

***The DREAM Mentoring Program:  
An Evaluation of DREAM's  
Impact on Youth Participants in  
Vermont  
(2004-05 Program Year)***

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## **The DREAM Mentoring Program: An Evaluation of DREAM on Youth Participants in Vermont (2004-05 Program Year)**

### **Background**

DREAM (Directing through Recreation, Education, Adventure and Mentoring) is a non-profit mentoring program that pairs college students and children living in affordable housing communities in Vermont. As described in their mission statement, “DREAM builds communities of families and college students that empower children from affordable housing neighborhoods to recognize their options, make informed decisions, and achieve their dreams.”

Founded in 1999 by students attending Dartmouth College, DREAM has evolved to a statewide mentoring and adventure program that now includes partnerships between six colleges and seven affordable housing communities across Vermont:

- Dartmouth College and Northwoods/Hollow Drive, White River Junction (est. January 1999)
- Dartmouth College and Armory Square, Windsor (est. June 2001)
- University of Vermont and Elm Street, Winooski (est. February 2002)
- St. Michael’s College and Franklin Square, Burlington (est. February 2003)
- Norwich University and Green Acres, Barre (est. November 2003)
- Castleton State and Forrest Park, Rutland (est. November 2004)
- Champlain College and Birchwood, Milton (est. November 2004)

Many of these communities are recognized as some of Vermont’s toughest low-income neighborhoods. DREAM’s relationship with these communities has formed organically over time – as college students were seeking communities in which to mentor, these communities were looking for increased youth programming and mentors.

Each DREAM Local Program is a partnership between a community of college students and a residential neighborhood. Every child involved in DREAM is matched in a one-on-one mentoring relationship with a college student. Each week during the school year, mentors bring the children to their college campuses for a combination of group and one-on-one activities. Each local program engages in adventure trips at the end of college semesters, which include traveling to cities and parks throughout New England for educational and recreational purposes.

Special programmatic efforts have also been made to sustain youths’ contact with DREAM over the summer months when youth often face a lack of structured activities and adult supervision. This includes free overnight camping at Camp DREAM, High Adventure trips for the oldest youth (past trips have included Colorado, Washington, Utah, and Alaska), and onsite programming.

Each of DREAM’s program offerings is designed to work together to form a cohesive whole. They are conducted in a safe atmosphere where the children have space to dream, plan, reflect, and have fun.

DREAM has a strong focus on community building between mentors and the residents of the affordable housing neighborhoods with whom they work. These relationships are portrayed in the Local Advisory Boards, or LABs, which consists of mentors, parents, and housing authority staff. They monitor the local program and provide an open forum for parents to express concerns. The community that is built of this shared ownership is unique among mentoring programs.

DREAM relies on each LAB to define the needs of their community, and to identify the age range of children they feel will best be served by DREAM. DREAM serves a wide age-range of youth from four through seventeen years of age. Any child participating in DREAM can choose to continue being part of DREAM over multiple years, and to benefit from sustained, one-on-one contact with a DREAM mentor. The long-term relationships that develop amongst DREAMers are designed to enable children to build trust and feel cared for and part of a community. Through these relationships children engage in positive risk-taking, expand their world view, gain new perspectives on themselves, their communities, and world around them, and envision new possibilities for their futures.

### **Goal of Current Evaluation**

As DREAM moves forward, growing its number of program sites and expanding upon its current program model, it is important to examine the impact that the program is having on its participating youth and families. In particular, project staff wished to evaluate the extent to which the DREAM program positively influences the experiences, perceptions, and understandings that youth have of themselves, their relationship to others and their communities, their engagement with the broader world, and their sense of the future.

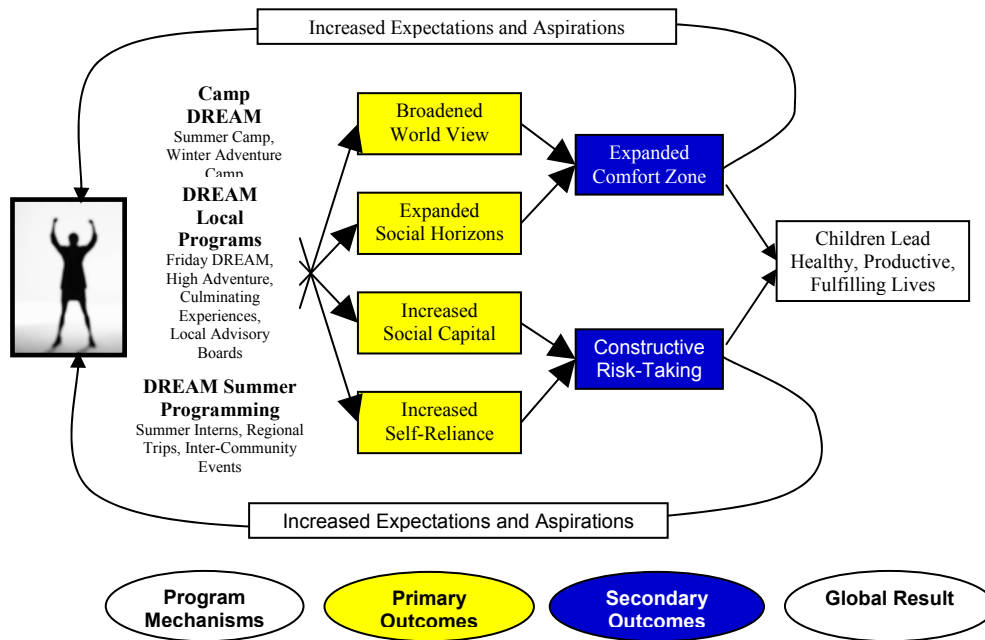
In the winter of 2004/05, DREAM Inc. developed a Theory of Change – a model which attempts to synthesize DREAM’s programmatic mechanisms, immediate outcomes, and long-term outcomes into a single framework. As noted by Weiss and others (e.g., Patton, 2002; Connell and Kubisch, 1998; Philliber, 1998), explicating a theory of change is valuable to informing the work and understanding of not only program evaluators, but that of program designers, managers, practitioners, funders, policy makers, and the general public.

The current study begins to explore this initial formulation of DREAM’s Theory of Change, and examine the impact of DREAM upon its youth participants. The study builds on an earlier pilot evaluation of DREAM’s 2003-04 program year (Char and Foote, 2005.)

**DREAM’s Theory of Change**

As described in their Theory of Change (Foote and Potter, 2006), DREAM works to increase the expectations and aspirations of Vermont’s children and youth. DREAM uses a variety of different program mechanisms to do so, fueled by the children’s own aspirations, passion, and dreams. To enable children ultimately to lead healthy, productive, and fulfilling lives, DREAM believes that children and youth must broaden their world view, expand their social horizons and social capital, and increase their self-reliance. This, in turn, will help expand youth’s comfort zones, and their capacity for healthy, constructive risk-taking.

