



The Students
Commission
Centre of Excellence for
Youth Engagement

SHARING THE STORIES



Amadeusz: The Look at My Life Project



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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to gain a greater understanding of how youth are engaged in Amadeusz: The Look at My Life Project. The quantitative and qualitative survey results in this report are based on a number of programs within Amadeusz.

Amadeusz used a custom survey to examine the qualities and outcomes of the program:

1. Quantitative Portion: participants were asked about resources and opportunities available to them in the jail.
2. Qualitative Portion: participants were given the opportunity to express their opinions about the program and the support in their lives.

Over 146 people from Amadeusz: The Look at My Life Project completed the custom surveys within the East, South, and Vanier closed custody facilities' programs. Overall, those involved in the programs seemed aware of the resources available to them and felt fairly positive about their futures. Youth in Amadeusz most highly rated the following outcomes¹:

- Participants feel that they have a chance to graduate from high school (4.25), go to college or university (3.91), or learn a trade (3.88).
- Participants report feeling connected to the Amadeusz staff (3.99).
- Participants reported knowing someone who could help them find and access resources and opportunities in the jail (3.55).

¹ The survey statements were scaled from 1 to 5 (1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree) and the average of their responses is reported in parentheses.

Sharing the Stories Background

The Students Commission of Canada (SCC) is the lead organization for the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (CEYE). CEYE is a network of youth, organizations, and academics focused on generating evidence and best practices on youth engagement programs, initiatives, and interventions. CEYE has developed a youth engagement definition for the Canadian context as well as a comprehensive youth engagement framework.

In 2011, the Students Commission of Canada identified a consistent gap in the capacity of Canadian youth-serving organizations to effectively tell their story. In fact, most organizations did not have the capacity or resources to rigorously evaluate their programs or compare the effectiveness of their programs with other organizations. As a result, there was a lack of Canadian evidence for youth engagement programs, initiatives, and interventions. Through support and funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the SCC launched the Sharing the Stories (StS) research and evaluation platform. StS includes reliable and valid quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools. More importantly, it includes a team of coaches and analysts who support organizations to effectively tell the story of their programs.

StS is based on a membership model. Each organization pays a relatively small fee to subscribe to the platform. They also agree to pool their data into an anonymized database so that comparisons can be made across programs using similar evaluation tools, processes, and measures. StS now has over 200 unique programs and organizations that subscribe to the platform.

Sharing the Stories Vision

Sharing the Stories is focused on building an anonymized database of information for youth, the youth sector, policy-makers, and funders. The information gleaned from the database supports:

1. **Youth Voice:** StS provides a platform for young people to have their voices heard in the programs and initiatives that work with them.
2. **Youth Sector:** StS provides a platform for organizations to learn about what's working in their programs and what might need to be improved.
3. **Policy-Makers:** StS identifies trends in the youth-serving sector and shares them with policy-makers so that policy can be informed by evidence.
4. **Funders:** The evidence generated from StS informs funders on the effectiveness of their programs.

Sharing the Stories is organized around reporting on change on Three Levels using CEYE's Youth Engagement Framework.

- The individual level focuses on reporting on changes (positive and negative) for individual youth and adult allies.
- The social level focuses on reporting on changes (positive and negative) in relationships. For example: how youth interact with other youth or how youth interact with other adult allies.

- The system level focuses on reporting on changes (positive and negative) for programs, organizations, and policy-makers. For example, how youth influence program design or how youth influence government policy.

Organization of the Report

This report will be broken down into two sections. The sections will be as follows:

Amadeusz Custom Survey-Quantitative: This section is a quantitative analysis of how youth answered the custom survey and is supported by the use of graphs to allow for a visual representation of the data.

Amadeusz Custom Survey-Qualitative: This section is a qualitative analysis of the themes and frequency in responses to the custom survey and is supported by the use of examples to highlight the voices within the data.

Quantitative Results

A hundred and forty-eight participants filled out the Amadeusz Custom Survey used to evaluate the program, resources available to the participants, and thoughts about their futures. This custom module consists of 11 quantitative questions and 5 qualitative questions. Analysis of the participants' responses will be separated by question type.

