



A Positive Force for Change: Live Different's Canadian Schools Program

Live Different Program Evaluation
By Nicolette Little
in collaboration with Live Different
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About the Evaluator and Author

Nicolette Little is a PhD student in York University's Communication and Culture graduate program. She is also an education-sector professional, with seven years' teaching and curriculum review experience at the post-secondary level, and published author.

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Background

Summer 2016 marks the inception of this collaborative Program Evaluation process between youth development organization Live Different and Nicolette Little, a PhD student from York University, education sector professional and writer. Nicolette and Live Different's comprehensive proposal for a program evaluation was submitted to York University's Knowledge Mobilization Unit with great success. This program evaluation's goals include assessing the success and usefulness of Live Different's school presentations, as well as establishing evaluation tools that can be used by Live Different going forward, so that the organization might continue to assess its impact and identify areas for growth.

Methods

The Author met with Live Different's Jenn Digiandomenico, Program Development, and Ryan Wood, Director of Canadian Programs, November through December of 2016 to identify the organization's program evaluation needs and goals, and develop a survey for students and teachers at the schools in which Live Different presents.

Survey questions were delivered via text message, to align with 21st-century students' proficiency with, and preference for, mobile technology. The survey required that participants identify themselves as either faculty or student. Questions tailored to the participant's chosen identification followed. A second follow-up survey was also sent to teachers who noted their willingness to participate further.

A total of 307 students' responses, received between March and April of 2017, are considered. The survey was implemented in March and report-writing began in April.

The analysis of teachers' responses began later, in May 2017, allowing for more data collection prior to writing. The Author included all teachers' responses up to this date, since a rigidly defined sampling period does not enhance validity in this case. 114 teachers' responses are included.

For the follow-up teachers' survey, only 11 responses were received. All 11 responses were explored for this report.

This project leaves tools for program data collection, in the form of the above-mentioned digital surveys, in Live Different's hands.

The Author would be happy to work with Live Different again in the future, as needed, on additional program assessment development and/or report creation initiatives.

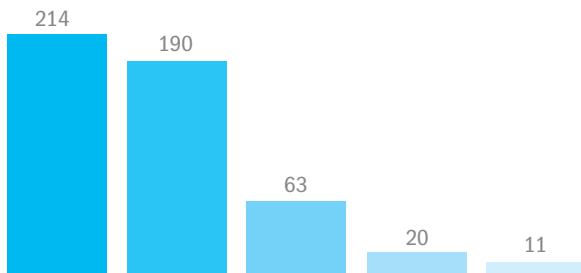


Students' Responses

General

Overall, Live Different's presentation is very well received by high school students. It is considered dynamic, helpful and even transformative. Ninety-five per cent of students (290 out of 307) responded positively that the presentation was "life changing," "useful for my peer group" or "engaging and exciting." The presentation's usefulness, in fact, was the point most commonly mentioned by students.

Student Perceptions: The presentation and its messages



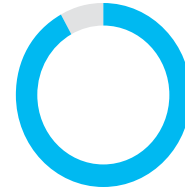
The great number of positive student responses contrasts with the very low number of responses indicating dissatisfaction. Only 20 students (7%) indicated they found the presentation "boring," while 11 (4%) found its content to be irrelevant or not useful for their peer group. If Live Different were to leave their current program unchanged, they could count on a high degree of student interest, engagement and benefit.

Effectiveness of Messaging

Live Different's goals include instilling attitudes of empathy, kindness and helpfulness in youth. Thus, in the program evaluation, we asked students to agree or disagree with the following statements: After the Live Different presentation...

1. I better understand what "empathy" is,
2. I am more aware of how my actions can hurt or help others,
3. I can better identify friends who may be facing trouble or sadness,
4. I am more inclined to take the time to listen to a friend who needs to talk, or who needs my support.

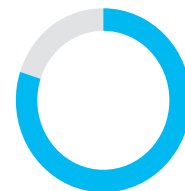
Of the 307 student respondents, 281 (92%) agreed that they better understand the concept of empathy, 249 (81%), that they are more aware of how their actions can hurt others, and 246 (80%), that they are better able to identify peers facing trouble or sadness. Importantly, 256 (83%) would be more inclined to take the time to listen to a friend who needs to talk, or who needs help. Students overwhelmingly report being more aware of others' feelings, as well as more willing – and better able – to support friends in need after the presentation.