**DREAM’s Theory of Change**



More specifically, the primary and secondary outcomes of DREAM’s Theory of Change include the following:

**Primary Outcomes**

- *Broadened World View:* Through such DREAM activities as visiting a college campus, spending time with college student mentors, attending outdoor summer camp, and going on High Adventure trips, youth build a greater image of the world in which they live. This includes a greater sense of possibility, a wider and richer repertoire of experiences, familiarity with places outside of their community, and an introduction to people of different cultures and lifestyles.
- *Expanded Social Horizons:* Through their relationships with college student mentors, and meeting other children and adults through DREAM Fridays, Summer Camp, and trips, youth are introduced to a diversity of views, aspirations, personalities, and life choices. By interacting with people from a wide spectrum of life experiences,

DREAM provides opportunities for youth to expand their own personal peer group, experience a greater diversity of relationships, and grow increasingly comfortable interacting with people of differing backgrounds.

- *Increased Social Capital:* Youth have the opportunity to build lasting supportive relationships with peers, mentors, DREAM alumni and supporters, neighbors, and different Vermont organizations. These relationships increase the social “wealth” of a child, providing them with a network of individuals and institutions that provides them with support, opportunities and resources, which in turn, they are able to reciprocate and give back to.
- *Increased Self-Reliance:* Through Camp DREAM, trips, fund-raising events, and new types of activities, youth increase their competence by knowing and becoming confident in themselves and their abilities. By allowing children a variety of safe venues in which to test boundaries, expand their skill sets, enjoy themselves, and reflect, DREAM is able to encourage youth to develop their ability to understand and trust themselves.

### Secondary Outcomes

- *Expanded Comfort Zone:* By broadening their world view and stretching their social horizons, youth are able to expand their own personal “comfort zones” - the psychological, social, and physical spaces within which a child feels safe and comfortable. In DREAM, this comfort zone is constantly being expanded as children become familiar with an ever-widening range of people, places, ideas, and experiences.
- *Increased Constructive Risk-Taking:* Risk taking is vital to a healthy and successful life as an adult. DREAM encourages constructive risk-taking by supporting youth with a network of relationships (adults, peers, institutions) that challenge and care for them. Through a variety of different programming options, youth have the opportunity to increase their levels of self-reliance, self efficacy, and resiliency. By learning outdoors survival skills, or planning and executing their own activities, events, fundraisers, and group trips, youth develop strong skills and gain experience in using these skills to help themselves and others.

With an *Expanded Comfort Zone*, youth are aware of, and comfortable with, a widening range of opportunities. *Increased Risk Taking* allows youth to search out life opportunities themselves, and make these opportunities a reality.

### **The Feedback Loop: Increased Expectations and Aspirations**

The entire system is fueled by the hopes and dreams of DREAM youth. As youth build a greater sense of the world around them and feel increasingly comfortable taking risks to explore it, they increase their expectations and aspirations for what they believe to be possible for their lives.

These aspirations and expectations exist both within the child and in all those who surround the child. Aspirations and expectations, both internal and external, can create self-fulfilling prophecies that either stifle a child’s potential or raise it to new heights.

DREAM’s Theory of Change depicts a cyclical process. As children grow with the DREAM Program, they pass through this cycle a number of times. With each iteration, DREAM intends for participants to increase their expectations of what they believe is possible for their lives. These heightened aspirations fuel the process for the next iteration and carry the child through increasingly harder challenges and greater rewards.

**Global Result**

*The ultimate goal of DREAM is that DREAM youth will lead healthy, productive, fulfilling lives.*

**The Study – Objectives, Sample and Methods**

The current study was designed to begin exploring this initial formulation of DREAM’s Theory of Change, and assess the impact of the DREAM mentoring program upon its youth participants.

Sample and Methods: The study targeted both DREAM youth and parents. A DREAM youth survey was administered to youth in seven DREAM sites, in Spring 2005. Completed surveys were received from a total of 90 youth (47 (52%) girls and 43 (48%) boys). Youth ranged in age from 5 to 17 years; 42 (59%) were in elementary school, 28 (31%) in middle school, and 9 (10%) in high school.

A parent survey was also administered to DREAM parents in all seven sites. Parents were asked to fill out one survey form for each of their children participating in DREAM. A total of 72 parent surveys were completed from 32 different DREAM households.

Site	# of Collected Youth Surveys	# of Collected Parent Surveys
Armory Square	11	10
Birchwood	12	8
Elm Street	21	16
Forest Park	3	3
Franklin Square	20	7
Green Acres	7	10
Hollow/North	16	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>72</b>

At the time surveys were administered, there were roughly 160 children participating in the DREAM Program throughout the state of Vermont. Thus the survey sample of 90 youth represented a little over half (56%) of all DREAM youth. The 72 completed parent surveys represented 45% of DREAM children and 38% of all DREAM households.

The youth surveys were administered to each site by DREAM mentors and office staff. Each child worked with a mentor or staff member to fill out the DREAM survey. If a child was too young or not able to read the document on his/her own, the document was read aloud to them.

For the parent surveys, staff members went door-to-door in DREAM communities dropping off the parent surveys. Staff members returned later that same day to pick up the filled out surveys. Parents were instructed to fill out one survey for each of their children participating in DREAM.

We also initiated a small pilot study of non-DREAM parents to obtain data from a comparison group of parents in 7 housing sites (1 comparison group at Birchwood, and 6 other sites deemed comparable to DREAM housing neighborhoods.) In spite of rigorous attempts to obtain completed surveys from non-DREAM parents, return rate was poor, and we received completed surveys back from only 24 non-DREAM parents. Thus, this report cites only a few interesting preliminary findings suggested by a comparison of the DREAM and non-DREAM parents.

Description and Analysis of Survey Instruments: The youth survey instruments consisted of a total of 39 items (34 multiple choice and ratings scale items, and 5 open-ended items.). For the youth surveys, youth were presented with a number of statements, and asked to rate each statement along a 3-point scale as to the degree to which they identified with the statement (i.e., sounds “A lot like me”, “A little like me” or “Not at all like me”). Survey items were analyzed for the proportion of students who strongly agreed that the statement sounds “A lot like me.” Qualitative data from the students’ prose responses to the open-ended questions (e.g. “Name 2 new things you have done in DREAM that you had not done before”; “One thing I learned about myself, by being in DREAM, is that.”) were compiled and later categorized and coded for major themes that arose from the youths’ statements.

DREAM parent surveys consisted of a total of 36 items (34 multiple choice and rating scale items and 2 open-ended items.) Parents were presented with a number of statements (e.g., “My child believes in his/her abilities,”; “My child is hopeful about his/her future”) and asked to rate each statement along a 5-point scale (ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”) A second set of statements asked parents to rate their levels of agreement with statements regarding their child’s experience with DREAM (e.g. ‘DREAM adds to my child’s happiness,’ ‘DREAM introduces my child to new experiences.’). DREAM parents also answered 2 open response questions (“What one thing would you like DREAM and your child’s mentor to provide for your child this year?”; “What does DREAM mean to you?”)