Most of the questions within the module used a 5-point scale to determine the level to which participants agreed or disagreed with the statements:

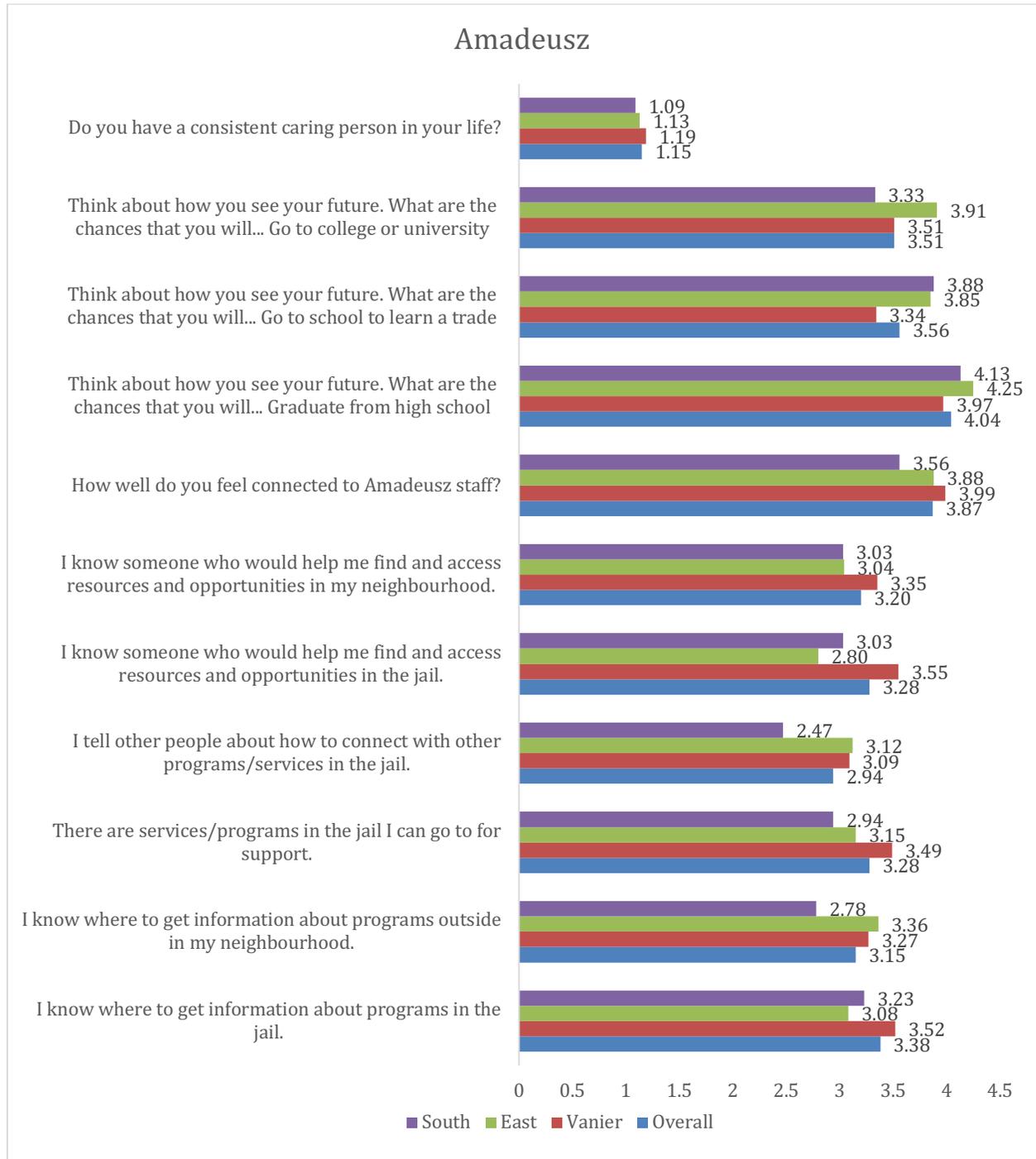
1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

Three questions within the module followed a different format. The questions that asked participants to reflect on their future and their chances (questions 8-10) asked participants to rate their beliefs on a 5-point scale using the following statements:

1. Very Low
2. Low
3. About 50/50
4. High
5. Very High

The data is illustrated through the use of graphs and key findings are highlighted to give readers a starting point from which to reflect on the data. Amadeusz: The Look at My Life Project data is broken down into the three programs; East, South, and Vanier and graphed alongside overall scores of the Amadeusz program.

