

Summary

Centennial outreach program encourages underrepresented students to enrol in postsecondary

Almost half of participants in a Centennial College outreach program to support Toronto-area marginalized and underrepresented students enrolled in a postsecondary program either at Centennial or elsewhere. However, the program participants fared worse when it came to academic performance, persistence and completion than non-participants, likely a reflection of the greater risk factors they face, finds a new report by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO).

The findings were presented in a study conducted by researchers at Centennial College and funded through HEQCO's [Access and Retention Consortium](#), a partnership between HEQCO, education institutions and community groups, that is evaluating the effectiveness of interventions intended to improve access to and persistence in higher education.

The report, *Helping Youth Pursue Education (HYPE): Exploring the Keys to Transformation in Postsecondary Access and Retention for Youth in Underserved Neighbourhoods*, presents the results of a study aimed at evaluating the effects of the HYPE program on student success.

Project Description

Since its inception in 2004, HYPE has sought to familiarize youth from underserved neighbourhoods with academic programs and services and increase their participation in postsecondary education. It offers a six-week, on-campus educational experience including financial support to young people aged 17 to 29 living in target neighbourhoods. In addition, participants receive referrals to and support with using college services, individualized attention and help with accessing financial assistance and access to peer mentors.

Applicants can choose to enrol in one of seven courses at Centennial for which they receive a continuing education credit after completion. The curriculum is structured to provide participants with exposure to a sample of the content they would receive if they were enrolled in a college program. In addition, motivational and skill-development workshops are offered weekly as well as an academic-skills preparation course. HYPE is tuition free and also provides breakfast, lunch, transit fare and learning materials free of charge. A bursary is also available to those participants with financial need who complete the program and enrol in full-time study at Centennial.

Findings

Since 2011, almost 600 individuals have participated in the HYPE program and 501 have successfully completed it. Almost half (47%) of HYPE graduates enrolled in college, the majority at Centennial. To date, 22% of those who completed HYPE have graduated from Centennial with a college-level credential.

More than half of HYPE graduates were female and more likely to enrol in college than their male counterparts in the program. More than 60% of HYPE graduates were the first in their family to attend

postsecondary education and 8% identified as Indigenous. Almost half were in the 21–25 age group. Students coming from a neighbourhood with a high percentage of lone-parent families were more likely to participate in the HYPE program.

When researchers looked at student success outcomes as measured by completion of or attendance in a college program, persistence beyond the first year of study and academic performance in college, HYPE participants fared worse than their non-HYPE counterparts.

The authors note that HYPE students face a variety of challenges and difficulties that other students do not. Program participants include youth from low-income families, youth in conflict with the law, Indigenous youth, immigrant and refugee youth, LGBTQ youth, Crown wards, as well as youth with mental health issues and physical disabilities and first-generation students. What's more, many of the supports they received such as a free breakfast and lunch and transit fares stopped after they completed the program, the authors note.

“The individuals who are most likely to enter the HYPE program are already at greater risk for withdrawal than those who do not enter it,” they write. “Given the multiple challenges and barriers experienced by the youth who are served by the HYPE program, the fact that HYPE students complete the program, with roughly half of them enrolling in a college and putting themselves in a position to achieve academic performance on par with other students at Centennial, is an achievement in itself.”

They conclude that more data and research is required to fully assess the impact that HYPE has on its participants, including more universal data collection through an identifier such as the Ontario Education Number.

The authors of *Helping Youth Pursue Education (HYPE): Exploring the Keys to Transformation in Postsecondary Access and Retention for Youth in Underserved Neighbourhoods* are Paul Armstrong, Hayfa Jafar, Dammy Aromiwura, Janet Maher, Anthony Bertin and Huizi Zhao.