

A Global Perspective

By Drew Malmuth

Report on Basti Ram's 2014 Beyond Boundaries Project

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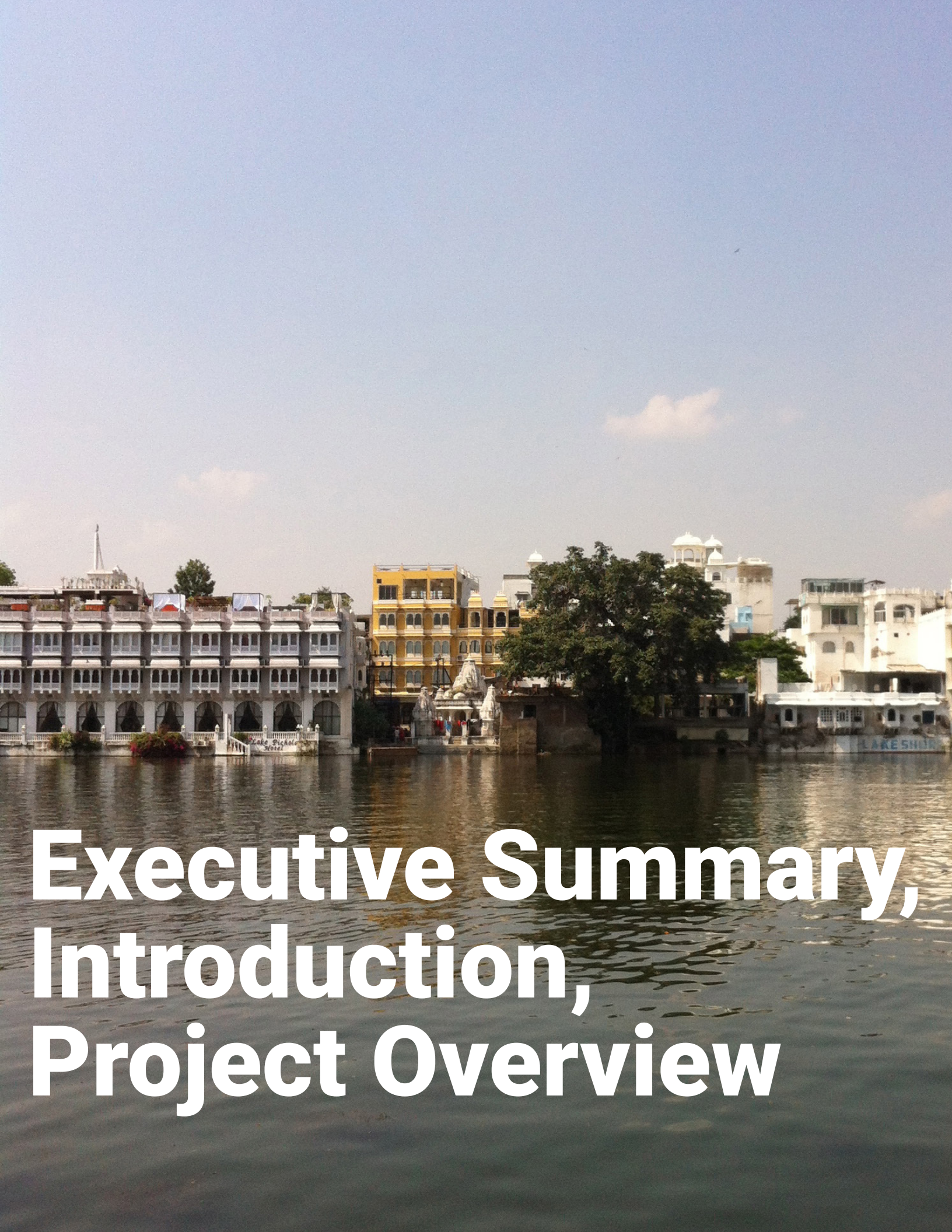
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Executive Summary, Introduction, Project Overview

Executive Summary

Over the course of 2014, Basti Ram Charity, in partnership with the London Borough of Hackney, delivered the Beyond Boundaries youth development program. The program recruited youth in foster care for an international volunteering experience in the Northwest region of India. Basti Ram commissioned an independent research report as a way of evaluating the strengths and limitations of the Beyond Boundaries initiative.

As youth support services continue to be rolled back in the UK, children that often require the most active support – i.e. children in foster care – are those that are being left behind. The question for youth workers becomes: how do we design programs that can create a positive, lasting impact for disadvantaged segments of society? That question will continue to be debated; but, in the meantime, youth organisations across the country are experimenting with new ideas, creating unique public-private partnerships, and sharing both successes and failures with the youth development community.

In that vein, Basti Ram and the Hackney Virtual School for Looked After Children have organised the 2014 Beyond Boundaries project. Operating since 2010, the program is funded and co-staffed by a local council (previously Barking & Dagenham and Lewisham) and made up of participants from throughout the borough. For the 2014 project, 8 youth participants (4 boys and 4 girls ranging from ages 14-16) were selected by Hackney representatives. The program consisted of two major phases: five pre-departure workshops meant to prepare the group for the international experience; and the trip itself, a 10-day journey in Udaipur, India and the surrounding areas. While in India, the youth lived in a volunteer house with peers and staff, worked as teachers at a school in a nearby village, spent time with members of a destitute boys home, and visited numerous cultural and geographical sites in the area.

The subsequent report will explore how the youth participants were impacted by their Beyond Boundaries experience. Using data collected from participant surveys, observational visits, administrator feedback forms, and semi-structured interviews, the program evaluator will look at how effectively the program was able to meet its initial objectives. In general, Beyond Boundaries staff hoped that, by partaking in the program, participants would benefit in areas related to personal development and awareness of global issues. With that in mind, the program evaluator used available evidence to assess the outcomes of the program. The following are some of the most significant findings:

- Survey data showed a post-program boost in participants perception of self-worth, aspirations, resiliency, and global connectivity. One youth participant decided that she wanted to become a teacher because of the experience.
- The teaching process was a frustrating but generally positive experience for the youth. It allowed all involved to build confidence, experiment with leadership techniques, and take initiative in a classroom setting.
- Living in close quarters with their peers forced the youth participants to become more flexible and accommodating. Generally reticent group members became less hostile to criticism and more open to instruction from both peers and adults.
- The new cultural surroundings stretched participants out of their comfort zone. In some cases, this fostered resiliency and made participants feel like a “new person.” However, it also created moments of potentially harmful confusion and insecurity.
- Seeing extreme poverty forced the youth to reflect on life choices, opportunities and resources. After returning from the trip, 75% of participants reported feeling more grateful and ready to take advantage of educational and career opportunities.

