethnicity?	Retreat 1 (n=21)		Retreat 2 (n=16)		Retreat 3 (n=17)		Retreat 4 (n=11)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
African Diasporic/Continental African/Black	7	33%	5	31%	7	40%	4	36%
Asian/Pacific Islander/Asian or Pacific Islander American	3	14%	2	13%	1	6%	1	9%
Latino(a)/Hispanic	2	10%	1	6%	0	0%	0	0%
Caucasian /European American	5	24%	4	25%	4	24%	3	28%
Multi-racial	3	14%	3	19%	4	24%	1	9%
Other	1	5%	1	6%	1	6%	2	18%
answered	21	100%	16	100%	17	100%	11	100%
no response or n/a	3		0		0		1	

Demographics (continued)

What is your sexual orientation?	Retreat 1 (n=19)		Retreat 2 (n=16)		Retreat 3 (n=17)		Retreat 4 (n=11)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Heterosexual	10	53%	8	50%	5	29%	4	36%
Gay	2	11%	2	13%	3	18%	3	28%
Lesbian	2	11%	0	0%	3	18%	1	9%
Bisexual	3	16%	2	13%	2	12%	1	9%
Queer	2	11%	3	19%	2	12%	1	9%
Questioning	0	0%	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%
Other:	0	0%	1	6%	1	6%	1	9%
answered	19	100%	16	100%	17	100%	11	100%
no response or n/a	5		0	0%	0	0%	1	

Involvement as Youth Trainer

Are you a new or currently active member of the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project's training team?	Retreat 1 (n=21)		Retreat 2 (n=16)		Retreat 3 (n=17)		Retreat 4 (n=11)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Yes	17	81%	14	88%	13	76%	8	73%
No	4	19%	2	12%	4	24%	3	27%
answered	21	100%	16	100%	17	100%	11	100%
no response or n/a	3		0		0		1	

If "No", when did you stop being active with the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project?	Retreat 1 (n=4)		Retreat 2 (n=2)		Retreat 3 (n=2)		Retreat 4 (n=3)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Less than 1 year	2	50%	1	50%	1	50%	1	33%
1 – 2 years	2	50%	1	50%	1	50%	2	67%
answered	4	100%	2	100%	2	100%	3	100%
no response or n/a	20		14		15		9	

How many years have you been (or were you) involved with the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project?	Retreat 1 (n=21)		Retreat 2 (n=16)		Retreat 3 (n=17)		Retreat 4 (n=11)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Less than 1 year	3	14%	1	6%	2	12%	1	9%
1 – 2 years	8	38%	4	25%	5	29%	5	46%
3 – 5 years	10	48%	8	50%	7	41%	4	36%
Over 5 years	0	0%	3	19%	3	18%	1	9%
answered	21	100%	16	100%	17	100%	11	100%
no response or n/a	3		0		0		1	

Repeat Retreat Attendance

Did you attend Retreat 1: Professional and Financial Wellness?	Retreat 2 Participants (n=16)		Retreat 3 Participants (n=15)		Retreat 4 Participants (n=11)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Yes	12	75%	12	80%	8	73%
No	4	25%	3	20%	3	27%
answered	16	100%	15	100%	11	100%
no response or n/a	0		2		1	

Did you attend Retreat 2: Emotional Wellness?	Retreat 3 Participants (n=17)		Retreat 4 Participants (n=11)	
	#	%	#	%
Yes	12	71%	6	55%
No	5	29%	5	45%
answered	17	100%	11	100%
no response or n/a	0		1	

Did you attend Retreat 3: Physical Wellness?	Retreat 4 Participants (n=11)	
	#	%
Yes	9	82%
No	2	18%
answered	11	100%
no response or n/a	1	

Accessing Mental Health Resources

At this retreat, did you learn about mental health resources?	Retreat 1 (n=22)		Retreat 2 (n=16)		Retreat 3 (n=17)		Retreat 4 (n=12)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Yes	13	59%	3	19%	8	47%	12	100%
No	7	32%	5	31%	5	29%	0	0%
Not Sure	2	9%	8	50%	4	24%	0	0%
answered	22	100%	16	100%	17	100%	12	100%
no response or n/a	2		0		0		0	