The parent instrument administered to the non-DREAM, comparison group of parents closely resembled that used for the DREAM parents, but excluded the DREAM-specific items asking for reactions to various aspects of the DREAM program. This non-DREAM parent survey had a total of 20 survey items.

## Summary of Findings

This evaluation provides some initial confirmation of areas of youth development identified in DREAM's Theory of Change. Positive growth in youth development were found in all of the primary and secondary outcome areas identified in DREAM's Theory of Change. Major results included:

- **Broadened World View:** DREAM youth and parents strongly agreed that DREAM introduced youth to new experiences, and had enabled them to do new things in their area and that made them happy.

- **Expanded Social Horizons and Increased Social Capital:** Both youth and parents felt that DREAM offered them a social network of caring and support. Youth felt DREAM expanded their social horizons by enabling them to meet different people and make new friends, had people who cared about them, and learned new things from their mentor. Parents regarded DREAM mentors as an important part of their family's life, and felt DREAM had added greatly to their neighborhoods and communities.

- **Increased Self Reliance:** Youth expressed a heightened self-reliance, knowing how to take care of themselves, to solve problems they might confront, and ways to raise money.

- **Expanded Comfort Zone:** DREAM youth expressed a sense of an expanded comfort zone for themselves. Many felt safe being in new places when they were with DREAM, were comfortable about being away from their family, and thought that going to college would be fun.

- **Increased Constructive Risk-Taking:** DREAM youth indicated a high level of constructive risk-taking and initiative. Most reported that if they worked hard at something, they usually succeeded, and that they have succeeded in doing something no one thought they could do. DREAM parents reported that DREAM taught their child valuable life skills. Many felt that their children do things that they feel are important to them, and believe in their own abilities.

- **Increased Aspirations and Expectations:** Youth reported consistently high levels of expectations and future aspirations for themselves. Most stated that they want to do well in school and felt it important to go to college, believed in taking good care of themselves, expected to be happy when they were adults, and wanted to travel and see new places when they were older. Most DREAM parents that their child was hopeful about his or her future. Most felt it likely that their child would graduate from high school, while about half felt it likely that their child would attend college.

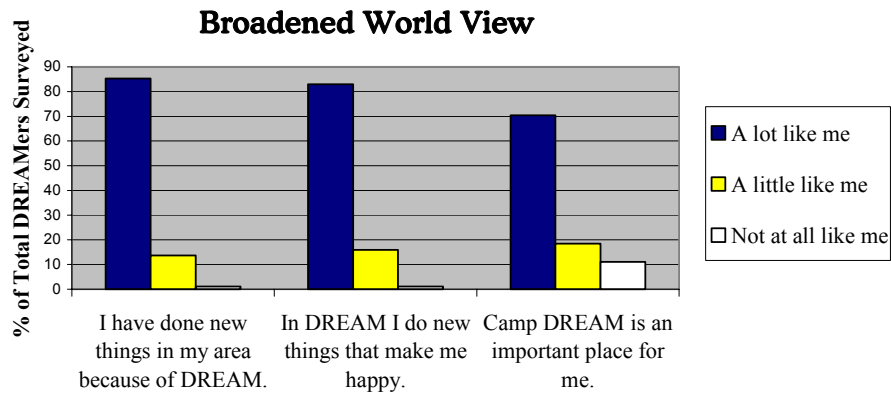
**Youth Perspectives of Self and Self-Reflection:** Youths' assessments of their greatest strengths, and what they learned about themselves by being in DREAM reflected some of the major projected outcomes of the program - that of broadening horizons, increased sense of social competence and capital, and increased self reliance and confidence, and comfort zones.

## Findings, by Specific Outcomes

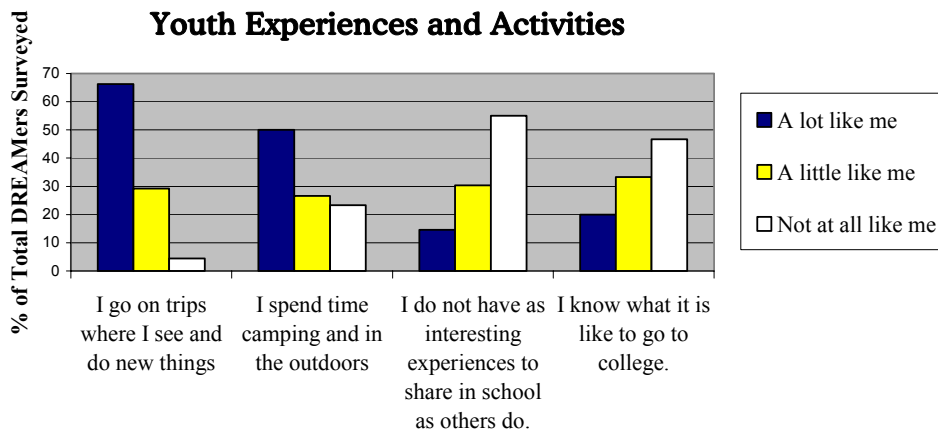
This section presents more detailed findings from the study using DREAM’s Theory of Change model as the organizing framework for presenting results.

### I. Broadened World View (Primary Outcome 1)

Youth Perspectives: DREAM youth reported a wide variety of ways that DREAM had broadened their world view. The vast majority of DREAM youth (85%)<sup>1</sup> reported that DREAM had enabled them to do new things in their area, and that through DREAM, they do new things that make them happy. 70% of youth declared that Camp DREAM was an important place for them.



Two thirds (66%) of youth reported that they go on trips where they see and do new things, and half (50%) said that they spend time camping and in the outdoors. Reflecting this positive outlook on their active exploration of the larger world, only 15% reported that they do not have as interesting experiences to share in school as others do. Boys were slightly more negative regarding having interesting experiences to share, with 24% of boys feeling that they did not have as interesting experiences to share in school, while only 11% of girls felt so.



As noted earlier, a unique feature of DREAM is its regular weekly sessions on college campuses, and its mentors being current college students of a particular Vermont college

<sup>1</sup> All findings for youth survey rating scales are reported in terms of most rigorous level: percentage of youth reporting that statement sounds “A lot like me.”

or university. Thus, it is somewhat surprising that only a fifth (20%) of youth overall indicated that they know what it's like to go to college.

When asked to name two new things they have done in DREAM that they hadn't done before, the most common response cited by about a third of the youth (36%) involved outdoor and physical activities and sports, such as ice skating, going swimming, or going for walks. This was followed by about a fifth of youth mentioning either new cities they had visited through DREAM (16%) or DREAM trips (such as High Adventure) (20%), or going to Camp DREAM (18%). Other new activities youth mentioned were DREAM trips to amusement parks (13%), museums and aquariums (9%), or engaging in specific fund-raising activities (7%).

Only 13% of youth mentioned a new thing done through DREAM as specifically dealing with college campuses, college life or facilities. It is unclear whether the regularity of the campus location as part of the general weekly program made college life feel less "special" or unique to youth, in comparison to special outings or novel activities.

Additional information on youths' perspectives of college is found in their ideas as to what would be the most interesting thing about being in college. The most common response, from 29% of youth involved either aspects of learning, working hard, and going to classes (22%), or the importance of getting a college degree or college enabling them to get a job (7%).