Introduction

Government and non-profit organisations are perennially experimenting with youth development projects that can provide support, experience, and inspiration to disadvantaged segments of the population. In particular, children that are in foster care present acute discrepancies in numerous developmental indicators when compared to the general population (Wilson et al., 2004). Groups throughout the UK recognise that providing support programs for children that have often had a tumultuous upbringing may represent an opportunity for positive youth development. In line with this thinking, Basti Ram Charity has conducted the Beyond Boundaries project, a collaboration with local London boroughs that provides a volunteer-abroad experience to youth that are disengaged and disadvantaged. Conducted in 2011 with the Borough of Barking and Dagenham, 2013 with Lewisham, and 2014 with Hackney Council, the project combines London-based workshops with an international teaching experience in Rajasthan, India. In March 2014, a program evaluator was commissioned by Basti Ram to conduct an independent evaluation of the Beyond Boundaries project, with a primary focus on the impact of the program for the youth participants. From April through August 2014 the program evaluator carried out the research that comprises this report.

Project Overview

Basti Ram’s Beyond Boundaries (BB) project attempts to use international volunteering experience to “raise aspirations, broaden horizons, stimulate self-development and increase world awareness” amongst the youth participants. The iterations of the project vary depending on the needs of the Borough, the goals of Basti Ram, and the circumstances of the youth involved. However, all of the projects have certain core elements that are replicated year-to-year. The project model consists of two main phases: 1) London-based workshops that aim to provide cultural awareness, promote group solidarity, and in general prepare the participants for an international experience; and 2) the 10 day trip to Rajasthan, India, which broadly consists of classroom teaching, travel, and cultural immersion. The projects are carried out in collaboration with local councils. The funding is provided by the council and various types of staff support are implemented depending on the needs of the project. The structure of the project – workshop activities, pre-departure materials, etc. – is provided by Basti Ram, with assistance from council staff. In general, Basti Ram acts as the lead organisational entity and local councils provide logistical assistance and active support for youth participants.

While following this basic structure, the 2014 BB project exhibited a number of specific elements. First, the project was carried out in conjunction with the Hackney Virtual School for Looked After Children. Hackney provided financial support and the BB project staff consisted of six Hackney representatives. For this trip, Hackney representatives managed the recruitment process for project participants (in the past Basti Ram has been involved in that phase). Three of the Hackney staff members were foster care youth workers while the remaining three were Hackney youth mentors. Second, the five pre-departure workshops were supplemented by an ASDAN certification program. ASDAN activities were conducted throughout the workshops as well as during the time in India. Finally, the 2014 group consisted of 8 youth participants with ages ranging from 14-16.

Demographics

Number of participants	8
Age range	14-16
Number of boys	4
Number of girls	4

The pre-departure workshops made up a substantial portion of the program's content. Below is a chart detailing the schedule for a representative pre-departure workshop.

Sample Pre-Departure Workshop Schedule

Time	Activities
10:30 am - 10:50 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group sings the good morning song and discusses the plan for the day's workshop Participants and staff play an ice-breaker game The participants practice group conversations. Each teen is given a piece of paper
10:50 am - 11:05 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group recaps the last session. Some sample questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Last session, what did they learn about Basti Ram? What did they learn about the volunteering work that they will be doing in India? Any questions so far?
11:05 am - 11:15 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program administrators give a questionnaire to assess baseline personality traits
11:15 am - 11:45 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural awareness session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group learns basic Hindi phrases Show video discussing the links between Basti Ram and India Discuss aspects of Indian culture, including: food, dress, climate, etc.
11:45 am - 12:15 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thinking as a group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administrators ask participants what they think they can't live without. Group discusses how this answer might differ in India How will traveling as a group be different than traveling alone What can we do to manage difficult feelings while on the project?
12:15 am - 12:30 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants fill out evaluation of the workshop's activities

The trip to India itself began on August 5th and concluded on August 18th. Below is a detailing of the main activities that the youth participants undertook during their time abroad.

Activities in India

Activity	Description
Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After arriving in India, the participants partake in an orientation session run by the local program administrators. Some of the topics covered include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> History of Basti Ram and Channel Youth's work in India What to expect when traveling around Udaipur/visiting school Information about India's history, culture, and socioeconomic situation
Community Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young participants visit the community that is home to many of the students that they will engage with. They get a chance to visit the homes of the local community members and see the lifestyle of a remote Indian village.
Classroom Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From August 11th - August 15th the participants spent each morning teaching at a school in the Aakharia community outside of Udaipur. They prepared lessons on basic English and Maths and delivered them to the schoolchildren.
Cultural Excursions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group visited numerous cultural sites, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ranakpur Temple Kumbalgarh Fort Udaipur's Monsoon Palace
Boys' Home Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Channel Youth (Basti Ram's affiliate in Udaipur) has worked extensively with a boys' home that serves both orphaned and destitute young men. The BB participants visited the home and interacted with the local boys.