Accessing Mental Health Resources (continued)

Do you feel better able to access mental health resources because of this retreat?	Retreat 1 (n=17)		Retreat 2 (n=4)		Retreat 3 (n=8)		Retreat 4 (n=12)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Yes	9	52%	2	50%	4	50%	11	92%
No, I don't feel better able to access these resources	0	0%	0	0%	2	25%	0	0%
No, because I already felt able to access these mental health resources	4	24%	1	25%	1	13%	0	0%
Not sure	4	24%	1	25%	1	12%	1	8%
answered	17	100%	4	100%	8	100%	12	100%
no response or n/a	7		12		9		0	

Accessing Inner Resources

Did you learn about ways to support yourself when outside services aren't available?	Retreat 1 (n=23)		Retreat 2 (n=16)		Retreat 3 (n=17)		Retreat 4 (n=12)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Yes	20	87%	16	100%	12	71%	12	100%
No	3	13%	0	0%	3	18%	0	0%
Not sure	0	0%	0	0%	2	12%	0	0%
answered	23	100%	16	100%	17	100%	12	100%
no response or n/a	1		0		0		0	

If "Yes", do you feel better able to rely upon these internal resources because of this retreat?	Retreat 1 (n=21)		Retreat 2 (n=16)		Retreat 3 (n=13)		Retreat 4 (n=11)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Yes	15	71%	14	88%	12	92%	10	91%
No, I don't feel better able to rely upon these internal resources	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
No, because I already felt able to access these internal resources	4	19%	1	6%	1	8%	0	0%
Not sure	2	10%	1	6%	0	0%	1	9%
answered	21	100%	16	100%	13	100%	11	100%
no response or n/a	3		0		4		1	

Confidence and Connection

Confidence and Connection: Retreats 1-4 Rating Average*	Retreat 1 (n=23)	Retreat 2 (n=16)	Retreat 3 (n=17)	Retreat 4 (n=12)
To what extent do you feel that participating in this retreat has helped you to feel more connected to others?	3.57	3.69	3.59	3.67
Please rate how well the project staff did to make you feel respected, appreciated, and valued at this retreat?	3.65	3.88	3.71	3.92

*The highest possible rating is "4.00."

Satisfaction with Retreat Trainers

Overall, the trainers this weekend were...	Retreat 2 (n=15)		Retreat 3 (n=16)		Retreat 4 (n=12)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Hard to Understand	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Somewhat Easy to Understand	1	7%	5	31%	0	0%
Easy to Understand	14	93%	11	69%	12	100%
answered	15	100%	16	100%	12	100%
no response or n/a	1		1		0	

Satisfaction with Training Topics

Overall, this weekend's training topics were...	Retreat 2 (n=16)		Retreat 3 (n=17)		Retreat 4 (n=12)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Not Very Good	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%
Good	0	0%	6	35%	0	0%
Great	16	100%	10	59%	12	100%
answered	16	100%	17	100%	12	100%
no response or n/a	0		0		0	

Retreat One Three-month Follow-up Findings

Since the Professional Wellness retreat, have you tried these new skills?							
	Yes		No		Not Sure or n/a		Total Responded
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Financial skills	10	77%	2	15%	1	8%	13
Public speaking skills	10	77%	2	15%	1	8%	13
Speechwriting skills	9	69%	4	31%	0	0%	13

If you tried new skills, was it because of what you learned in the retreat?							
	Yes		No		Not Sure or n/a		Total Tried New Skills
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Financial skills	10	91%	1	9%	0	0%	11
Public speaking skills	8	73%	1	9%	2	18%	11
Speechwriting skills	9	90%	1	10%	0	0%	10

Retreat One Three-month Follow-up Findings (continued)