The next most common response, given by 20% of youth concerned social aspects of meeting new people and making new friends. For example, one 17 year old boy described college as being interesting since it enabled "meeting new people from distant places."

Appealing aspects of other, more concrete aspects of college life interestingly broke down along more gender lines. Girls tended to describe the appeal of living in a dorm and/or in one's own space apart from family, while boys tended to focus on college cafeterias and on food and getting to eating what you want.

Parent Perspectives: DREAM parents were unanimous (100%) in their agreement that DREAM introduced their child to new experiences. When asked what DREAM meant to them, some DREAM parents specifically mentioned DREAM afforded new and interesting activities for their children. Parents expressed that for them, DREAM:

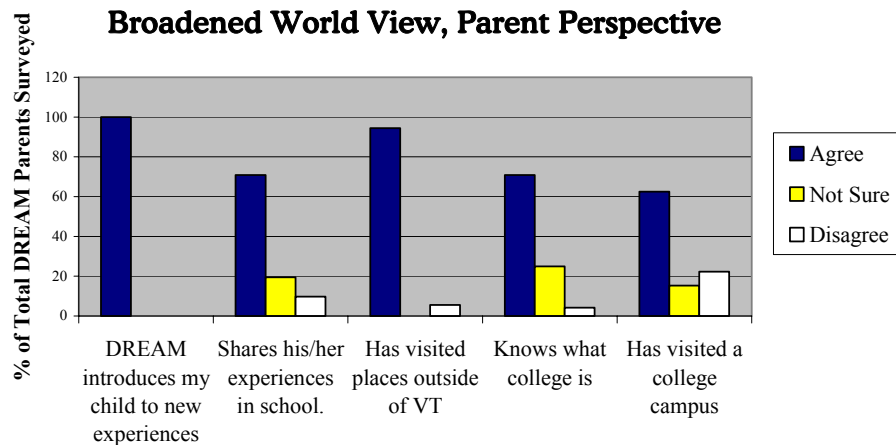
*Gives children a chance to do things they otherwise wouldn't have a chance to do (such as Chill and High Adventure). (Parent of 14 year old girl, Elm)*

*Means that my son will learn that there is more in life than what little he sees here in Rutland. (Parent of 6<sup>th</sup> grade boy, Forest Park)*

*Gets my son out of "the Park" and he enjoys it! (Parent of 5<sup>th</sup> grade boy, Milton)*  
One parent, whose 8<sup>th</sup> grade son has been in DREAM for the past six years, said, "DREAM means the world to me. These wonderful people have helped me (a single

mother of 7) bring [to the children] positive guidance and a happy way to spend time and learn new and interesting things they would have never known.”

Roughly three out of four parents (71%) indicated that their child shares his or her experiences in school, corroborating the earlier finding reported by DREAM children that they had interested experiences to share with their classmates. 94% of parents mentioned that their child has visited places outside of Vermont.

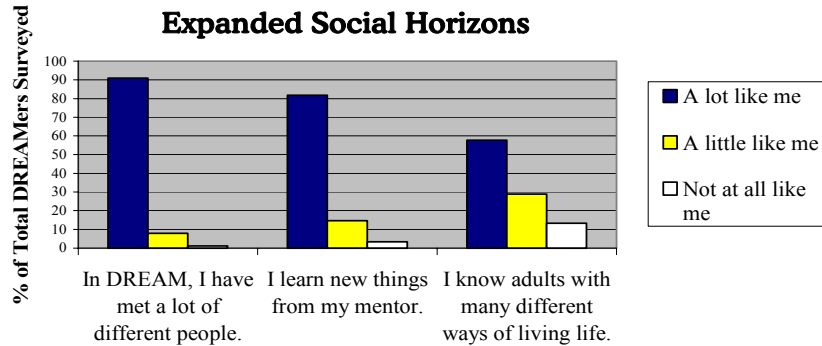


About three out of four DREAM parents (71%) reported that their children knew what college is. About three out of five DREAM parents (63%) indicated that their child has visited a college campus, a figure much higher than one would expect from this type of community and family population. Supporting evidence is found in our initial pilot data from a comparison group of non-DREAM parents. While 45 out of 72 (63%) of DREAM parents agreed that their child had visited a college campus, only 1 out of 24 (4%) of the control group parents did so.

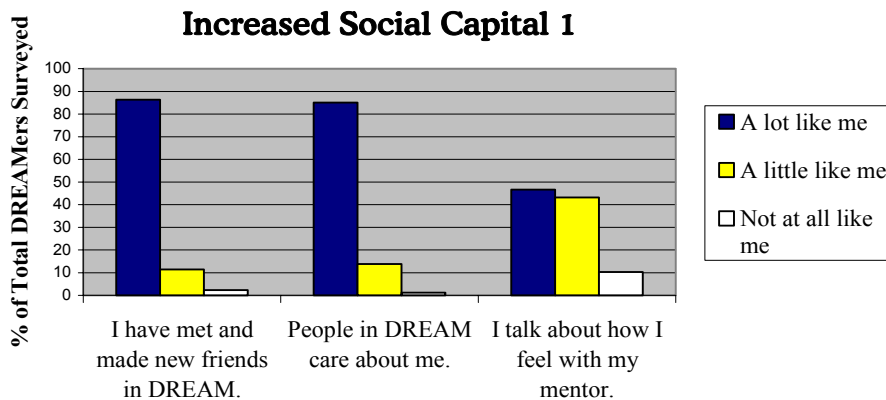
It was somewhat surprising that 37% of DREAM parents either thought that their child had not visited a college campus (22%) or were not sure (15%). It is possible that some DREAM parents may have misinterpreted the wording of the survey item to entail formal visits to a college that accompany college admissions, or implied a visit to a college campus other than the DREAM mentor’s campus. This finding, however, coupled with the relatively low percentage (20%) of youth reporting that they know what it’s like to go to college, suggests that the college-based qualities of the program could possibly be further enhanced. For example, DREAM mentors might focus their energies on talking more explicitly with DREAM parents about college opportunities for their families, as the youth approach their middle school and high school years. DREAM’s burgeoning partnership with Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) and concurrent development of a Teen Programming model lays groundwork for such possibilities.

## II. Expanded Social Horizons and Increased Social Capital (Primary Outcomes 2 and 3)

Youth Perspectives: Youth were resoundingly positive in how DREAM has expanded their social horizons. 91% of youth reported that DREAM had enabled them to meet a lot of different people, while 82% indicated that they had learned new things from their mentor. Almost three fifths (58%) of youth reported that they know adults with many different ways of living life.