Both Basti Ram and Hackney staff voiced particular outcomes that they hoped to see in regards to the youth participants. The desired outcomes can be grouped under two broad themes: personal development and deconstruction of reality/global awareness (see Literature Review for further discussion on “deconstruction of reality”). The program administrators reasoned that by providing both an international experience and an intellectual project, BB may be able to affect multiple dimensions of youth personality. Below is a list of the youth development changes that Beyond Boundaries is designed to affect:

Desired Outcomes

Personal Development	Deconstruction of Reality/Global Awareness
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raise aspirations• Stimulate self-development• Inspire them to achieve their full potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stretch participants out of their comfort zone• Increase awareness of global issues• Inspire youth to reflect on their life choices, opportunities, and resources

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Literature Review, Methodology

Literature Review

Beyond Boundaries' approach is not grounded in academic theory but it nevertheless draws on principles that have been discussed in the youth development literature. By understanding previous youth research that speaks to the goals of the BB project, one can review this paper's findings and juxtapose BB's outcomes with existing schools of thought. The major theoretical considerations that underly the BB approach include: positive youth development theory and theories on global youth work.

Positive Youth Development

Historically, research on youth development has focused on the deficiencies of a given population and the steps that can be taken to correct behaviour. Researchers that espouse Positive Youth Development (PYD) argue that improving the lives of children should begin with an understanding of the strengths of adolescence, rather than its weaknesses. From the PYD perspective, "youth are not broken, in need of psychosocial repair, or problems to be managed. Rather, all youth are seen as resources to be developed" (Lerner et al., 2005: 10-11). A fundamental component of this approach is the idea that youth adapt based on outside influence. In other words, there is a plasticity to youth development, suggesting that development trajectories can be significantly affected by interventions from families, friends, educational institutions, youth programs, and any number of social actors. Those who work with so-called "at-risk" youth continually report instances of youth finding creative ways to maintain resilience, overcome expectations, and enact positive change (Floyd & McKenna, 2003). At its core, PYD theory suggests that supportive, compassionate, and thoughtful interventions can reinforce existing youth assets and provide for positive development.

Global Youth Work

By employing international exposure as a means for youth development, Beyond Boundaries is stepping into discussions on the impact of Global Youth Work (GYW). Also referred to as Global Learning or International Youth Work, GYW is a model for youth education which suggests that by bringing a "global dimension to work with young people," youth programs can alter the way that participants think about the world as well as their obligations toward fellow human beings. Woolley (2009) suggests that GYW allows youth to "explore global issues through global experiences to develop global perspectives" (Sallah, 2013: 3). Building off of the argument that humans' perceptions of reality – rather than being objective truths – are subject to environmental influence, the GYW model seeks to reorient the perception of youth participants. As Sallah notes, "a key part of Global Youth Work...is to get young people to deconstruct [their] given reality in order to see the world in a different way, and hopefully a change in the way they interact with the world" (2013: 4). This theoretical premise is a core element of the Beyond Boundaries approach and it will be returned to in the concluding section of this report.

Potential Contributions

Beyond Boundaries overlaps with previous research on PYD and GYW, but it also offers an opportunity to explore new possibilities in terms of the impact of youth development programs. Most notably, BB raises questions in two theoretical areas: 1) how are youth impacted by opportunities for role reversal in education situations? And 2) how do attempts at cultural awareness operate differently in locally-based programs versus abroad experiences? Looking at the first question, BB is a distinctive program in that it allows participants, through the hands-on teaching experiences, to become leaders in a classroom environment. This approach has the potential to impact the way youth think about their relationship to their teachers, school, and education in general. The second question addresses the extent to which geographical location impacts a young person's ability to understand the implications of cultural differ-

ence, empathise with international populations, and reconsider their own personal living circumstances. The BB pre-departure workshops were designed to provide a window into life in India. But it is possible that the youth participants absorbed these London-based experiences differently than they did their on-the-ground experience in Rajasthan. The data gathered during BB 2014 offers a starting point for providing tentative answers to these questions.

Methodology

In order to assess the extent to which BB reached its program objectives, the program evaluator employed a wide-range of methodologies. The research tools included observational visits, surveying of project participants, program administrator feedback journals, focus group interviews with project participants, and semi-structured interviews with program administrators. Considering the small sample size and the short-term nature of the program, quantitative data on its own would not have provided robust data for answering evaluative questions. For this reason, the research process was centred on qualitative evaluation methods that could help create a detailed, “thick description” of the project’s outcomes (Geertz, 1973).

Observational visits

In order to get a sense for how the youth participants reacted to the pre and post-departure workshops, the researcher acted as a participant-observer on two occasions. On the first visit, conducted on 2 August 2014, the evaluator took part in team-building sessions, observed the lesson planning activity, and engaged in focus group discussions concerning the groups’ feelings about the upcoming India trip. The second visit took place on 23 September 2014 after the group had returned from India. The evaluator observed the group during a period of photo viewing and trip reflection. The field notes were used as data for the report’s analysis.

Participant surveys

The project participants were given the opportunity to fill out individual surveys (Appendix B) both before and after the India-based segment of the project. The questionnaire was adapted from well-tested survey designs employed in the youth development literature. The questions were designed to assess self-worth and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), internal resilience (U.S. Department of Education, 2007), aspirations (Waugh, 1993), feelings of global connectivity (Furco, Muller, and Hammon, 1998), and perceptions of lifeworld, opportunities, and resources. Seven of the eight participants filled out the pre and post-intervention surveys.

