

Bright Futures: Cookie Cart Youth Program

Cookie Cart began with a simple idea: North Minneapolis teenagers needed a safe and engaging place to spend their time. The streets offered young people crime, violence, and gang involvement, but one woman, Sister Jean Thuerauf, decided to offer North Minneapolis teens something different. In 1988, Sister Jean's vision for a safe, secure, creative, and engaging space for North Minneapolis' youth was



formalized and registered as Cookie Cart, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Today, Cookie Cart provides lasting and meaningful work, life, and leadership skills to 15 to 17 year olds through hands-on experience and training in an urban, nonprofit bakery. In 2016, Cookie Cart will serve 200 teens, who will participate in more than 30,000 hours of hands-on work and classroom experience.

The youth development program of Cookie Cart focuses on 5 outcomes: future goal orientation, interpersonal skills, critical thinking skills, employment readiness skills, and the ability to connect to new communities. These outcomes are built through both experiential learning – in which Cookie Cart youth employees learn foundational job skills through cookie production in the bakery program – and classroom learning. The curriculum used in the classroom learning is concentrated on three key areas: Foundation, Leadership, and Bright Futures. In the Foundations section, new employees are provided with the tools they need to succeed in their first paid job including customer service, dealing with conflict, and sales. The Leadership curriculum focuses on peer leadership, critical thinking, and advanced communication. Lastly, in order to prepare Cookie Cart youth employees for their next job, the Bright Futures courses hone the skills and interests they've developed at Cookie Cart to assist with all aspects of the job search including resume writing, job applications, and mock interviews.

In addition to this curriculum, youth employees have the opportunity to interact with community members through financial literacy workshops and credential learning. In partnership with area financial institutions, these workshops cover the essential building blocks of personal finance: budgeting and saving, checking accounts, and personal credit, which are critical for teens who have the new responsibility of a paycheck. Cookie Cart is proud to offer teens the chance to take the National Career Readiness Certification and ServSafe Food Handlers Certification, as a part of credential learning. Both certifications show prospective employers that a teen has the foundational skills necessary to be successful in the workplace.



For more information about Cookie Cart, contact tubich@cookiecart.org. Photo credits: John Schaidler & [Paul Vincent](#).