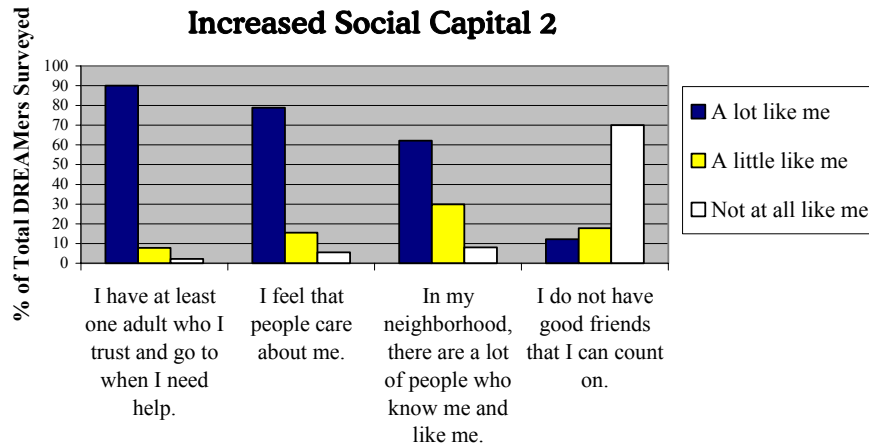
Regarding their building of social capital through DREAM, many youth (86%) reported that they have met and made new friends in DREAM, as well as felt that people in DREAM cared about them (85%). Most youth (90%) said they talked about their feelings with their mentors to some degree (47% = “a lot like me”, 43% = “a little like me”).



Also, when describing new things they have done through DREAM, about a fifth of the youth either mentioned hanging out with grownups and having a mentor, or specifically mentioned their mentor in their description of doing a new activity.

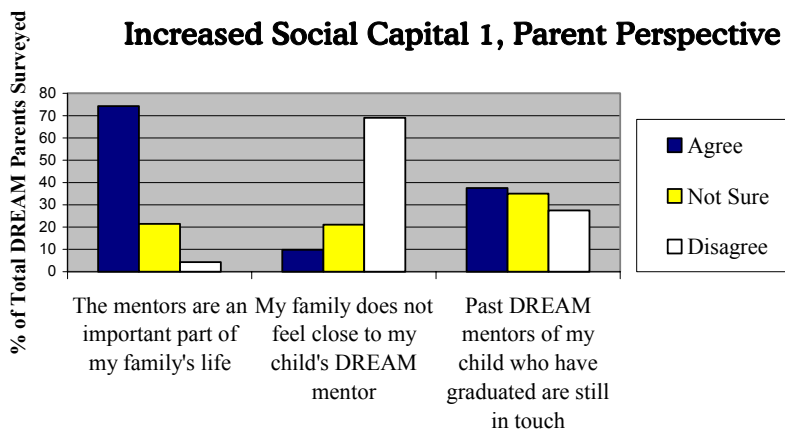
Youth generally reported a positive sense of being part of a social network and community. The vast majority (90%) of youth reported that they felt they had at least one adult who they trust and go to when they need help. Most (79%) also reported that they felt people cared about them. Furthermore, at the community level, most (62%) felt that a lot of people in their neighborhood knew and liked them. In keeping with these

positive stances on their interpersonal relationships with others, only 12% of youth felt that they did not have good friends that they could count on.



Girls were generally more positive about the strength of their social relationships with others than were boys. Girls were somewhat more confident that they were known and liked by their neighbors than were boys (71% girls vs. 57% boys), and that people in DREAM care about them (96% girls vs. 78% boys). Similarly, they were more confident that they had strong friendships they could count on. While only 4% of girls felt they lacked good friends to rely on, 27% of boys felt so. At the same time, boys reported a slightly wider circle of kinds of people they knew, concerning knowing adults with many different ways of living life (65% boys vs. 55% girls).

Parent Perspectives: Regarding DREAM affording youth increased social capital, about three quarters of DREAM parents (72%) felt that the DREAM mentors were an important part of their family’s life.



Similarly, many (68%) disagreed with the statement that they did not feel close to their child’s DREAM mentor. Over a third of DREAM parents in fact indicated that past DREAM mentors who have graduated from college and officially DREAM alumnae were still in touch with their child.

When asked what DREAM meant to them, a fifth of the DREAM parents specifically mentioned aspects of the interpersonal relationships and social interactions and groups of

DREAM. Several parents offered short, concise responses, such as DREAM personally meant “togetherness,” “a friend,” “good relationships,” or “a supportive influence.”

Some parents specifically emphasized the important one-on-one relationships afforded by a child’s mentor.

*Our mentor is great with my child. He helps him in so many ways. Friendship means a big part to my child. (Parent of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade boy, Elm)*

*William<sup>2</sup> receives 1-1 attention. That’s important to William. He is the 4th child out of a family of 5 and does not always get the attention he needs. (parent of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade boy, Milton)*

*It’s a helping hand to me knowing that she is doing something she wants to do with just her and her mentor. (Parent of 4<sup>th</sup> grade girl, Armory)*

*It means that there is someone there for my child who I can trust. (Parent of 4th grade girl, Milton)*

Other parents focused not only on the important one-on-one mentor relationships but also being member of a larger group and community.

*It means my kids get some one-on-one time with another caring adult as well as a group of friends doing something they think is cool and exciting. (Parent, multiple aged children, Franklin Square)*

*DREAM is a program that helps to show the children that adults and kids can have fun together. It gives them a chance to see that a group of adults and kids can all get along together, not just one friend at a time. (Parent of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade boy)*

A large element of DREAM appeared to be that it offered parents and children a larger social network of caring and support. As some parents described the support network offered by DREAM:

*DREAM to me is a program where children learn that adults can be very fun and also your friend, that you can turn to if or when you ever feel you really need someone to talk to besides your own family. (Parent of 6<sup>th</sup> grade boy, Franklin Square)*

*My child realizes older children care about him. (Parent of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade boy, Armory)*

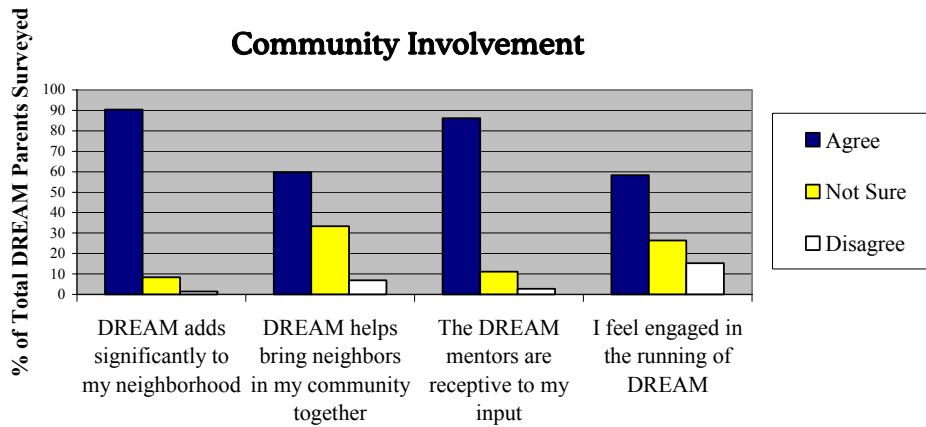
*DREAM has continued to be a great source of good positive interactions with my child. These mentors have helped my daughter grow in a good, happy way. (Parent of a 5<sup>th</sup> grade girl, Hollow Drive, been in program 6 years.)*