92% agreed that they better understand the concept of empathy



81% agreed that they are more aware of how their actions can hurt others



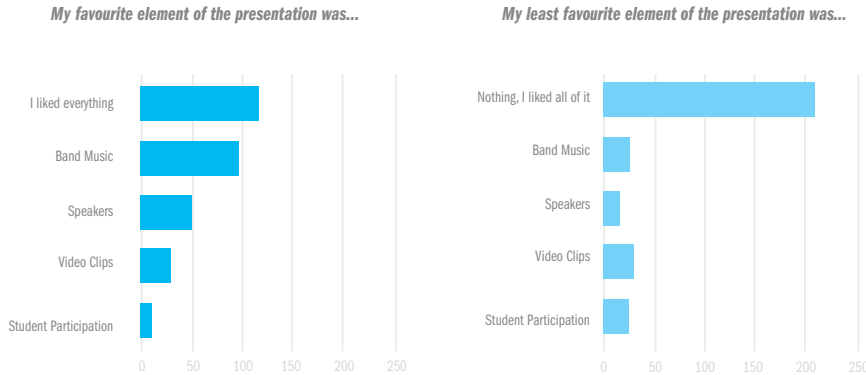
80% agree that they are better able to identify peers facing trouble or sadness



83% would be more inclined to take the time to listen to a friend who needs to talk, or who needs help

Students' Preferences

Students were asked to identify their “favourite” and “least favourite” elements of the presentation. Their responses are compared in the following charts:



First, it should be noted that a majority of students “liked everything” about the presentation, indicating no particular favourite or least favourite aspect (left-hand column). If we focus on the remaining students who specified favourite/least favourite aspects, however, the band music and speakers were clear favourites, while students liked and disliked the video clips in fairly equal proportion. More students disliked than liked the opportunities for student participation.

Keeping in mind the fact that the majority of students enjoyed the presentation exactly “as is,” Live Different may nonetheless be well-served by increasing time allocated to the band and reducing opportunities for student involvement. Some reduction in the number and/or length of video clips shown may also be helpful. To gain a more nuanced understanding of students’ presentation preferences, the Author recommends including a “comments box” in future surveys, so that students may elaborate on their selections for this section. (e.g. if a student indicates he/she did not enjoy the band, he/she therefore has the opportunity to explain why)

91% of male respondents reported feeling more aware of friends who may be in need of support after the presentation, as opposed to only 81% of female respondents.

While students overall report Live Different's presentation is helpful and impactful, students from low-income backgrounds find it particularly impactful.

Gender

Of 307 students, 202 (65%) respondents identified themselves as being female, 75 (25%), as male, and 15 (5%), "Other." Another 15 (5%) students either checked "prefer not to say," or left the answer blank. Since nearly three times more female than male students responded to this survey, Live Different may want to consider ways to improve levels of male students' survey engagement.



*5% of students checked "prefer not to say" or left the answer blank

While fewer male students responded, those who did show slightly more positive responses on the "empathy" questions (survey questions one through three). For example, 91% of male respondents reported feeling more aware of friends who may be in need of support after the presentation, as opposed to only 81% of female respondents. Similarly, 89% of male students report being more willing to listen to a friend in need, in comparison to 88% of female respondents. Nonetheless, these results are close enough that we can determine that both male and female students responded well to Live Different's presentations.

Where a stronger gender divide does appear, however, is amongst students who identified as "Other." In this category, only 60% felt better able to identify friends in need, or more willing to listen or give their time to a friend who needed support. This average reporting of enhanced social awareness and engagement contrasts with the positive reports by female and male-identifying students.

Family Income

Of the 307 students who responded, 95 (31%) indicated that, to their knowledge, their family struggled with income issues. The vast majority of these 95 students (95%) agreed or strongly agreed that Live Different's presentation positively impacted their understanding of what "empathy" is, and deemed this presentation "life changing," "useful for my peer group" and/or "engaging and exciting." Another 88 students (93%) of the students from low-income families emphasized that the presentation was important for students to see (88, or 93%).

These numbers compare with the fact that, in the total population of 307 surveyed students, 284 (92%) agreed or strongly agreed that the presentation helped them understand empathy better, 281 (91%) felt that it was important for students to see, and 290 (94%) described the presentation as "life changing," "useful for my peer group" and/or "engaging and exciting."

These figures suggest a high satisfaction and enjoyment rate amongst students who self-identify as coming from low-income families. While students overall report Live Different's presentation is helpful and impactful, students from low-income backgrounds find it particularly so.

Trickle-Down Effect

In response to the question, “How likely are you to share what you learned from Live Different’s presentation with friends and family,” 231 (75%) of the surveyed students indicated that they were likely or very likely to do so.

If a good number of students believe they will share Live Different’s teachings with others, then a trickle-down effect may be assumed. It is likely that the presentation’s helpful and positive messaging reaches beyond the walls of each host school, and into the communities in which they are located.

75% of the students indicated they were likely or very likely to share what they learned from Live Different’s presentation with friends and family.



Qualitative Responses

Students were given the opportunity to provide additional feedback about how the Live Different presentation “made a difference” for them. Students’ responses indicate improved levels of awareness of how their actions can impact others, and a dedication to being more sensitive to others’ feelings and needs.

One student, for example, notes that the presentation has improved her “ability to empathize with others in a positive way,” while another comments that she has “learned how to really listen to others.” Yet another student notes that, while she is typically a “closed off person,” she began opening up to her friends more after the presentation and, in so doing, “realized I’m not alone.” Male respondents indicate similar advancement, post-presentation: for example, one comments that his “sense of empathy as a whole” has improved, making him “now feel more inclined to help others, and to let them know I am there for them.” Student commentary about how Live Different has impacted students’ development is overwhelmingly positive and appreciative.

