



Hope from the Heartland; Empowering Teens for Success

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Introduction to Wyman

Growing up is hard enough, but the teen years are especially challenging. Teenagers today face a cacophony of conflicting messages and urgings from media and peers. The early years, especially, are a crossroads for character development that determines a lifetime of behaviors.

Wyman, a teen-development leader near St. Louis, Missouri, helps teenagers see this fork in the road, as well as the pathway to a productive and fulfilling adulthood. Its programs provide hope against disheartening statistics:

- The national graduation rate for youth in public school is now 68 percent.
- The rate in high-poverty urban districts has dropped to lower than 50 percent.¹
- According to the National Center for Education Statistics, teens from the lowest income quarter are more than six times as likely to drop out of high school as teens from the highest.

Wyman is reversing this trend by recreating the supports and resources teens need to tap into their own confidence and power to finish school and achieve success, even in disadvantaged circumstances. Of teens who completed the Wyman Teen Leadership Program in St. Louis:

- 100% graduated from high school, averaging a GPA of 3.1
- 100% completed at least 120 hours of community service
- 100% will continue their education post high school

The Wyman Teen Leadership Program is one of several Wyman teen development programs that make a significant difference in the lives of teens.

Who We Are

Wyman is a leader in developing and administering programs that enable teens in economically disadvantaged circumstances to discover their strengths, potential, and leadership abilities – qualities that point to lifelong success.

At Wyman, teens come first. All programs are outcome-based and dynamic; administrators, staff, and teens give feedback on what does and doesn't work to ensure the programs support, inspire, and prepare teens for adulthood. Wyman puts a premium on engaging the right staff and achieving results, thus teens can connect with their dreams and learn how to make them a reality at home, at school, and in their communities.

Wyman has been making a positive difference in the lives of youth for 110 years. Founded in 1898 to provide tenement children with fresh air, good food, and healthy outdoor activities, Wyman has positively impacted the character, values and outlook of generations of St. Louis children.

In the year 2000, Wyman narrowed its focus to the particular, and increasingly complex, needs of today's teens by developing and administering long-term, outcome-based programs to help teens find meaning and purpose, and then share their success with their communities. Wyman teen programs and training are now running nationwide, in the Virgin Islands, and in the United Kingdom.

Among youth development nonprofit organizations, Wyman bridges the gap between theory and practice with processes and programs designed to implement the best new youth research.

What We Do

Choices made during the teen years are critical to lifelong success. Decisions young people make between the ages of 12 and 18 affect the quality of the rest of their lives. Case in point: nearly half of all dropouts age 16 to 24 are unemployed³ and an estimated 67 percent of prison inmates nationwide are high school dropouts.⁴

Better choices lead to better, more fulfilled lives, but many teens lack awareness of their options, skills, and potential rewards. They often don't have the inner confidence to overcome economic disadvantages and it's difficult for them to find the courage to risk failure or ask for help.

Karen Pittman, Executive Director of the non-profit, non-partisan Forum for Youth Investment, dedicated to helping young people prepare for college, work, and life, has said, "Finding meaning may be a lifelong endeavor, but it is imperative for adolescents. Helping young people find meaning is the essence of youth work."

Wyman takes on this challenge by:

- Creating and running long-term programs that provide teens with a range of experiential support and resources every day
- Partnering with and coaching parents/guardians on how to support their teens' development
- Providing adventurous developmental experiences for teens on Wyman's campus, in the community, and in educational settings
- Working with schools to provide teens with guidance and support

Wyman helps teens in economically disadvantaged circumstances develop positive strengths as the foundation for future achievement by encouraging teens to:

- Form and maintain positive relationships with peers and adults
- Make positive contributions to the community
- Explore and develop skills for academic, leisure, and career pursuits
- Respect human diversity by learning to live, work, and play in a diverse community
- Understand the environment and be stewards of our natural resources

- Graduate from high school to pursue a college education, technical training, or meaningful employment

What We Have Learned

Plant a thought, reap an act. Plant an act, reap a habit.

Plant a habit, reap a character. Plant a character, reap a destiny.

This folk wisdom, often credited to Confucius, is being confirmed by brain research showing that practice, modeling, and experience shape the quality of teens' brain pathways and the speed at which they develop. Thus, 'how' one thinks may help define one's destiny.

