

The Met Students' Action Research Project with Youth In Focus

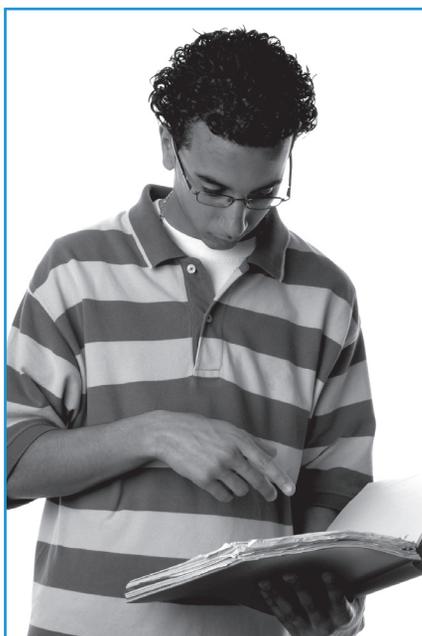
Youth in Focus staff members Jesús Sánchez and Alyssa Nelson interviewed Chris B. about the experiences and challenges of being involved in an action research project.

What was your youth-led participatory action research project?

The Met Sacramento charter school recently wrapped up a youth-led action research project with Youth In Focus. Our research question was: What types of information do students at the Met need to help meet their various needs? The goal of the project was to create a resource center at our school where students could get information about internship programs, community service projects, higher education, and health. The process took about 10 months to complete and was coordinated by Jesús Salas Sánchez, Project Manager at Youth In Focus.

How were you involved in the process?

The process started when Jesús came to the Met to work with my class to devise our research project. I was not one of the original stu-



students were taking the survey, our research team was there to make sure that students understood the survey and could ask any questions about it. After we looked at the data, I became part of the core group that carried out the planning for creating the resource center.

What were some of the project's challenges?

We first started this project as a class but quickly realized that the majority of the students were not as engaged as was needed. Many of the students in our class didn't take the project seriously, so Jesús decided to lead a smaller group of students who were really inspired and motivated to finish what we started. The group consisted of Seetha Ream-Rao, Jolene Duren, Maria Farinias, and me.

At one point we had a summer break in the middle of the data collection phase. It was kind of chaotic. The original surveys we administered before summer break had to be administered to our school's incoming students so that we could get their point of view, too.

Another challenge came when we started to analyze the data. When

dents on the project, but since I had obtained an internship with Jesús at Youth In Focus, I was still able to join the process at its beginning stages. The student research team met bi-weekly with Jesús and started figuring out the proper steps to get the project rolling. Jesús helped us develop our thoughts and ideas about the process. We created our research question and questions for a student survey so that we could learn which resources students at the Met wanted. I was also part of the group of students that collected student surveys from different classes at our school. We worked closely with the teachers so that we could administer the surveys during class time. Out of 140 students in the school, 96 took our survey. While

we looked over the survey results, we worried that about half of the students were not taking the survey seriously. We knew this because a lot of the students told us that they did not care about the survey and that they didn't fill them out properly. We felt this was a major roadblock in our project because the resources that were going to be brought into the resource center were going to be based on the survey results. Despite this concern, we used all the surveys when we analyzed our results and we believe our research gave us an accurate sense of what students wanted to see in the resource center.

How did the research help you understand what your peers wanted?

Even though some students didn't take the survey seriously, there was still the data analysis piece to carry out. Based on our analysis of the surveys, we concluded that students mostly wanted information on internships, health services, and higher

education. Based on those findings we provided flyers and pamphlets on those three subjects, and established community connections in those three areas. Currently, a new group of students is continuing the resource center work by creating more relationships with community organizations and getting more information from students about how the resource center should function.

How well do you feel the project achieved the goal of developing the resource center?

The resource center has been promoted well and runs successfully. In February 2009 the resource center was also turned into the Student Store. The Student Store has been very profitable for our school. Students feel so much more comfortable getting information from a space on campus, especially when looking up information on higher education, internships, and health services. Overall, the Met Sacramento is a better school due to the Resource Center/Student Store. It

was challenging at times but overall very beneficial to be a part of the creation of the center.

What were some other youth accomplishments?

A fellow project member, Seetha Ream-Rao, wrote and received a grant of \$5,000 from the Grants Advisory Board for Youth* to make the resource center both attractive and functional. Recently, faculty members have benefited from the resource center, using information and resources to link students to various service providers. Lastly, my fellow project member, Jolene Duren, took the lead on developing a short documentary** about our process of creating the research project and the resource center. It was a great way to wrap up our work and create a fun final product.

Author

Chris Barrick is a high school junior at The Met Sacramento High School.

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