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<sup>2</sup> All individual names have been replaced by pseudonyms

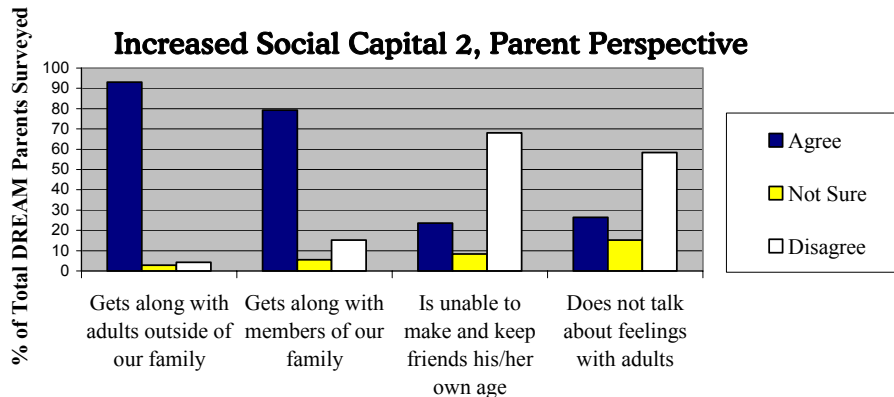
One parent whose fifth grade son has been in the DREAM program since he was a kindergartener, expressed that “DREAM has been a godsend to my family. Living in a multi family complex can be extremely hard for small children. The housing complex we lived in was extremely hard. DREAM came and brought happiness and continuing support to the family.”

DREAM parents reported that they believed that DREAM had a positive influence on their communities. The vast majority of parents (90%) stated that DREAM added significantly to their neighborhoods, while three out of five parents (60%) felt that DREAM helped bring the neighbors in their community together.



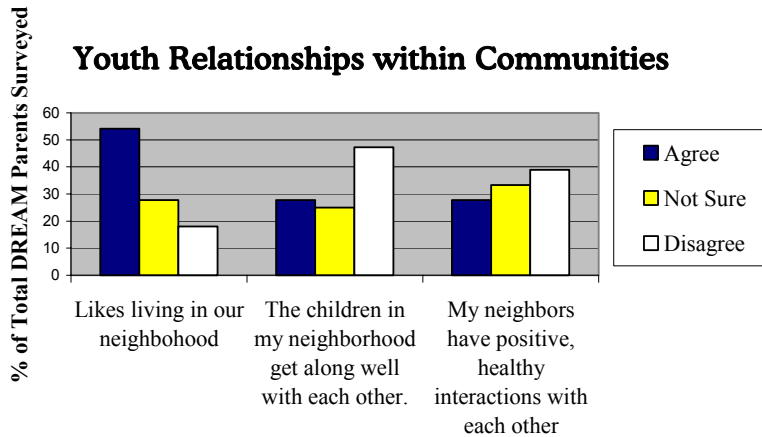
Parents felt generally well-connected to the DREAM program. Most of the parents (86%) felt that the DREAM mentors were receptive to their input, while over half (58%) felt engaged in the running of DREAM, presumably through their involvement in the Local Advisory Boards (LABs).

In their surveys, most DREAM parents reported positive social relationships between their children and others. Almost all parents felt their child got along with adults outside of their families (93%), and most reported that their child had generally positive relationship with members of their family (79%). Only 23% of parents felt their children were unable to make and keep friends their own age, and 26% felt their child did not talk about their feelings with adults.



Regarding relationships in their neighborhood communities, about half of the parents (54%) indicated that their child likes living in their neighborhood. Less than a third

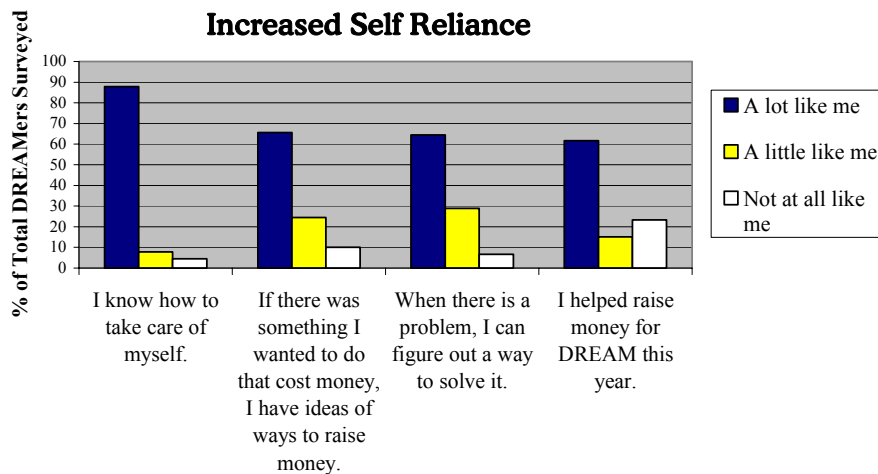
(28%) felt that that the children in their neighborhood got along well with each other, or that their neighbors had positive, healthy interactions with each other. However, this 28% of DREAM parents was a figure much higher than the level reported by the small, comparison group of Non-DREAM parents. For these non-DREAM parents, only 13% (3 out of 24) reported that they felt their neighbors had positive interactions with one another.



### III. Increased Self Reliance (Primary Outcome 4)

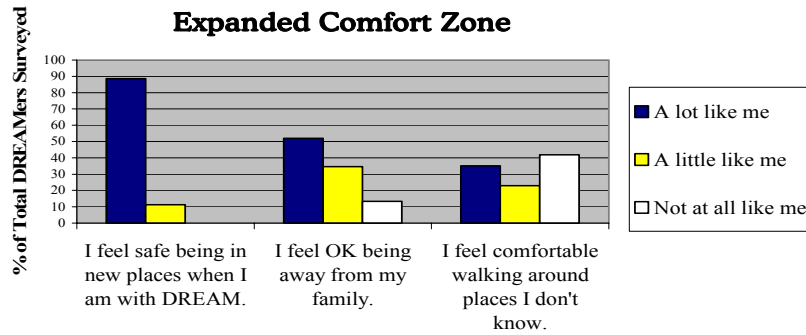
Youth Perspectives: Youth reported consistently positive assessments of their own self-reliance. Most youth (88%) indicated that they knew how to take care of themselves. Many (66%) also confidently reported that if there was something they wanted to do that cost money, they had ideas of how to raise money. Similarly, many felt (64%) that if there was a problem, they could figure out a way to solve it.

Almost all youth (90%) reported that they had helped raise money for DREAM this year, either “a lot” (66%) or “a little” (24%).



#### IV. Expanded Comfort Zone (Secondary Outcome 1)

Youth Perspectives: The vast majority of youth (89%) stated that they felt safe being in new places when they were with DREAM. Regarding their general “comfort zone” in the world, over half (52%) felt very comfortable about being away from their family. Only about a third (35%) of youth indicated that they felt comfortable walking places they don’t know.