Specifically, research and reporting from places like Harvard's McLean Hospital in Belmont, Mass., and by Dr. Jay Giedd at the National Institute of Mental Health, are clarifying that a critical period of brain development occurs in adolescence, which begins for most youth during middle school.

These studies⁴ are demonstrating that the teen brain is a 'work in progress.' Brain scans demonstrate that the ongoing maturation of the parts of the brain responsible for planning, impulse control, and reasoning occurs throughout the teenage years. This brain development is different, but just as important as that taking place in the first years of life. The Public Broadcast Systems' "Frontline" reports:

"Dr. Giedd and his colleagues found that in an area of the brain called the prefrontal cortex, the brain appeared to be growing again just before puberty. It is particularly interesting to scientists because it acts as the CEO of the brain, controlling planning, working memory, organization, and modulating mood. As the prefrontal cortex matures, teenagers can reason better, develop more control over impulses and make judgments better. In fact, this part of the brain has been dubbed 'the area of sober second thought.'"

At the same time, research also demonstrates that the brain begins "pruning" its connections between the ages of 13 and 18. Teen activities during this pruning period seem to influence what connections become stronger, thereby affecting them for the rest of their lives. Giedd calls this the "use it or lose it principle," and tells FRONTLINE:

"If a teen is doing music or sports or academics, those are the cells and connections that will be hardwired. If they're lying on the couch or playing video games or MTV, those are the cells and connections that are going to survive."

When teens are guided by watchful parents, older siblings, and other adults in the community who provide positive role models, structure, supports, and opportunities, they have a path to successful adulthood that their brain development is more likely to follow.

Increasing numbers of researchers also theorize that when teens lack such role models, structure, and opportunity; persistently take unhealthy risks; or are fed information that encourages unhealthy thoughts or practice without the benefit of mature adult guidance, their mature brain development may be delayed or diminished. As a result, behaviors are more likely to remain volatile, be less mature, and possibly harmful to the teen's ability to realize their full potential.

Wyman has learned that long-term programming that provides teens with necessary supports through their formative years is essential to success. Its signature teen development programs, Wyman Teen Leadership Program, and Wyman Teen Outreach Program, eschew the quick-fix approach and instead surround teens with people and processes that empower them to make good decisions. Wyman Teen Leadership Program, in particular, has shown that five years of support generates an astounding result: a 100 percent high school graduation rate.

Wyman's approach to teen development reflects another philosophy: don't wait for the problem. Wyman programs are preventative, establishing a system of supports that guide teen development. The five-year Wyman Teen Leadership Program begins the summer before eighth grade, or just before the preponderance of temptations to make bad decisions.

Wyman Signature Programs – Real Results

Wyman teen programs are long-term, designed to support, challenge, and empower teens during their critical learning and development years.

Wyman Teen Leadership Program

Wyman was selected to develop a comprehensive teen leadership program for teens in economically disadvantaged circumstances by the Camp Coca-Cola Foundation of Atlanta. Wyman conceived and developed the Wyman Teen Leadership program, wrote the operating plan, and launched the first program in St. Louis in 2002.

Wyman teen development programs, including Wyman Teen Leadership Program, currently serve nearly 800 local teens. St. Louis' annual goal is to recruit between 75-100 teens across the region to participate. The program:

- Pulls together multiple influencers to engage and impact teens: family, school, counselors, corporate and individual supporters, legislators, and other community-based organizations
- Maintains high yet realistic expectations for participation and performance
- Builds each teen's cognitive, emotional, moral, physical, and social abilities
- Focuses on the future, helping teens develop skills, values, and knowledge to become personally successful and contribute to the greater community
- Achieves results by leading with, and building on, the best national youth research and best-practice standards

Wyman Teen Leadership Program participants are carefully selected using economic, academic, behavioral, and motivational guidelines to ensure youth with leadership potential are provided opportunities they might otherwise be denied due to circumstances beyond their immediate control. Participants typically come from households with income less than \$10,000 per person.

Not all of Teen Leadership Program teens in St. Louis or other cities complete all five years of the program – some need to take summer jobs that don't allow them to continue in the summer camp experience, while others will move to other cities with their families. However, even a few years in the program can establish the healthy concepts and behaviors that lead them to success in other teen endeavors and in adult life.