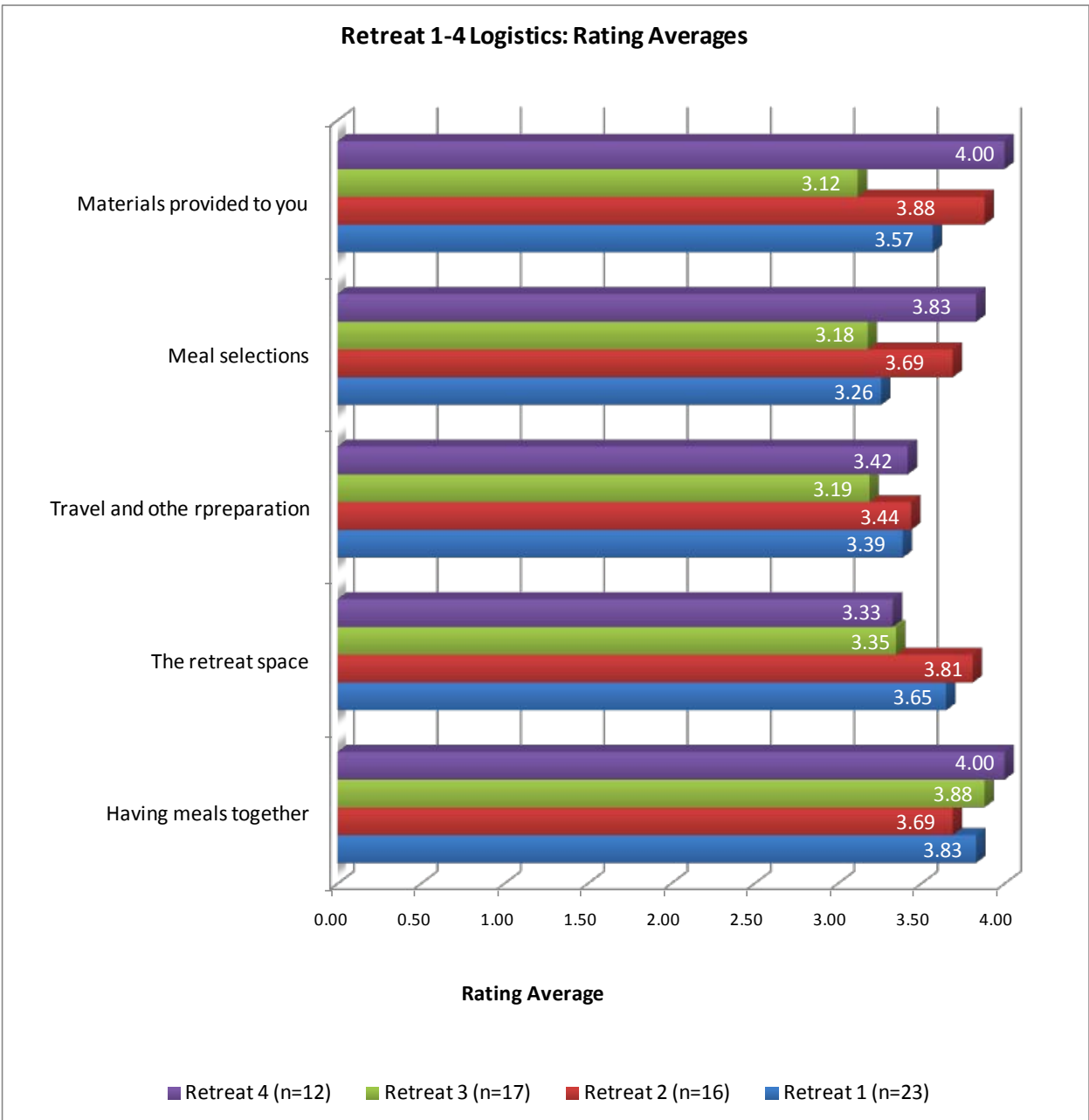
Mental Health Resources Tried Since Training		
	#	%
Individual counseling	5	63%
Group counseling	2	25%
Spirituality resources	2	25%
Information resources	1	13%
Other resources	6	75%
answered question	8	N/A*
skipped or n/a	5	

*Total responses > 100% because some chose more than one answer.

Inner Resources Tried Since Training		
	#	%
Phone a friend	9	100%
Exercise	7	64%
Reading	7	64%
Singing	4	36%
Eating well	4	36%
Journaling	4	36%
Art	3	27%
Breathing techniques	3	27%
Meditating	2	18%
Other resources	2	18%
answered question	11	N/A*
skipped or n/a	5	

*Total responses > 100% because some chose more than one answer.

Satisfaction with Retreat Logistics



(The highest possible rating is “4.00.”)