Teachers' Responses

Live Different: An effective conveyer of messaging

Teachers at the host schools report that Live Different's presentation resonates with students, and effectively conveys the importance of students' showing empathy and compassion to peers. In fact, out of 114 teachers surveyed, 93% agreed or strongly agreed that Live Different's messaging resonated with students, and 99%, that the importance of empathy, compassion and active listening were effectively conveyed to students. These numbers – along with the fact that no teachers “disagreed” in the above-mentioned areas – indicate an extremely high sense among teachers that the Live Different presentation is effective and important for students.



93% of teachers agreed that Live Different's messaging resonated with students.



99% of teachers agreed that the importance of empathy, compassion and active listening were effectively conveyed to students.

Active Listening: A popular theme

Teacher's unanimously agreed that active listening is an important tool for students to develop, and thus a good selection for Live Different's 2016-2017 theme.

Schools in Lower Income Neighbourhoods

Teachers were asked to report whether they deemed their school to be in a low-income area. 45 teachers located their school in such an area, and of these teachers, 40 (88%) felt the presentation resonated well with students and 44 (98%) felt it effectively taught what empathy is. This contrasts with the fact that, of the 69 teachers who did not locate their schools in low income areas, 96% deemed the presentation resonant for students, and 100% agreed that it effectively conveyed the importance of empathy. Evidently, teachers in low-income neighbourhoods did not feel as strongly that the presentation resonated with their students. Specific recommendations for presentation improvement made by these teachers include:

1. *Include more ethnically and racially diverse speakers in the presentation,*
2. *Include more in-class "pre-work" leading up to the presentation,*
3. *Have teachers do workshops with their kids in classes following the presentation.*

While these teachers indicated lower levels of student engagement and/or messaging resonance, it is important to recognize that the eightieth-percentile numbers indicate teachers identifying their schools as low-income still largely saw the presentation as resonant. Also, as previously discussed, students who self-identified as coming from lower-income families indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the presentation.

Teachers' Satisfaction

Eighty-eight per cent of teacher respondents indicated they were deeply satisfied with Live Different's presentation. While satisfaction rates are excellent, it should be noted that there was again some difference between teachers who identified their school as being in "low-income" neighbourhoods and those who did not.

Teachers who did not identify their school as being in a "low-income" neighbourhood indicated greatest levels of satisfaction with Live Different's presentation.

Overall, less satisfaction, impact and resonance was seen by teachers in low-income neighbourhood schools.

Once again, overall satisfaction with Live Different's presentation, however, was high: While teachers from schools in lower income areas were slightly "less impressed," Live Different should remain confident in their messaging's delivery, impact and importance – given the fact that lower-income schools' teachers still indicate a first-class (80%) satisfaction rate.



Teachers' Follow-Up Survey Responses

Only 11 teachers have completed the follow-up survey to date, and Live Different may consider sending out reminder emails, going forward, to heighten engagement. All 11 respondents indicated their school's culture had improved, either by becoming more understanding, caring, empathetic or advocacy-oriented, or some combination of the above, following the presentation. Seven of the 11 respondents indicated this positive shift lasted well after the presentation date.

Teachers offered comments of which Live Different should be proud: notably, that the presentation was “a powerful and moving” one in which “students were very engaged,” and that teachers “Wish we had the opportunity to have your team twice a year.” One teacher noted, “great music, awesome speakers,” while another said, “I think your presentation was terrific.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

Live Different's presentation is a powerful and dynamic one for high school students, typically geared around the importance of being empathetic towards those around us, actively listening to friends in need, and choosing kindness and non-judgement in our approach to others.

Student and teacher surveys indicate this presentation is highly successful at conveying the above-mentioned messages, and that the impacts of Live Different's presentation are likely felt in the broader community, as students adopt kinder attitudes towards others and share Live Different's messages more broadly, with friends and family.


While Live Different's current presentation model is clearly a success, the organization would do well to take the following recommendations into account.

Live Different should:

1. *Keep a close eye on qualitative responses from teachers, and especially those who identify their school as being located in a low-income neighbourhood. Taking these teachers' feedback into account can help raise satisfaction rates amongst teachers in this category.*
2. *Reduce the volume for the band's music, and ensure sound equipment produces a clear sound that is more balanced between instruments (overly loud) and vocals (hard to hear).¹*
3. *Consider ways of increasing male students' survey participation, as well as ways the presentation can be made more impactful for students who do not identify as female or male.*
4. *Allot more presentation time to the band and speakers, and a little less for videos and opportunities for student participation.*
5. *Provide teachers with more/stronger preparatory materials with which to engage students in weeks leading up to the presentation.*
6. *Responses indicate that some teachers were not aware of post-presentation workshop materials that Live Different provides. Live Different should improve communication to educators of Live Different's teacher resources, to ensure Live Different's messaging makes a lasting impact on students.*



¹ This was a comment that appeared frequently on the teachers' survey (#1).



Congratulations on a job well done, Live Different! You are making a difference to students and their communities.

Evaluator/Author Contact

Nicolette Little, the evaluator and author, may be contacted for further curriculum development, research or communications initiatives at nicolette.little@ucalgary or wordsbynic@gmail.com. Thank you.



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