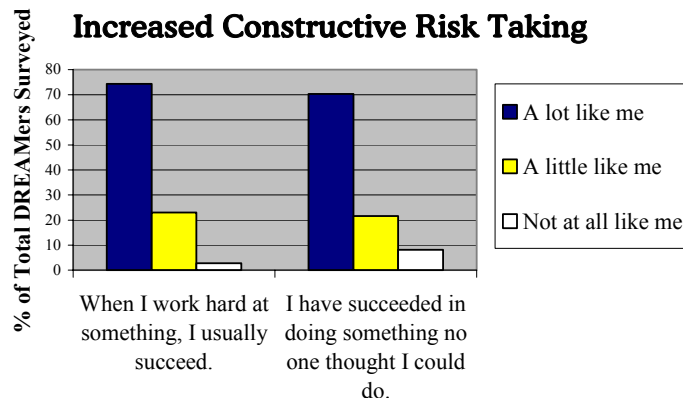


Boys felt somewhat more comfortable and confident in the world than girls. Boys were more comfortable being away from their family (62% of boys vs. 49% of girls) and in unfamiliar places (48% of boys vs. 33% of girls). At the same time, the presence of DREAM strongly bolstered girls’ comfort level, with 96% of girls saying that they felt safe when with DREAM, compared to 81% of boys.

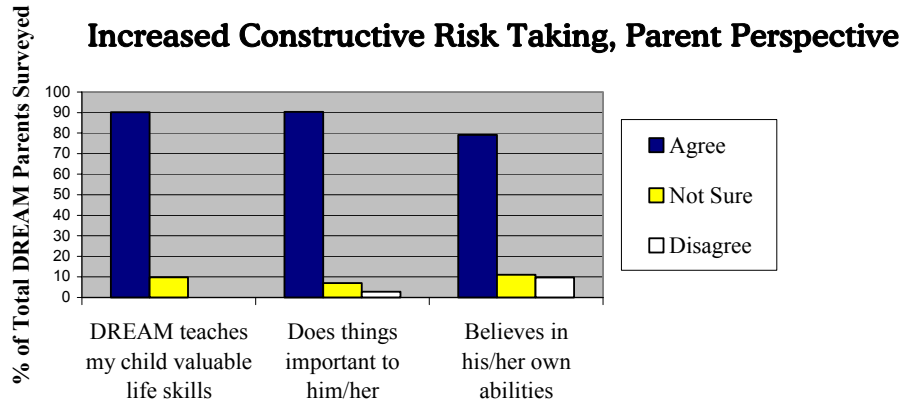
Almost two thirds of youth (62%) strongly related to the notion that going to college would be fun. Of note, this positive sentiment was expressed similarly by both boys (62%) and girls (64%).

#### V. Increased Constructive Risk-Taking (Secondary Outcome 2)

Youth Perspectives: Regarding constructive risk-taking and initiative, roughly 3 out of 4 youth (74%) reported that if they worked hard at something, they usually succeeded. Similarly high levels (70%) reported that they have succeeded in doing something no one thought they could do. These positive attitudes were reported at comparable levels by both boys and girls.



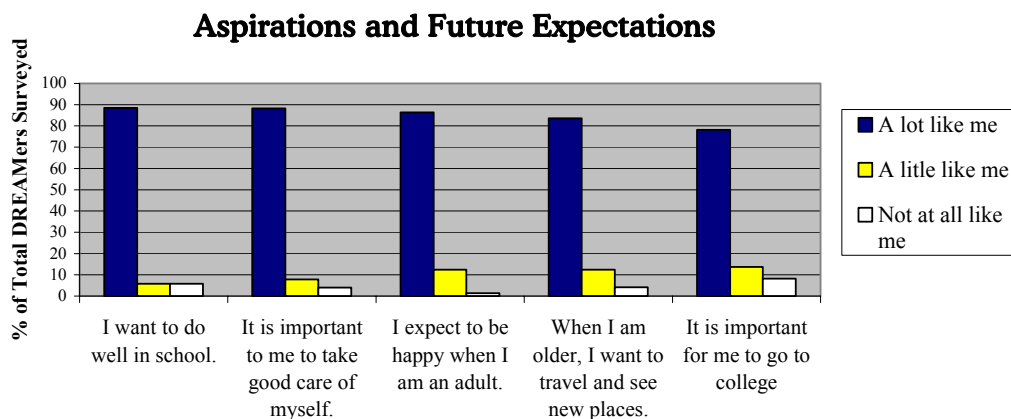
Parent Perspectives: The vast majority of DREAM parents (90%) felt that DREAM taught their child valuable life skills. Many parents also felt that their children do things that they feel are important to them, and that they believe in their own abilities (90% and 79%, respectively).



## VI. Increased Aspirations and Expectations

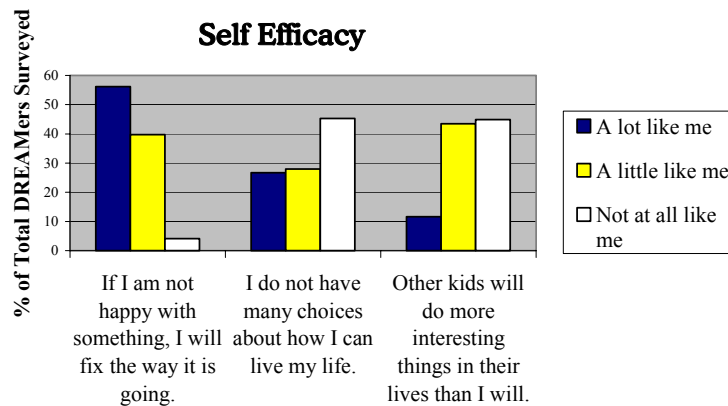
Youth Perspectives: Youth reported consistently high levels of expectations and future aspirations for themselves. The vast majority of youth stated that they want to do well in school, and that it is important for them to take good care of themselves (89% and 88%, respectively).

Many youth expected to be happy when they were adults, and wanted to travel and see new places when they were older (86% and 84%, respectively). Many (78%) also believed it was important to go to college.



Youth also expressed quite healthy levels of determination and self-determination. Over half (56%) felt that if they were not happy with something, they would fix the way it is going. Almost half (45%) strongly disagreed with the statement that they did not have

many choices about how they can live their lives, or that that other kids outside of their neighborhood would do more interesting lives than they themselves would.