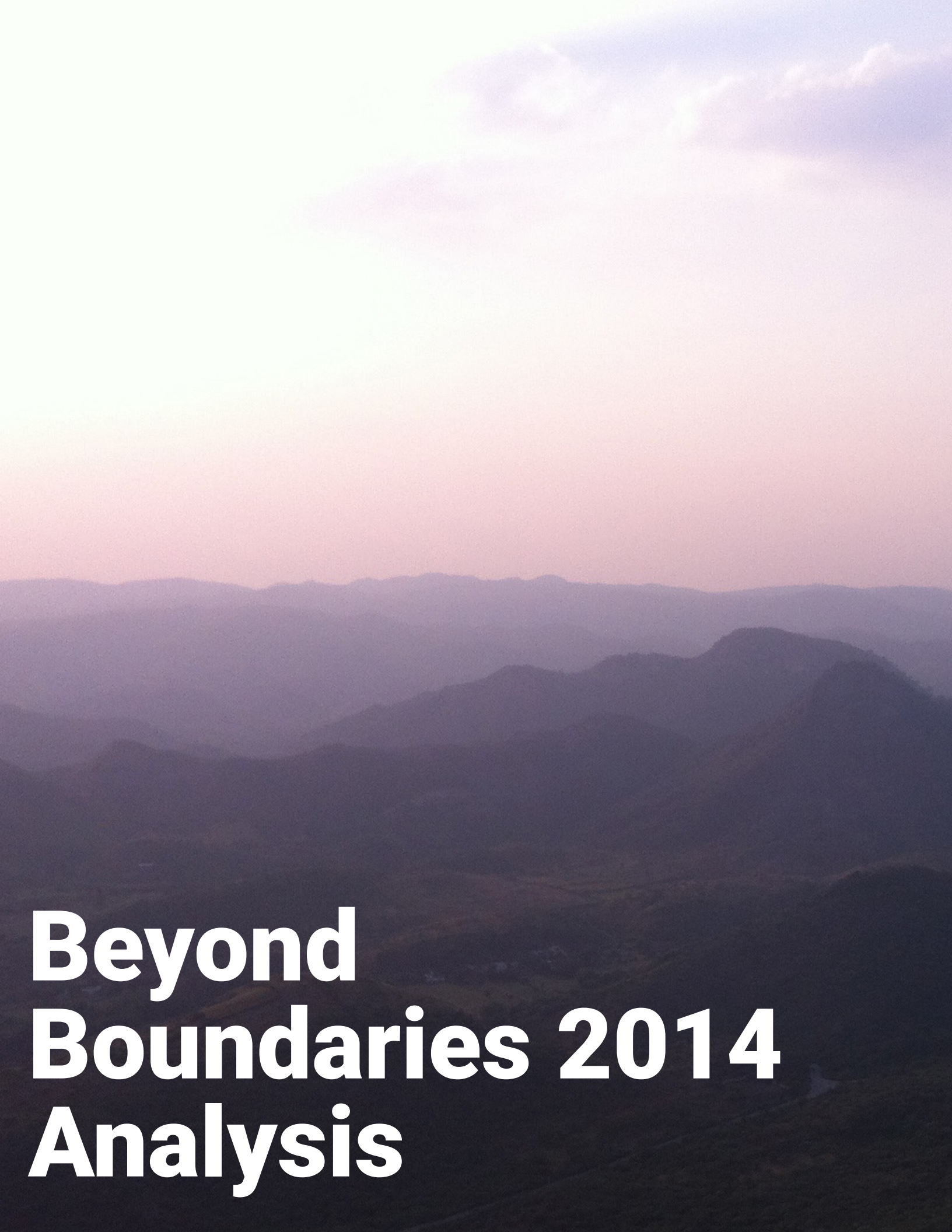
Program administrator feedback forms

As a way of tracking the experience of the youth participants during their time in India, the researcher developed feedback tools for program administrators (see Appendix A). The forms were designed to provide space for administrators to reflect on any notable personality shifts in the youth participants, with reference to the project’s desired outcomes. The eight project leaders were told to actively make notes on their perceptions of how, if at all, the participants were being affected by their experience in India. They were also asked to specify what evidence they saw of the identified outcome and what element of the project they found to be causally relevant. The researcher collected and analysed all forms after the trips completion.

Semi-structured interviews

The researcher as well as the Basti Ram staff conducted a semi-structured group interview with youth participants during the post-India evaluation workshop. The purpose of this interview session was to investigate discussion about various aspects of BB 2014 – the strengths and weaknesses of the program, the difficulties of traveling to India, the impact of the project overall, etc. The program administrators determined that a group interview environment, rather than one-on-one sessions, would be more comfortable for the youth participants, and potentially lead to more revealing responses. The majority of the participants were responsive during the interview session.

As a way of understanding the details of the projects implementation, the evaluator conducted semi-structured interviews with three members of Basti Ram's administrative staff. All three interviewees were present during the India segment of the project and were thus able to give their impression of program effectiveness, positive moments for youth participants, difficulties that they faced, etc. The interviewees were Rachel Stovold (Project Leader, Basti Ram), Sumeet Dhamu (Project Leader), and Neeraj Kumar (Founder and Project Manager, Basti Ram).



Beyond Boundaries 2014 Analysis

This section will present findings concerning the outcomes of the Beyond Boundaries project. The project itself was divided into two phases which had distinct goals and methods. Taking this into account, the analysis will look at the dynamics of the pre-departure workshops before examining the volunteer trip in India. As a whole, it will be shown that BB 2014 used unique development techniques to make a significant and positive impact on the youth participants. While acknowledging this success, it is also important to examine the program's deficiencies and opportunities for improvement.

Pre-Departure Workshops

The five pre-departure workshops were designed to promote group solidarity as well as to prepare the youth participants for their time in India. The evaluator's observational visits and interview responses from the participants suggest that the workshops were moderately successful in terms of delivering on these goals.

The program administrators made significant, and often successful, efforts to build a sense of camaraderie amongst the participants. However, their ability to motivate the participants to engage in the group was inconsistent and dependent on the activity. During an observational visit, the evaluator noted that "team-building activities allowed the kids to come out of their shells but they did not completely let their guard down." What was most evident was that as the workshop progressed, and as the participants had more opportunities to engage in activities, there was a stronger sense of group interaction. During a lesson planning activity, the participants had an opportunity to engage with their group mates to complete the project. While most reacted positively, some participants remained isolated and unwilling to engage. According to program administrators, the group displayed its highest levels of social cohesion during group outings that did not involve an educational setting (i.e. bowling). One youth participant noted that "the bowling was useful to get to know everyone."

The primary goal of the workshops was to prepare the participants, both practically and mentally, for the trip to India. The evaluation suggests that while administrators provided youth participants with valuable skills and cultural awareness there was, understandably, a noticeable amount of apprehension amongst the youth in related to the "newness" of India. During the evaluator's observation the group practiced common Hindi phrases, discussed the schedule for departure, and received a lesson on the procedures involved in lesson planning. During their time in India, the participants organised classroom activities at a local school. In an effort to prepare for this, the workshop leaders asked participants to plan and carry out a lesson on a subject of their choice. The youth participants were able to think creatively about how to deliver information in an enjoyable way and, after the activity, they were clearly more confident in their ability to lead in a classroom environment. The evaluator noted that "working out how to plan the lesson seemed to be a very stimulating role-reversal process."

