![SanJosé Works logo]

Summary Report on the SJWorks Mentoring Pilot 1.0
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(in close collaboration with Rob Duran, Co-Director and Larry Cargnoni, Encore Fellow)
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THE MAJOR CONCLUSION

Let's start where we finished this summer. The San Jose Works Mentoring Program 1.0 demonstrated that there's a very solid "there there" -- a strong foundation upon which to build the next phases of the program. Without doubt, we have proof of concept.

ABOUT SAN JOSE WORKS

Every summer since its inception in 2015, San Jose Works has offered approximately 375 underserved high school students a paid summer internship with Silicon Valley businesses and city agencies, ranging from tech companies to libraries. This summer (2020) the program was affected by Covid-19 in two ways: participation was scaled back to approximately 175 students and all internships (except those in Community Centers) were conducted remotely. That said, Covid-19 will not have an impact on SJ Works' overall numbers (375), as they are striving to enlist another 200 students during the school year 2020-2021. Covid-19 has also served as a catalyst to innovate by employing a hybrid model for the overall program design.

Every student participant is assigned a case manager, or "coach," who guides them through a process that includes work readiness activities and access to supportive services including training workshops to help with writing a resumé and the creation of a personal budget. San Jose Works is supported by such strategic partners as the Silicon Valley Organization (aka, Chamber of Commerce), the East San José Union High School District, the Office of Economic Development and the City of San Jose's Parks, Recreation & Neighborhood Services.

THE TIMELINE

In 2019 the Mayor designated Clint Wilkins, a retired high school principal and Encore Fellow, to oversee a pilot mentoring program, it's mission to complement San Jose Works' program and add another layer of support for its student participants.

July through December: Networking and Preparation of Initial Materials. I interviewed and networked with the key players at Work2Future Foundation, SJ Works and other stakeholders in preparation for an "alpha test" within its winter program, originally scheduled to start in mid-to-late November. During the fall I started to recruit a core group of mentors. I wrote a comprehensive mentor resource guide. And put systems into place, including marketing and recruiting documents.

January through March: Recruitment of Mentors. In January I learned that the SJ Works Winter program would be cancelled, thus delaying the mentoring program's "alpha pilot." That provided me with the opportunity to focus on the further recruitment and training of mentors. By the end of January I had recruited twenty (20) mentors, a very diverse group -- older persons, younger persons (mainly from City Hall) -- ready to get to work for the Spring cohort. By the end of March, the initial group of 20 mentors had salted down to roughly ten. At the same time, I developed strong relations with Intel.

In late February I brought on board a much needed "sidekick," Rob Duran, a seasoned youth worker who agreed to volunteer part-time.   He would become an invaluable partner and co-director through all phases of the pilot. By early March we had decided to conduct the Spring Cohort in groups, and use the City's community centers as our gathering places. By mid-March, however, the Spring Cohort was cancelled due to COVID-19, leaving us with only one option for the summer: conduct the pilot online--and what turned out to be a game-changing opportunity.

April through September: Program Design, Mentor Training and Program Implementation.
In early April, Rob and I dove into the program design. We decided on the structure (four one-hour group sessions to be scheduled at the same time every week) for as many as 60 potential students.   By early April it was clear that we were well on our way to recruiting a very strong cohort of mentors, given our deepening relationship with Intel. By mid May we had nearly reached our goal of twenty mentors

We spent all of June refining and streamlining our curriculum and onboarding and training our new mentors. We had also solidified our leadership roles: Clint would focus on the mentors--their orientation, scheduling and support; Rob would reach out to the students. In early July, finally, we were presented with approximately 30 students, most of whom were "career track" (highly motivated and focused on college and career). In mid July, Larry Cargnoni, my successor and a fellow "Encore Fellow," came on board and immediately immersed himself into the program, starting out in listening mode and quickly becoming an essential and highly valued member of the leadership team. By the end of August we had completed the four workshops -- in three cohorts -- a total of 12 sessions.

In September we conducted a formal evaluation of the program, held a "Zoom graduation ceremony" with the Mayor as the keynote speaker, and started immediately into formal planning mode for the next phases. *(See Planning for the Second Year section.)*

THE PROGRAM DESIGN

We settled on the following design: four one-hour to 75 minutes sessions (or "workshops"), organized around a sequence of topics, starting with an introduction to Carol Dweck's concepts of "growth and fixed mindsets," moving to case studies in the workplace and how a mentor can be of assistance in difficult situations and ending with a session on career exploration. We also settled on the structure that would be consistent through all the sessions: an "opening community circle," which would bring all participants together around a major theme; "breakout groups" of 3-5 students and mentors; and our "closing community circle," when we would share what was brought up in the breakout groups and preview the next session. We would use Zoom technology to deliver all aspects of the program.

