EVALUATION

"Catch people in the act of doing something right."

Ken Blanchard
Evaluation

At Please Touch Museum the large group project that students complete together is the primary method for achieving program outcomes. Each student’s role in the project directly relates to his or her program goals. Students have the opportunity to learn about many career fields, depending upon their role in the project (accounting, marketing, museum design, education, etc...). Each student’s ownership of their project role helps to ensure excellent retention. The academic support that we lend to students helps them stay in school until graduation. Program trips will lead to greater understanding of career options and also to greater program buy-in and retention. In short, everything that the students do and create in the museum is part of working toward the required program outcomes.

The Youth Program Manager meets with all mentors about frequently to ensure that mentors are on track and understand program objectives. This time is used for addressing any challenges that arise throughout the course of the program. In addition, mentors, students, and the youth program staff meet to discuss mentors’ assessments of students and students’ self evaluations. On a daily basis, the Youth Program staff check on each student’s progress. Students are also evaluated on their ability to lead and participate in project-related meetings.

Finally, ACES brings in an outside evaluator to lead focus groups and conduct group surveys in order to get feedback from parents, school partners, students, and mentors. This evaluation process is extremely important. In the past it has provided us with a solid basis on which to make program modifications and improvements.
I’ve learned so much about myself and the society we live in. As I move on in life, I will take what I learn to inspire others.

Saybah Biawoge, ACES Alumni
Follow-Up

*All students follow their own paths.* Sometimes that doesn't include your youth program. Be respectful of student decisions to disengage from your program and always try to keep contact with the students. Follow up with all students, including those that are let go from the museum's program. Sometimes the process of losing an ACES position is really difficult for the student but it can also be a learning opportunity. Offer students help to improve the issues that they had. Give them a chance to discuss why they lost their job and give them feedback. Then, let it go. Encourage other job opportunities and offer to help with homework or projects. A Youth Program is not the same as a regular job and students need to know that their behavior does not make them "bad" and will not affect the way you interact with them.

If a student decides to drop out of the program, walk them through the decision. Make sure they have thought through their reasoning and help them understand that if they decide to leave, it is a permanent decision. Continue to support the families of the students and if asked, offer guidance on future decisions and issues.

We have found that continuing to support students after they drop out is a vital step. Students often leave because they are over-involved in other extra-curricular activities or because of trouble in school. By continuing to support the students you are showing that their personal decision to discontinue coming to the program because of other commitments or because of a need to focus on their work is respected and in some cases admired. These students will often refer visitors to the museum, friends to your program, and keep their families involved in the museum.
ACES students learn about medical careers. Lysa Oscar, an operating room nurse, shows students how to put on sterile gowns and gloves. Antonio Thomas looks on as Jessica Graves tries on the gloves.

Alumni Relations

Keep in touch with your alumni! The stories that you hear from alumni sustain staff throughout the tough times within a program. Invite alumni to come back anytime. Provide them with a museum membership when they become parents. Hold special events for the alumni to interact with current students and to visit with staff people who previously were close to them. Many alumni will call and keep in touch on their own. Keep a written record of conversations with students and every time you see them, check on phone numbers and addresses. Make sure the students are on the regular museum mailing list so that they can keep current on museum events throughout the year. That way they will still feel connected to the museum after leaving.

Offer opportunities for the alumni to deliver workshops, or create programs for the current students. This is a vital piece of programming. Students bring their experiences back to the museum and inspire younger students. In addition, clear updated reports on the activities of alumni help the museum with evaluations and to find funding.

Poetic Madness

One powerful example of how alumni stay involved in Please Touch Museum’s youth programs is our Poetic Madness event. Poetic Madness originated from one student’s passion for poetry and youth voice. Pearl Walker created a city wide poetry reading and art show at the museum during her senior year of high school. She and a local artist created a song out of one of her favorite original poems, Anonymous. Pearl spent hours during her senior year finding artists, selecting a caterer, designing invitations, and developing the premise for our first annual Poetic Madness. The event was attended by students, family, and friends of the museum and was an exciting way to showcase her poem and the other talented ACES students. Pearl loved organizing the event and felt that she truly had accomplished her goals. She went on to graduate high school and about a year later she had a baby girl. Pearl, like many alumni, kept in close contact with Please Touch Museum and our youth program. Two years after graduation, on a visit to the museum she approached me about doing a second Poetic Madness. Pearl had come up with ways to make the event bigger and better and wanted to involve the new ACES students in her vision.

Pearl returned to the museum and led a new group of students in the second Poetic Madness. The students were inspired by her passion and the second event was as she had predicted, bigger and better. This time she wanted to involve all of the ACES students and a larger segment of the community. We changed the advertising and collaborated with additional community organizations. The event went from a personal showcase to a snapshot of the community’s talent and passions. We have decided to make Pearl’s Poetic Madness a semi-annual event at Please Touch Museum and consistently encourage alumni to stay involved with the museum.