After returning from their time in India, the group reflected on the extent to which pre-departure workshops prepared them for the various challenges of traveling abroad. There was a broad consensus that the workshops provided helpful information but, before leaving, some participants were still unsure of what to expect. One boy thought "they could have been taught more Hindi" while another participant noted that she used the Hindi more than she anticipated. Most everyone agreed that after the workshops they were "nervous but excited" and had gotten an "idea" of what they were about to take part in.

One participant's letter to the program administrators indicated that the workshops were able to successfully convey the potential benefits of an international experience. An unexpected situation made Sam (note that all participants names have been changed to ensure anonymity) unsure whether or not program staff would still allow him to partake in BB. He wrote a note to the staff explaining why he

thought the trip would be valuable. He noted: “many people said that these types of trips are once in a lifetime.” Furthermore, he said that he wants to “learn how to communicate with other people in the world and gain my confidence to speak to them.” These reflections show that the pre-departure workshops gave the participants some indication of what they could expect during their time in India. However, as noted by Neeraj Kumar, co-founder of Basti Ram, the “workshop effectiveness can only truly be evaluated after the kids are in India.” With that in mind, the next section will show what the teens were able to accomplish during their abroad experience.

Trip to India

The impact of any youth development initiative will inevitably be as complex as the youth participants that it is trying to reach. Still, turning to an analysis of the India-based portion of the Beyond Boundaries program, this section will formulate a picture of 1) specific program outcomes and 2) the mechanisms that were able to generate those outcomes. Figure 1 shows the results of pre and post-program surveys that were administered to the participants. As a way of measuring numerous personality traits, the questions were grouped into three categories: perception of self-worth, internal resilience, and feelings of global connectivity. All question answers were coded such that 1 = a low level of the desired trait and 4 = a high level. The researcher averaged the group’s answers within each measurement category and then compared the pre and post-program average. As the table indicates, the group’s post-program answers were, on average, slightly more positive across all three personality traits. It is important to note that because of the low number of program participants, no claims can be made about a causal link between the Beyond Boundaries project and the post-program shift in survey answers (i.e. the change could have happened by chance). However, the data is nonetheless worth noting, especially in tandem with the qualitative data that comprises the subsequent analysis.

Personality trait	Pre-trip average	Post-trip average	P-value
Self-worth	3.05	3.16	0.089
Internal resilience	2.75	3.04	0.003
Global connectivity	2.61	2.70	0.389

Figure 1: The results of surveys administered to participants before and after the India segment of the trip. Note that survey answers were coded such that 1=low level of a given trait and 4=a high level of a given trait. The groups answers were averaged within each personality trait category.

Given the size and length of Beyond Boundaries, the most useful data was generated using observational visits and interviews with participants and staff. In general, the information gathered demonstrates that the trip to India was a positive and enriching time for the young people involved. In terms of the program outcomes, there is strong evidence that the trip was able to stimulate self-development, stretch participants out of their comfort zones, and inspire youth to reflect on life choices, opportunities and resources. Nevertheless, not all outcomes were achieved and it is important, after looking at the positive results, to examine opportunities for improvement. Below are some of the most significant themes that emerged from the accrued data.

The teaching experience had a multi-faceted and mostly positive impact

Beyond Boundaries’ philosophy stresses the idea that by giving participants the responsibility of teaching, they will build confidence and work toward self-development. After some initial frustrations, it is evident that the young participants were able to do exactly that. The teaching sessions were not without their issues – complications with partner interaction and difficulties maintaining classroom control among the most common – but, in general, the teaching process reoriented participants’ thinking about

education, created opportunities for leadership, instigated self-management techniques, and pushed the teens to be more open and confident.

In group discussions after returning from the trip, all of the program participants agreed that, in some instances, “it is frustrating being a teacher.” Sam recounted that he “felt so frustrated when they weren’t listening to you.” This realisation of the difficulties of being a teacher may have ultimately altered the way the participants relate to the teachers in their own lives. As David noted, he “now knows how some of his teachers feel.” He said that having this new perspective will change his behaviour in school. Similarly, Jerome, after returning from the trip, assured support staff that the experience of teaching will “make him more focused in school.”

Teaching was a unique exercise for the participants because it was an opportunity for them to decide how they were going to adapt to a leadership role. Anyone who has ever attempted to lead a classroom understands that students intuitively react to a teacher’s demeanour, tone of voice, posture, and general personality. The young participants picked up on this requirement. According to support staff, Jerome showed that he could “moderate his language dependent on the audience.” For Evan, being in the teaching role created an opportunity for him to “be the role model for the other boys.” Teaching, in general, provided a social context wherein the teens were able to “self-regulate.” This was especially the case with David, who was forced to focus when teaching and had to change the way he spoke in order for the students to understand.

The program administrators cited the teaching process as the impetus for a number of other instances of self-development. Sam initially had trouble grappling with the lesson planning process. But, according to administrators, he “was able to work it out eventually.” He “struggled at first but continued and did really well.” David was able to listen more, negotiate with adults, and receive suggestions with maturity. In other cases, the teaching allowed participants to build capacities that they already had. For example, Felicia, who was one of the most active lesson planners during pre-departure workshops, took on even more responsibility in India. Further, she was faced with difficulties in working cohesively with her partner, but was able to support him in a positive way. Mira found myriad opportunities to practice techniques for motivating and engaging the kids. Program staff noted that, after her experience in India, Mira had become inspired to pursue a career as a teacher.