THE STUDENTS

Demographics. Almost all our students came from the "career track" program. That is, they are very motivated to go to college and pursue a professional career. Most of our students were Asian and Latinx, reflective of the diversity of the city and the county. Nearly all of our students were either well along in high school (i.e., rising 12th graders) or recent graduates transitioning to community and four-year colleges. All came from East San Jose Union High School District -- particularly the following high schools: Independence, Evergreen Valley, Piedmont Hills, James Lick, Andrew P. Hill, Silver Creek.

By the Numbers: We had smaller numbers than anticipated, due mainly to a lack of marketing by SJ Works' coaches. We were prepared for 60 students. We started off with a viable pool of 30 students. This salted down to 20 by the time the program began. That number would salt down further to 15 regulars. For some students it was due to a lack of a good fit with their needs as well as a change in their schedules, as week two of our program coincided with the end of summer vacation and the start of the school year.

Characteristics. These students brought their career track qualities with them to our program. They were engaged, focused, socially adept and forward-thinking. A number of them described themselves as "go-getters." Approximately ten of these go-getters formed the core of the "Student Advisory Council," led by Rob Duran and designed to get unvarnished feedback in real time. These go-getters did not disappoint: they were punctual, reliable and respectful. In brief, they fit the definition of what is known as "critical friends." Throughout our four sessions, mentors picked up on their initiative and critical thinking skills, many "pleasantly surprised" by their positive and active engagement.

THE MENTORS

Demographics. During our orientation in July, we had a total eighteen mentors -- six from the aborted Spring Cohort and twelve from Intel. Roughly a third were "seniors" (i.e., over fifty, which is "Gen2Gen" territory). About sixty-percent of our mentor corps were "mid-career," and one in his first year out of college. Most of our Intel mentors were trained engineers, although a

good number had evolved into other areas of the business, especially marketing and management. By the time the program started we were down to fifteen. Three mentors dropped out for a variety of reasons, but all expressed interest in participating in the future.

What the Mentors Brought to the Pilot. Nearly all of our mentors were "naturals." That is, they had the social skills, the empathy and the authenticity needed to work effectively with teenagers, bringing a rich motherlode of professional and life experience, which they shared quite openly. One surprise to our students: they learned first-hand that nearly all of our mentors' career trajectories were not linear. That is, they "ended up" in jobs they hadn't quite anticipated when they started out. This very powerful fact was not lost on our students, just one example of how natural was the relationship of corporate mentors with these bright and motivated teenagers!

What the Mentors Derived from the Pilot. Nearly all of our mentors were on a rather steep learning curve as the program evolved. They were especially skillful in adapting to our students' individual personalities and temperaments. As they got to know the students better, they became increasingly more comfortable in sharing their own struggles and challenges. They also became more comfortable in being able to wait patiently enough through awkward moments of silence for the students to respond. They became increasingly skillful in the art of self-disclosure, and in so doing they built a natural sense of trust and confidence. As the sessions evolved, so did they. For many, their mentoring days are before them.

About the Preparation of Mentors. We had originally scheduled two, possibly three one-hour orientation sessions to prepare the mentors for the pilot. It turned out that it took six or seven sessions. I believe we can streamline this orientation to three to four sessions in future pilots and programs. The key issue: we need to work with mentors until they are knowledgeable enough of the program content and have a good sense of self-confidence.


ASSESSMENT

The Raw Data. We conducted much of our assessment in real time, every week, through regular feedback with the Student Advisory Council. This gave us critical "program data." And we conducted a formal evaluation during the fourth and final session using Zoom "Forms," with a focus on "student data." We measured for part of what social scientists call "agency." We asked the students four "simple" questions:
  ● Have you developed any new skills? yes, no, maybe;
  ● Have you developed greater self-confidence? yes, no, maybe;
  ● Do you now have greater opportunities? yes, no, maybe.
  ● Would you recommend this program to others? yes, no, maybe.