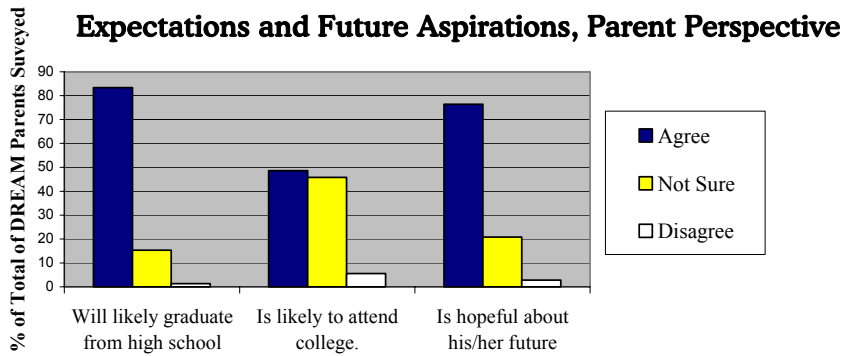
Girls were somewhat more optimistic that they would be happy as adults (92% girls vs. 81% boys), and felt that it was more important go to college (89% girls vs. 73% boys). They also were somewhat more likely to disagree with the notion that they did not have many choices about how they can live their lives (46% of girls vs. 36% of boys), and that other kids would do more interesting things in their lives than they would (47% of girls vs. 36% of boys).

**Future career aspirations:** Youth were also asked what they wanted to be when they grew up, with responses revealing some interesting gender differences. In general, girls were more likely to aspire to hold more professionally-oriented jobs such as becoming doctors, lawyers and scientists, or teachers, while boys expressed interests in the safety occupations and in the trades.

Of those 20 youth wishing to be a doctor, lawyer or veterinarian (12) or teacher (8), all were girls, while two out of the three youth wishing to be a scientist were girls. In contrast, 11 of the 12 who wished to hold safety occupations (e.g., police officers firefighter) were boys, as well as were the five youth interested in the trades (e.g., carpenter, auto repair worker). Thus, already emerging gender differences in career aspirations may be playing some role in the different priorities placed upon pursuing college after high school.

Jobs in the arts and fashion were also popular with girls, who made up 11 of the 14 youth who expressed interest in those careers. Careers in sports were equally popular with boys and girls (9 youth; 5 girls and 4 boys).

Parent Perspectives: Regarding youth’s increased aspirations and expectations for the future, 83% of DREAM parents indicated that they felt it likely that their child would graduate from high school. This figure corresponds to the general high school graduation rate reported for the state, of 81% (Youth Count: The Vermont Youth Report, 2002).



Furthermore, about half (49%) indicated that they felt it likely that their child would attend college. This figure is higher than that yielded from the small comparison group of non-DREAM parents, in which only 33% (8 out of 24 parents) indicated that they felt it likely that their child would go to college.

Three out of four DREAM parents (76%) also felt that their child was hopeful about his or her future, as compared with 62% of the non-DREAM parents.

When asked what DREAM meant to them, a number of parents commented on DREAM’s promoting a positive outlook on the future and their place in the world.

*DREAM is a program that shows the children that it is a big world out there and all kinds of things are possible if you want them enough. (Parent of a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade girl, Franklin Square)*

*I love the fact that DREAM instills anything is possible. (Parent of 4<sup>th</sup> grade boy, Birchwood).*

*DREAM gives children a better outlook on life other than life in a low income development. There is a chance to get out and have a better life. (Parent of 9<sup>th</sup> grade girl, Elm)*

As one parent of a 4<sup>th</sup> grade girl expressed, “DREAM means a continued success with peers of the same age and adults coming together and making a positive dent in a harsh (sometimes) world...and how much of a difference we all are able to make.”

## **VII. Youth Perspectives of Self and Self-Reflection**

Two open-ended items on the survey – youths’ assessments of their greatest strengths, and what they learned about themselves by being in DREAM – reflects the diversity of perspectives and experiences that youth participants bring to DREAM, and what they gain from the program.

When asked what they regarded as their *greatest strengths*, youths' responses clustered into three major areas. The first area concerned interpersonal relationships and qualities. Youth spoke about their strengths in terms of having a good circle of friends and relationships with their families (11 youth), being helpful, nice or caring to others (11), or being friendly, funny, or fun-loving (13).

The second area concerned competence and skills. Youth spoke about being athletic and good at sports (14), having special skills and talents in art, languages, music, or building things (12), or being good in school and academic subjects (5).

The third area concerned personal qualities relating to self-reliance, risk-taking, and expanded comfort zone (12 youth.) This pertained to such qualities as increased self-reliance and initiative, assertiveness, adaptability and having a positive outlook on life.

<b>Areas of Strength</b>	<b>Sample Comments</b>
Self-reliance	<i>I am tough, and brave. I love adventures. Courage to explore woods.</i>
Assertiveness & Adaptability	<i>I have great leadership skills, and I like meeting new people of all races. I'm not afraid to stand up for myself. How easily I adapt.</i>
Positive Outlook on Life	<i>Being thankful for things. I love my life.</i>

When asked to describe *one thing they learned about themselves by being in DREAM*, youth responded with a variety of different personal reflections. The three most common types of comments concerned acquiring a broadened world view (9 youth); friendships and social capital (7 youth), and an increased comfort zone (8 youth).

<b>Areas of New Self Awareness</b>	<b>Sample Comments</b>
Broadened World View	<i>I really can do things I've never got to do before. I can try new things and feel good about it. That I'm a really good traveler. I like the outdoors! It's fun to do trips.</i>
Social Capital	<i>I do have lots of friends, More than just my family care about me. That I can make new friends.</i>
Comfort Zone	<i>I can do more than I think I could. I have learned that I am independent and not scared of anything. I can be outgoing and comfortable in situations. I won't be homesick so far away. I learned that I can meet new people on my own, and not</i>

	<i>being afraid or shy.</i> <i>Trust to go different places.</i> <i>There are a lot of nice people in college.</i>
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A few children commented on new self-realizations concerning their self reliance, saying that they now know how to keep themselves safe, and to take care of themselves.

Several others commented on their discoveries of determination, assertiveness, and self-assuredness:

*Never give up.*  
*It's ok to speak out loud and be yourself and say something if there is a problem.*  
*I can show my real self.*  
*I am a very social person with very varied emotions and actions. And people like me for who I am.*

Two girls, ages 12 and 15, voiced their increased aspirations and expectations, saying that through DREAM they found “I can be anything I want to be if I imagine,” and “I can do anything if I work hard.”

Thus, youths’ assessments of their greatest strengths, and what they learned about themselves by being in DREAM reflects some of the major areas of the program - that of a broadened world view, increased social competence and capital, and increased self reliance and comfort zones.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, the Spring 2005 DREAM evaluation provides some initial confirmation of areas of youth development identified in DREAM’s Theory of Change. Positive growth in youths’ development were found in all of the primary and secondary outcome areas identified in DREAM’s Theory of Change.

Thus, the current study provides promising initial evidence for the desired youth outcomes targeted by the DREAM mentoring program. These results corroborate findings from numerous other studies (e.g., Jekielek, Moore and Hair, 2002; Gambone, Klem & Connell, 2002) indicating the variety of positive benefits of mentoring programs in promoting youth’s healthy development. Future evaluations of the DREAM program, working in concert with DREAM’s evolving theory of change, should offer a fruitful avenue for studying the specific impact of DREAM programs upon participating youth, family, and communities, and also contribute more broadly to the field of mentoring, youth development, and community initiatives.

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