Jerome, one of the more reticent and insular program participants, became increasingly benevolent and thoughtful throughout the teaching process. Support staff noticed him forming a bond with both the students at the school and the boys at the group home. Project Leader Rachel Stovold told the following story: “We had told the kids not to buy gifts for their students but, without us knowing, Jerome bought a ball and gave it to his group at the boys home. He also bought some kit-kats and wanted to slip them to his students at school.” She noted that this was a “totally unexpected” way for Jerome to react to the teaching process. Other members of the program staff were similarly surprised by Jerome’s rapid shift in personality. Evidently, by the end of the trip he was a “different person.” During the post-trip group discussions Jerome was, indeed, more willing to engage with the rest of the group. Yet he was still prone to isolated behaviour and it is unclear how persistent the impact of the trip will be in his day-to-day life. This is a potential limitation of BB – the program is not designed to actively build on the positive developments gained in India – and it will be addressed further in the “Discussion” section.

One of the most commonly reported outcomes of the teaching process was an increase in confidence. By the end of the trip, six out of the eight participants were noticeably more confident in their ability to manage a classroom environment, deliver coherent lessons, and adapt to unpredictable circumstances. According to staff observations, Evan worked as a team during the teaching process and “in the classroom he had the ability to change his teaching style.”

Evidently, teaching was a time for creativity, self-reflection, and confidence building. However, at other points, it was an opportunity for the participants to play out what they consider to be “typical” teacher behaviour. Sam talked about how it was “frustrating being a teacher.” Telling a story about how he felt he needed to discipline his students, he said that he used phrases such as “wipe that smile off of your face.” When program administrators asked Sam why he said it in that particular way, he said that it was because that is what your teachers say to you. More often than not, the teaching process allowed the participants to experiment with new leadership traits and modes of confidence; but it also allowed them to recycle the disciplinarian techniques that they experience in education.

The fact that teaching was done in pairs resulted in mixed outcomes for the participants. Support staff reported that, in some instances, the partnership created opportunities for team-building and cooperation. Sam ultimately displayed an “improved ability to work alongside his partner.” However, other groups were not able to find a mutually productive arrangement and ended up doing more work independently. Sarah “struggled with her partner” but was able to complete her lesson planning on her own. Working in pairs presented an opportunity for a cohesive working relationship, but participants did not always take full advantage of that circumstance.

Living closely with new people stimulated self-development

There was a sense among youth participants and program administrators that the tight-knit, shared experience of traveling in India made participants more confident amongst the group, more able to handle criticism, and more likely to move outside their comfort zone. Sam noted in post-trip interviews that “it was good to meet different people from different places.” This was a reference not only to the children in India, but also the various youth (partaking in the Duke of Edinburgh volunteer trip) that shared house space with the Beyond Boundaries team. Interaction between the two groups was limited, but BB participants were nonetheless exposed to the difficulties and necessities of living in close quarters with peers.

By the end of the trip, Sam was able to “deal with negative behaviour more positively” – he was less confrontational and able to laugh at himself. Observations on the trip indicate that it was because of the close group interaction that Sam became less hostile to outside criticism. He was able to adapt positively to the new group dynamic. Evan, who displayed reticence and very little social interaction during pre-departure workshops, improved his social interaction with peers. In interviews, staff attributed this shift to the experience of living in close quarters with program members. Ultimately, David was able to take instruction from the other young people on the trip. This was something that he struggled with early on in the pre-departure exercises. According to Neeraj Kumar, the participants chosen for BB often demonstrate feelings of “claustrophobia” or “mistrust” when surrounded by their peers and/or individuals that are new to them. By the end of the trip, however, “they realised that it wasn’t too bad to have to work closely with others.” This is a function of being exposed to a tight-knit living situation.

Interacting with a new country stretched participants out of their comfort zone

A common theme during group discussions about the trip was how “different” everything was as compared to the UK. The participants had to adapt to any number of new environmental circumstances: the people, climate, language, food, etc. Reports from the youth participants as well as the staff indicate that, beyond some initial apprehension, the participants were able to adapt, deal with difficult situations, and partake in activities outside of their comfort zone.

Sumeet, one of the group leaders, recounted a story about two of the young male participants who were reluctant to remove their shoes before entering into a temple. "They refused to take off their shoes. So we just sort of headed in and let them decide what they wanted to do. Eventually one of them took his shoes off and went inside and pretty soon after the other one followed." These small moments of adjustment accrue when traveling in a new country, and the majority of the participants, rather than avoiding change, made an effort to experience the new lifestyle.

After returning home, multiple participants suggested that, because India was such a different place from home, they now feel like a "new person" with a different perspective. In conversations with staff, Mira said that the trip had "completely changed her" and it was "hard to imagine how she could ever be the same." Sam indicated that he "felt like a new person," and, in reaction to the trips experiences in general Felicia said: "It taught me a lot about myself....that I could do anything." When observing the participants talk about how the "newness" of India made them feel, the researcher noted that the young individuals took a considerable amount of time in trying to formulate what they were going to say. It was evident that they had certain ideas in their head about how being a new country had affected them, and they wanted to be careful to express the ideas in the right way.

Notably, there were times when immersion in a new cultural environment created issues and insecurities for some of the participants. As black young men, Evan and Jerome experienced moments of what support staff described as "racial tension" when first visiting the destitute boys home. They were treated differently by some of the members of the boys home because of the color of their skin. According to administrators, both boys were able to "stay calm" and "react appropriately in a difficult situation." Ultimately, the issues were resolved by the staff and the interactions at the boys home became more productive and peaceable. In this encounter, Evan and Jerome demonstrated significant resilience and maturity. However, it would be difficult to argue that the situation did not result in negative ramifications. At the time of the encounter, Jerome in particular was frustrated and upset. His ability to negotiate the difficult situation does not negate the anger that he experienced at the time. Future programs should consider taking steps to avoid this kind of situation.