Our results were very encouraging:
  ● Regarding new skills? Yes: 11; No: 4; and Maybe: 1
  ● Regarding self-confidence? Yes: 15; No: 1; Maybe: 0
  ● Regarding greater opportunities? Yes: 13; No: 2; Maybe: 1
  ● Regarding recommending the program: Yes: 13; No; 0; Maybe 3

Click on google doc for results and a graph.
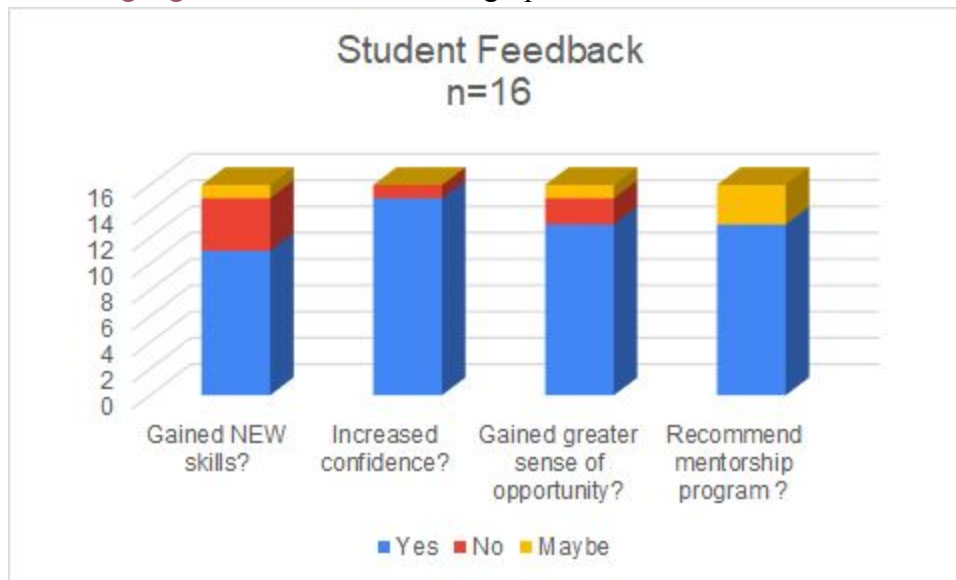
We also picked up along the way important "mentor data," asking them the same questions, receiving mostly narrative answers, offering us very useful context and suggestions. Again, consult google doc, especially the second tab.

Program Strengths. The bulk of our mentoring took place in our breakout groups. Often there were two mentors and two students to a "Zoom Room." In some cases we had more mentors than students, which often turned out to be especially effective. We tried on for size a number of configurations in these relationships, breaking them up both randomly and intentionally. Mentors were able to overcome their initial insecurities in graduated steps, listening to and participating with their colleagues. Students were able to get perspective from more than one adult as well as another student. Over time, they all seemed to become more comfortable with their roles. This design worked well for both mentors and students.

Utilizing the Zoom platform worked extraordinarily well. We were able to set the major themes for a session in our "opening community circle," conduct the essence of mentoring in our "breakout groups and draw conclusions and some closure in our "closing community circle."

One Important Structural Flaw. We lacked enough time for all students to build real rapport with mentors, let alone getting to meet all mentors. We also were not crisp enough on our objectives at the start of the program, leaving some students wondering where we were heading. One student remarked, "The program felt rushed and unclear in the beginning but after the second session, offered much more consistent and clearly defined objectives." The structural flaw is that we rushed into content before fully "enrolling" the students and being more thorough with the time-consuming tasks of just getting familiar with each other.

The Major Take-away. Being able to conduct all our business online enabled us to overcome a whole host of hurdles and offered us extraordinary organizational and time-saving efficiencies, most noteworthy the recruitment, screening, assessing and onboarding of mentors. There is simply no comparison with the cumbersome administrative tasks of arranging for on site meetings for the orientation of mentors, let alone the herculean tasks of finding the times and places for mentors and students to meet once the mentors have been onboarded.

As transformational as was our ability to overcome these organizational hurdles, the program design--particularly the implementation of group work--added even greater value. As every high school educator or youth development worker knows, teenagers are most influenced (for better or worse) in groups. And this is buttressed by social science research.) Group work offered us even more benefits: particularly in helping us make for better matching of individual mentors and individual students post pilot. In brief, the four group sessions positioned the mentors, the students and the program itself for whatever might come next. The best metaphor for the whole experience? A "launching pad.

KEY LEARNINGS

What students learned. The students didn't have a sense of clarity about the program (not to mention that none knew it even existed) about what the mentor program was all about. They only really learned about it once we were able to contact them directly. The disadvantage of this communication gap: this reduced our numbers. The advantage: the students we did enroll were highly motivated, curious and self-starters, qualities that proved invaluable in receiving their feedback, especially in real time. *(See the "Students" section of this report.)*

Student "learnings" were about as varied as the number of students themselves, but some patterns emerged. They seemed to learn how helpful it was to hear others' experiences, especially the mentors first, as a catalyst for sharing their own experiences. This was true for the more reticent students as well as the more outgoing students. As Rob and I expected, it took until the third and fourth sessions for the students to truly open up. The result: most students felt that the program increased their self-confidence in talking to new people, including and especially adults. Most saw the expedient benefits of knowing people at Intel, how our Intel mentors could help them in their own networking and career journeys.