Wyman Teen Outreach Program (TOP)

Wyman TOP is a nationally replicated, best practice program used by schools, communities, and other youth practitioners for more than 30 years to empower teens to avoid problem behavior and prepare for successful adulthood. Leading researchers recognize Wyman TOP as a program that delivers real results for teens in the area of school improvement and teen pregnancy.

More than 14 years of rigorous experimental and comparison evaluation have consistently demonstrated these real results. Teens nationwide who complete Wyman TOP:

- Experience a 60% lower school dropout rate
- Have a 33% lower rate of pregnancy
- Demonstrate a 14% lower rate of school suspension
- Have an 11% lower rate of school course failure

During the most recent program year, teens enrolled in Wyman's St. Louis TOP achieved these outcomes:

- 100% of seniors graduated from high school
- 100% of teens remained in high school or job training programs
- 90% retention rate of teens

Wyman TOP combines classroom/group discussion with community service and currently reaches over 12,000 teens in the United States, the Virgin Islands, and United Kingdom. Wyman TOP generally operates on a school-year cycle, with weekly group meetings (during or after school) for teens and trained facilitators. Facilitators focus on group support and positive dialogue around the topics of peer pressure, gangs, drug and alcohol use, goal setting, romantic relationships, human sexuality, friendships, and high school graduation.

Youth apply learned skills and develop a sense of purpose through community service, a crucial element in the success of the program. Participants perform a minimum of 20 hours per year of community-based volunteer service as an exercise in taking on adult roles to build personal responsibility.

Assessment

All Wyman programs are outcome-based and dynamic. Unlike some organizations that attempt to fit youth to their programs, Wyman fits its programs to the needs of teens and consistently measures teens' success. Measurement, formalized through the use of two best-practice assessment tools, gives Wyman the ability to tweak programs to ensure they help teens achieve their goals.

Youth Development Strategies, Inc.

Wyman extended its program assessment tools in 2004 by adopting the Community Action Framework for Youth Development, created by Youth Development Strategies, Inc. (YDSI). A national nonprofit research, evaluation, and technical assistance organization, YDSI is a nationally recognized leader in youth development.

The YDSI Youth Survey measures the benefits participating teens receive from Wyman programs through direct questions on organizational and program environment. The Youth Survey measures the full range of developmental supports and opportunities youth experience through Wyman.

Evaluations for 2005 determined that Wyman's programs, specifically Wyman Teen Leadership Program and Teen Outreach Program St. Louis, excel at their objectives overall, with three major areas of achievement:

- 1) supportive relationships, 2) community involvement, and 3) measurable youth development success.

Youth Program Quality Assessment

Another important measurement for Wyman is the program observation assessment tool Youth Program Quality Assessment, or Youth PQA, used as a complement to YDSI data.

The Youth PQA was developed and researched by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, and is recognized as the leading program quality tool in the field.

While YDSI's Youth Survey is an analysis of Wyman programs through direct assessment of teen program participants, Youth PQA interviews program administrators, makes observations in youth work settings, and verifies staff training reports.

Youth PQA reliably measures dimensions of quality that are related to positive outcomes for youth, including: safe environment, supportive environment, interaction, engagement, youth-centered policies and practices, high expectations, and access. National research suggests that positive outcomes on nationally validated questions, such as the ones utilized by YDSI, are good predictors of teen success later in life. Wyman's 2007 YDSI outcomes were excellent for both the TOP and TLP programs.

On-going YPQA and YDSI assessments are conducted both internally and by external evaluators. Combined, the youth feedback tool and program observation is a powerful mechanism to measure program efficacy as perceived by outside evaluators, internal staff and counselors, and the teens themselves. Wyman uses this valuable information to continually tailor its programs for teen success.

What's Next

Wyman is expanding its facilities to provide enhanced services to more teens. It also continues to incubate exciting new products.

Five Star After School Program

Wyman successfully obtained a federal grant for the Teen Outreach Program, which allowed us, in 2007, to prepare to serve an additional 400 kids in TOP in 2008. The resulting Five Star Program is a program designed to create a positive environment for youth during the crucial "out-of-school" time. It includes opportunities for academic enrichment, recreation, and life skills. Middle school students in five St. Louis Public middle schools meet 15 hours a week for the entire school year. Each of these middle schools serves very low-income youth (76% - 93% free and reduced lunch); each of the middle schools has low attendance rates (59% to 69%); and each middle school serves youth, who are below grade level in reading and/or math (75% - 90% of the students are below). An early evaluation of the program in the Fall of 2008 has already shown impressive results for the students being served. During the program's pilot period, 68% of failing students improved by at least one letter grade! The Five Star program is made possible through a unique partnership with ARCHS, St. Louis Public Schools, St. Louis Department of Parks and Recreation and Wyman.