Seeing extreme poverty – and the way that Indian residents reacted to it – forced youth to reflect on life choices, opportunities, and resources

Beyond Boundaries is premised on the belief that international travel changes the way people look at the world. This is a common way of thinking about travel; but it was not a given that BB's model – bringing young participants, most of whom have never left London, to a new, unfamiliar place – would deliver positive outcomes. Interviews with the teens, however, indicate that the cumulative experience of traveling in India had a significant and positive impact. Participants saw the difficult circumstances of poverty and the ways that people in Udaipur were able to adapt, support one another, and enjoy simple pleasures. They made the link between their own experience as a young person and the very different day-to-day existence of the children that they were teaching. In this way, they internalised a new appreciation for their own resources and, most importantly, they developed a new drive to take advantage of life opportunities. Below are some of the sentiments expressed in a group interview:

"The people were happy and proud of their houses even though they were made out of straw." - Sam

"I realised money doesn't affect how happy you are...I am now more grateful for things." - Sarah

“The trip taught me a lot about myself...that I could do anything.” - Felicia

“I felt like a new person...because when you don’t see things like that you are greedy. The trip made me want to give money to charity.” - Sam

“It changed me. I was in school last week and my teacher was saying something to me. I was getting upset and I wanted to say something. Like yell at her. But I thought about the trip and I realised how privileged I was and said nothing. I thought about how the kids in India, if they had one wish it would be to have an education. I have an education for free.” - Mira

Evidently, the experience of traveling in India made BB participants think about their own lives in relation to the people that they met during the trip. In line with the Global Youth Work perspective, the trip pushed the “young people to deconstruct [their] given reality in order to see the world in a different way, and hopefully change the way they interact with the world” (2013: 4). The trip participants and support staff agreed that this shift in worldview was dependent on being physically present in a new country. Learning about the socioeconomic circumstances of India in pre-departure workshops was informative for the group. However, a second-hand account cannot replace the visceral experience of interacting, face-to-face, with a new cultural environment.

Discussion, Recommendations, Conclusion



Discussion

As a whole, the evidence indicates that Beyond Boundaries 2014 was a unique, creative, and successful program. As an international volunteering experience, the program gave youth participants a rare opportunity to spend time in villages on the outskirts of Udaipur, India. They immersed themselves in the rich culture of the region and were able to explore sights, sounds, and flavours that are not typically available to London's foster care youth. Overall, the international element of the trip contributed to a number of positive program outcomes. The young participants were stretched outside of their comfort zones and forced to reflect on life choices, opportunities, and resources. Beyond that, Beyond Boundaries used the process of teaching – lesson planning, working with partners, managing a classroom – to stimulate self-development and help build confidence in the teens. Finally, living in close-contact with their peers seemed to create numerous opportunities for self-improvement, including: chances for older participants to be role-models and instances that allowed the teens to adjust to outside criticism.

“This trip doesn’t necessarily fix anything...but it makes them think” - Neeraj Kumar

In terms of the program's limitations, it is important to consider 1) program outcomes that were not fully achieved and 2) the complex impact of many of the program's features. Outside of Mira – who expressed her interest in becoming a teacher after returning from the trip – the participants did not report a significant change in aspirations (as measured by what career they hope to have later in life). Jerome is still interested in playing professional football and David still wants to become a mechanic. Their aspirations were raised slightly (in terms of how well they hope to do in school) but, in most cases, the program did not alter their vision for what the future might hold.

The fact that a program element triggers mostly positive outcomes does not mean that it will be free of negative ramifications. For instance, exposure to a new cultural environment can help participants build resilience and stretch their capabilities; however, it can also create circumstances that lead to deepened insecurities and feelings of frustration. When two of the program participants were exposed to racial tensions they were able to demonstrate maturity and poise in response. At the same time, they were forced to think of themselves as “other” and they were singled out by the people that they were meant to be engaging with. Looking at another element of the program, the teaching process did not always create an opportunity for creativity and self-development. In some cases the young teachers would simply recycle the harsh disciplinarian techniques (e.g. saying “wipe that smile off your face!”) that they see teachers use on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore, the frustrations of teaching put strain on the partner groups and in some cases made team-building efforts break down. This created opportunities for perseverance and resilience, but it potentially took away from the holistic benefits that can come from successful group projects.

Recommendations

Looking at the evaluation of the program, there are four major recommendations that can be made to potentially improve future initiatives:

Establish the teaching partnerships earlier on in the pre-departure phase

For Beyond Boundaries 2014, the young participants were paired off into teaching partnerships, which meant that throughout the time in India they would be sharing a classroom with a particular person. In theory, this arrangement would create an immediate support system for the teens – they could rely on their partner to help them with both the planning and execution of teaching. However, the participants did not learn who would be their partner until approximately a week before the trip was set to start. This

left very little time for the partners to get a chance to work together, let alone form the type of connection that might ultimately be helpful once in India.

There is no guarantee that arranged partners will get along with one another. Indeed, the extended foster care experiences of the program participants make it difficult for them to form strong social bonds with unfamiliar people. However, BB demonstrated that by the end of the trip the participants were becoming far more familiarised with each other. Support staff noted that Jerome and Sam, who had initially been cold to one another, were helping each other out around the house and showing other signs of camaraderie. If these kinds of support systems among the peers could be created before the trip begins it would arguably make for a more rewarding experience for all involved.

Strive to build even stronger relationships between staff and youth participants

Throughout Beyond Boundaries, it was hardly a given that exposing young participants to a unique culture would result in positive outcomes. Evidence suggests that the most vital mechanism for ensuring a positive process was having an effective and vigilant support staff. As Sumeet, a project staff member, noted, the kids on the trip “need people that they can trust” because “it provides a support structure.” According to reports from the staff, the relationships with the children could have been even stronger (especially in relation to Basti Ram staff) and the connections could have started earlier on.

Evidence from other youth projects suggests that the fun elements of the pre-departure workshops should be front-loaded toward the first few sessions (Montgomery, Rogouin, and Persaud, 2013). This allows the teens to feel comfortable and makes them more likely to establish relationships with the adult staff. Program administrators might consider designing activities that require the adults and teens to pair up (e.g. the group could split into partners for a trivia game related to Indian culture). This could establish an early system of support for the participants and make them feel more comfortable moving forward.