Amadeusz Custom Survey-Quantitative



Takeaway: Generally speaking, youth in Amadeusz had similar scores across the programs East, South, and Vanier. Overall, the low means (almost all below 4) suggest that young people do not agree very strongly with these questions/statements. The highest ratings were seen for questions that inquired about the future. Most notably, youth feel strongly about their chances of graduating high school. Another high scoring question examined how close youth felt to the

Amadeusz staff. The lowest scoring question according to participants indicates that youth do not feel they have consistent and caring people in their lives.

Qualitative Results

The next portion of the report will break down the qualitative portion of the Amadeusz Custom Survey. The analysis will examine the themes within each question with the help of examples from the participants' responses.

Caring, & Consistent People:

Of the one hundred and twelve responses, seventy participants indicated that they had a family member who was a caring and consistent person in their lives. Other responses mentioned romantic partners, friends, religion, school, and Amadeusz staff. The following are examples of the responses given:

“My sister; she gives me positive advice about situations, she will drop everything to be there for me (emotionally), she always tries to make me feel better when I’m down”

“The mother of my child. She always motivates me to do better and be better in life”

“Amadeusz staff, Sheena”

Why Participants Want to Complete Their GED, High School, or Post-Secondary Education:

The one hundred and forty-five responses were varied. Participants mostly listed individual outcomes as their reasons as well as social and system outcomes. The following are examples of the most common subthemes of the outcomes:

Individual Outcomes: *Personal Growth and Opportunity (42)*

Forty-two participants reported having personal growth and opportunities as their motivation to continue their education. Below is a small example of the voices within the data:

“So that I can be stable and happy in life”

“To have better opportunities in life”

Social Outcomes: *Family/Caregiver (23)*

Another common theme within the responses was that family members were participants' motivation. The following are some examples of the twenty-three responses:

“I would like to have it for the purpose of jobs and to show a good example to my grandbabies”

“I want to complete my GED because I want to show myself and my family how much I can accomplish on my own. I have potential that shouldn't be wasted”

How Participating Has Helped:

Participants had a wide variety of responses as to how Amadeusz has helped them. The following are examples of the common themes including optimism, a focus on the future and a ways to cope with their present:

“Being in this program has given me a clear view of my future and has opened my eyes to all the possibilities I could embrace if I stay focused”

“It has made me open, and very open-minded. I feel very comfortable here, and want to succeed very much”

“It has made me believe in myself again. It has made me start using my brain for more positive thinking. It is helping me cope with jail life. It makes me feel like I'm doing an important thing. I'm proud of myself and so is my sister it makes me feel GREAT”

“I just started the program and the staff are very helpful with helping me be persistent about getting my GED”

What Participants like Most About Amadeusz:

Amadeusz has a number of qualities that get positive feedback from the participants. The most common themes were their relationships with helpful and caring staff and the quality of the education participants receive. The following are a few examples of the many positive comments:

“The staff are amazing very comfortable with them easier to learn”

“That no matter what you gain something from this”

“The connection between staff and students”

“It's an interesting way of learning, you learn more then just stuff bout school. Helps you open up, squash fears, in order to openly learn”

“That they don't have a problem helping inmates”

What Participants like Least About Amadeusz:

Participants involved in Amadeusz had some comments about their least favourite aspects of the program. The most common themes within the responses revolved around time and topics covered. The following quotes are examples of the most common responses:

“What I least like about the program is the waiting time to get involved in the program”

“I guess the push from the immediate start to do an assignment in co-ordinance to what our life goal may be without the comfort yet but I have the knowledge/understanding that my goal won't involve being generally acquainted with all parties.”

“It is not long enough, there is not enough time”

“I wish I had more days instead of just 2 days a week because I would be able to get more done.”

Conclusion

There were clear positive findings about the resources and the qualities of Amadeusz: The Look at My Life Project. Overall, the voices found within the data in the report illustrate that participants involved in Amadeusz have a number of positive things to say about the program and themselves. Through the program's custom survey, participants expressed their beliefs in their chances at positive futures. There were low levels of reported caring and consistent people in participants' lives, but through the qualitative and quantitative analysis, participants reported that there was support from a number of sources, either through family or connections with the Amadeusz staff.

Additional opportunities for participants to share their stories of Amadeusz: The Look at My Life Project will offer a deeper examination of the individual, social, and system level changes that may be occurring as a result of the program and the process.

References

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