



Urban Future Leaders of the World (uFLOW)
Chicago, Illinois, USA

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Urban Future Leaders of the World Fact Sheet

Mission

The Urban Future Leaders of the World (uFLOW) Program aims to empower underserved youth to create their own community service projects. These youth will receive 1-on-1 mentorship, resources, and funding to implement their service projects. By tackling the problems facing their own neighborhood, these youth will not only improve their community, but will also develop leadership & entrepreneurial skills, gain a sense of belonging and self esteem, and commit to creating positive change in their community.

Overview

The “Urban Future Leaders of the World” Program (uFLOW) was founded in 2008 to provide a new and innovative way to tackle the complex problems facing America’s most troubled communities. Founded by a group of medical students enrolled in the University of Illinois-Chicago's Urban Medicine Program, uFLOW rested on the premise that residents of a community are best situated to identify the problems in their own community. The founders also recognized the insight and energy that youth possess, and thus the uFLOW approach focused on empowering youth to tackle their own community problems. This approach assured that each youth led project would both contribute to improving the community, and also help increase the youth's confidence, leadership skills, and commitment to their community.

Understanding that youth have choices, and that almost a million youth are drawn to gangs, uFLOW was designed to be FUN and exciting for the students. The goal was to blend service and fun. Carefully placed incentives would draw the students into the program. Micro-stipends for students, raffles, celebrity speakers, entertainment events, a team format to promote a sense of belonging, and a youth targeted marketing plan would be key drivers to draw youth to the program. The name of the program (“uFLOW”), the logo, and the program activities were all youth driven and selected by students.

uFLOW rests on blending the ideas of the youth with the experience and project management skills of volunteer mentors in the community. These mentors help students implement their ideas, but also provide general guidance to the students. uFLOW, which started on the west side of Chicago, enrolls mentors from all across the Chicago area. These mentors have quickly seen themselves as “mentors with a cause”, as are guiding youth to create meaningful projects all across Chicago. uFLOW will expand across Chicago and to other Midwest states in the next year, and plans to expand nationally within 5 years.

Model

uFLOW students are organized into ‘teams’. The prototypical uFLOW team consists of 40 high school students from one partner high school (10 students in each grade 9-12). uFLOW students are recruited in grade 9 by completing a short [application](#). Each grade 9 student selected will gradually progress through high school in a 4 year uFLOW curriculum where they will gain more responsibility each year. By their senior year of high school they will serve as a junior mentor to the new grade 9’s. Each team will meet for a two-hour event every other Saturday for 6 months throughout the school year. The youth spend one hour participating in a group entertainment event such as bowling or playing pool, and one hour meeting with their mentor one-on-one to discuss their project.



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Results

uFLOW launched a pilot program of 10 students from Crane and Powerhouse High School in 2009/2010. The results were encouraging as the students were enthusiastic about the program. In fact, 100% of the kids in the program strongly agreed that the program impacted their lives openly inquiring on how they can continue to be more involved. Students have commented positively with quotes such as "I would have been just like everyone else, but now I want to grow my organization", and "I never thought I could do something like this".

Eight out of these ten students will be returning in 2010/2011 to continue in the program. Some of the projects that students created include:

- An after-school program focusing on nutrition and exercise
- A brothers and sisters against violence that educates parents and children to avoid destructive behavior
- A regular movie night centered around movies with a positive message
- An after-school dance program
- A self esteem project for girls that especially focuses on the prevention of teen pregnancy
- A basketball tournament to promote violence prevention
- A set of 3 paintings to promote multi-culturalism and peace

uFLOW will continue to rigorously and formally assess the progress of both the students in the program, and the projects they create in their community.

Growth Strategy

Once uFLOW proves the success of the 4 year curriculum, uFLOW plans to expand relatively quickly across the nation with a franchise like growth model. This viral expansion model will allow any individual or organization to start their own uFLOW team with minimal commitment. Generally, the organization or individual will simply have to follow the uFLOW expansion manual with the support of central uFLOW headquarters. The main tasks the individual will have to follow include partnering with a local high school, recruiting a group of students, and recruiting a group of volunteers.

Executive Team

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*** For complete team biographies and other organizational information, please visit <http://www.uflow.org/about>*