What students learned in their own voices. Here is a sampling of student observations:.

"As a student, I gained a greater sense of opportunity because I was able to meet many great mentors throughout these past 4 weeks and I am connected with some of them so I hope I could use this as an opportunity to further learn and gain more wisdom from them."

"In talking with different mentors, I feel I am much more prepared for the future and I have a decent understanding of what I want for my future."

"Quite frankly I'm a semi-introvert so I always push myself to meet new people and this was a great practice experience to do so."

The natural power of our stories. Mentors have stories. Students have stories. Program leaders have stories. Some of the most memorable moments from the program were in the opportunities for us to share our stories, both major and minor. To aid in this experience we offered all participants a simple story structure to follow: some form of challenge, followed by a response or struggle, followed still by a resolution. Put in this format, and providing students and mentors alike a safe and supportive environment -- yielded powerful moments and a common set of experiences upon which to build strong mentor/student relationships.

The Power of Zoom. Simply put, Zoom is an ideal platform for group work. Moreover, we were impressed with how easy it is to perform such organizational tasks as scheduling meetings, how effective it is in sharing resources such as videos, surveys, documents and slides and how quickly a teacher/facilitator can break students into and out of sub-groups. One further benefit: with students' videos turned on, how easy it is to track their level of engagement and "body language"

"No champion, no change." This is a maxim used by social entrepreneurs, and nowhere is it more apt than in building our mentoring program. Our partnership would never have become so fruitful had we not been able to rely on an Intel employee, Diana Wu, a beneficiary of mentoring herself when she grew up in New York City and who took it upon herself to "pay it forward."

"Less is more." Robert Duran and I learned a lot on our seven-month journey together, and most noteworthy among them was our tendency to over-engineer our program. Our early drafts of each session were essentially "scripts" for mentors to follow. By the time we approached our first session, however, we had stripped away a lot of the script, leaving in its place more general guidelines for the mentors to use at their discretion. By the time we got into the program itself, we were streamlining our instructions even further, thus creating a more healthy balance of structure and spontaneity. One more observation: as we streamlined our instructions, we needed to increase the amount of time we spent with the mentors in orientation.

PLANNING FOR THE SECOND YEAR

Leadership of New Programs: Larry Cargnoni to lead, calling upon Clint and Rob in support

1. "Refine and Scale" the alpha pilot into a beta test for forty CTE students, starting in mid-November and running through January. It most likely will be delivered in six installments instead of four and be far more integrated into SJ Works program itself.

2. Design and implement a pilot program for ten PRNS kids and ten mentors, led by Clint Wilkins and Rob Duran (as volunteers).

3. Create a "One-on-One" mentoring program for those students in the alpha pilot for the current school year. (Participating students suggest a hybrid mode, featuring online sessions and some person-to-person contact.

Notes on Corporate Strategy for the Beta Test and PRNS Alpha Pilot. We only need to expand on our partnership with Intel and add two other corporations. I recommend HPE (a natural for Larry and already a relationship with SJ Works) and BoA (already a relationship with SJ Works). I also recommend we seek out City Hall personnel, especially for PRNS.

Administrative, Logistical and Teaching Materials:

Administrative Tools Created (to be used as the foundation for future programs)
- *Catalogue of Resources and Templates* (e.g., stock emails, correspondence, etc.)
- *Catalogue of "Curricular Materials"* -- Slides, study guides, notes, etc.
- *Catalogue Mentoring Policies & Procedures for Onboarding and Orientation* (e.g., fingerprinting at City Hall; Volunteer Code of Ethics, Volunteer Participation Document, Benevity accounts)
- *The Mentor Resources Handbook* (written by Clint Wilkins)

Some Important Strategic Suggestions:

Create a SJ Works Website, where a mentoring community can be built, logistics assigned and all manner of resources made readily available.

Create a Greater Capacity for Sustainability & Continuity. I have volunteered to gather a small team of older volunteers -- let's call them a "Sustainability Corps"-- to be entrusted with ensuring the program's sustainability and continuity after Larry Cognoni departs in June, 2021.

Various Tactical Suggestions:

Regarding the curriculum:

- Provide students and mentors with more background and prep material
- Provide skill development workshops
- Spend more time unpacking various "career trajectories" of the mentors
- Revise how we introduce growth mindset and refine how it is a "throughline"

Making Connections:

- Conduct speed dating for students and mentors to get to know one another before creating one-on-one relationships based on mutual interests.
- Create a "network mixer," perhaps along the lines of speed dating.
- Put students in breakout groups based on interests