Wyman Teen Outreach Program

Wyman is currently researching new training and distribution strategies to expand the number of youth who have access to the program to at least 70,000 by the end of the decade. Furthermore, Wyman sees tremendous benefit in expanding the TOP curriculum to address teen concerns including, but not limited to, obesity and nutrition, media messages, future planning, and financial management. Wyman also envisions TOP as a specialty approach useful to a variety of youth settings, including juvenile justice, foster care, youth ministry, and camps among others.

Wyman Leadership

Wyman's unique vision, focus, and measurable results are the result of a strong and committed leadership team.

Dave Hilliard, President and CEO

Dave Hilliard joined the staff of Wyman in 1972 and has served as President and CEO since 1975. Hilliard has led Wyman in its evolution from providing summer camping experiences for inner-city children at Kiwanis Camp Wyman in Eureka, Mo., to serving as a nationally recognized youth development organization providing comprehensive, year-round programs for teens from disadvantaged circumstances. Under Dave's leadership, Wyman is nationally recognized for its innovative management and high quality programming, as it advocates for children and youth; provides staff development, consulting and other technical assistance services; as well as direct youth services.

Dave currently serves on the advisory board of the Nonprofit Leadership and Management Program of the University of Missouri, St. Louis, the Nonprofit Advisory Board of UMB Bancorp and the Executive Advisory Board of the John Cook School of Business at St. Louis University. He served as the co-chair of the Youth Development Task Force of St. Louis 2004; as a special advisor to the City of St. Louis for its "Blueprint for Youth Recreation" and has lectured at local universities. Dave is also a frequent lecturer and consultant to nonprofits on the national level as well. His areas of emphasis include: managing organizational change, strategic planning, marketing, youth development, leadership and board/staff relations in nonprofit management.

Dave graduated from St. Louis University in 1971 with a bachelor's degree in psychology. He has done graduate work at the University of Missouri and Webster University in business and counseling. He holds certificates in: The Administration of Voluntary Agencies from the United Way and in Grantsmanship and Fundraising from the Grantsmanship Center of San Francisco. Dave is a member of FOCUS St. Louis' 1991 Leadership St. Louis program.

Claire Wyneken, Sr. Vice President, Wyman Institute for Youth Development

Claire L. Wyneken joined Wyman in 1987, and has dedicated her professional career to the organization. She has held various positions including Program Instructor, Division Director for Education, Recreation and Hospitality, Senior Vice President, Programs and Services, and Senior Vice President, Community Initiatives. Claire currently serves as the Senior VP, Wyman Institute for Youth Development, where she provides executive leadership and directs Wyman's program operations.

Claire has been involved with many other organizations in the greater St. Louis area including acting as a Youth Internship advisory committee member for the St. Louis Science Center, supporting Forest Park Forever as a consultant and project designer for Voyage of Learning, working with CORO-Women in Leadership as an adjunct facilitator and acting as a Youth Leadership Advisory Committee member since 2002 for FOCUS St. Louis. Claire is also a graduate of National Conference for Community & Justice - Dismantling Racism Institute (1997), CORO Women in Leadership (1998), Leadership St. Louis (2002).

Claire holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Purdue University, and has taken additional graduate coursework at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in education.

Wyman Board of Directors

Wyman is supported by a volunteer board of directors distinguished by its motivation to help all Wyman teens succeed. Its board is a diverse group of senior executives from Fortune 500 companies, small business owners, public policy experts, and community volunteers.

Conclusion

Wyman programs are making a measurable difference in the lives of St. Louis teens in economically disadvantaged circumstances and in the process, forging best practices that are used around the world. By testing new approaches and codifying those that generate positive outcomes, Wyman is continually improving the impact of its programs and contributing to the body of knowledge surrounding teen development.

Contact

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Citations

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⁴ Excerpted from PBS *Frontline: Inside the Teenage Brain*, 2002,

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