Design a way for participants to actively reflect

Rachel Stovold, a staff member on the trip, stressed that the ASDAN certification program gave the teens an opportunity to think abstractly about their experience in India. This was a helpful outside tool for Basti Ram but, ideally, the BB staff could devise a reflection process that is specifically designed for the participants of the program. If participants were able to think more concretely about what they were experiencing on a day-to-day basis – the new sites, the unusual smells, the image of livestock on the highway – it would potentially lead to new realisations about the trip and a deeper understanding of the emotions involved in travel. It would not need to be a complex initiative. In fact, a simple diary or journal entry process would likely do the job. The point would be to create some kind of systematic tool for allowing the participants to think through the complicated feelings of traveling abroad.

Think about out how to extend the impact of the program

This evaluation has limitations, in so far as it is unable to capture how this program will affect the participants in the weeks and months after completion. However, it is nevertheless clear that Beyond Boundaries would be more effective over the long term if the program was able to establish a follow-up support system. In general, the BB participants do not maintain regular contact with Basti Ram after the trip is completed. This is potentially a missed opportunity to build off of the successes of the program and solidify the shifts in personality that occurred during the time in India.

On BB 2014, one of the participants in particular underwent significant personal changes over the course of the trip. What is difficult to know is whether or not those developments will have a permanent impact. Will the teen, now back in an everyday environment, disregard everything that was learned while in India? One way to make sure that doesn't happen would be to reinforce the positive elements of BB during future interaction with the participant. Of course, spending more time with the teens would potentially require more funding and/or attention from staff. However, some potentially cost effective ideas might include: partnering with the participants' public school teachers to think about integrating BB-related content into his or her education (i.e. an existing school project could be a chance to focus on a topic related to India); and involving the participants in future BB program elements, e.g. having them attend and speak at informational meetings for potential participants. The goal would be to have an open dialogue with the participants and a platform for creating even more positive opportunities for the youth who need it most.

Conclusion

Amidst news that, over the last two years, England has cut spending on youth services by 36%, youth workers across the country are reminding the public why we need to invest in our next generation (Barton & Edgington, 2014). From both a moral and economic perspective, it is imperative that young individuals have realistic opportunities for growth, improvement, and achievement. It is clear that this philosophy undergirds the work done by Beyond Boundaries, and in this sense the program is a step in the right direction for London's youth development services. The program targeted foster care youth that have a tendency toward problems in school or difficulties finding work. By engaging in the program, the youth would not necessarily have an immediate path to affluence. However, ideally, the Beyond Boundaries experience could force a reorientation in their thinking – in terms of their sense of self, their confidence levels, and their understanding of their own opportunities. The evidence demonstrated that the program, in general, was able to accomplish this goal. The program's unique pedagogical and international elements provided a context for self-development, a boost in resiliency, and a shift in worldview. Beyond Boundaries has room to improve – group solidarity can be strengthened, tools for engaging the youth can be sharpened, and the program impact can be extended – but those limitations should not discount the overall benefit of the project. Moving forward, Beyond Boundaries is poised to make an even stronger impact on segments of society that are far too often left behind.

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Program Administrator Feedback

This form is to be used by program administrators to document their perceptions of the effects of the Beyond Boundaries Project. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible. Return to Drew Malmuth when completed.



Name of Program Administrator: _____

Beyond Boundaries Project Objectives

Personal development

- Raise aspirations
- Stimulate self-development
- Inspire the kids to achieve their full potential

Change in lifeworld/global awareness

- Stretch participants out of their comfort zone
- Increase awareness of global issues
- Inspire youth to reflect on life choices, opportunities and resources

Name of program participant:		
In terms of the program objectives listed above, have you observed any changes in the program participant? If so, list any and all observed changes below.	Do you think that the Beyond Boundaries project is responsible for this change? If so, what element of the project do you think has had an impact?	What evidence (i.e. observations, conversations, etc.) do you have that the change in the participant has occurred. Anything you can think of will be helpful.
Date of observation:		
Date of observation:		
Date of observation:		
Date of observation:		
Date of observation:		

Beyond Boundaries Participant Survey

This is an **anonymous** survey that will be used by Basti Ram to assess the Beyond Boundaries project. It is **entirely confidential** and at no point will the researcher know the identity of the participant. Please answer all of the questions as **honestly as possible**. Thank you very much for taking the time to answer the questions.



Participant number: ____ _

Male ☐ Female ☐

Circle the answer that shows how much you agree or disagree with each statement

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2. At times I think I am no good at all.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6. I certainly feel useless at times.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on equal plane with others	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel like I am a failure.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

How true do you feel these statements are about you personally? Circle one response.

11. I can work with someone who has different opinions than mine.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
12. I enjoy working together with other students my age.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
13. I stand up for myself without putting others down.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
14. I can work out my problems.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
15. I can do most things I try.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
16. There are many things I do well.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
17. I feel bad when someone gets their feelings hurt.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
18. I try to understand what other people go through.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
19. I try to understand what other people feel and think.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
20. When I need help I find someone to talk with.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
21. I know where to go for help with a problem.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
22. I try to work out my problems by talking or writing about them.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true

How true do you feel these statements are about you personally? Circle one response.

23. There is a purpose to my life.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
24. I understand my moods and feelings.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
25. I understand why I do what I do.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
26. I have goals and plans for the future.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
27. I plan to graduate from high school.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true
28. I plan to go to college or some other school after high school.	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very much true

Fill in your own answers for the following questions.

29. What do you think your FIRST job will be after finishing school? Please write at least 1 and up to 3 responses in the lines below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

30. What would be your IDEAL job when you are 30 years old? Please write at least 1 and up to 3 responses in the lines below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement. Circle one response.

31. I often think about how political and social issues affect the world.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
32. It is my responsibility to help make the world a better place.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
33. I am aware of important global problems outside of the UK.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
34. Helping other people is something I am personally responsible for.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
35. I feel like I have the power to make a difference in the world.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
36. I think about the amount of resources I have compared to others in the world.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
37. I feel like I have very few opportunities to improve my future.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
38. I feel like I don't receive very much support from society.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
39. I am optimistic about my ability to achieve things in the future.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Thank you very much for filling out the survey!