GRIPTAPE

YOUTH DRIVING LEARNING

GripTape is an organization built around a simple yet radical premise: Young people are hungry for and fully capable of leading their own learning. Everyday, we meet this demand by offering teenagers the resources, respect, and authority to pursue their learning interests and develop agency.

WHAT DO YOUTH WANT?
Young people are demanding more opportunities for ownership and engagement in their learning. They overwhelmingly want opportunities to design and direct it, and believe that doing so will significantly advance their development. But far too many of them—especially youth without access to the rich learning opportunities available to their more resourced peers—find their learning experiences disempowering and passive. Indeed, high school students say their education experience fails to connect to their lives in meaningful, authentic ways, leaving them disinterested and unchallenged. Just one-third of 10th–12th graders report feeling engaged with school.

At GripTape, we flip this problem on its head. Here, youth are the active drivers of their learning, pursuing their passions aligned with their visions of success. And they are doing so at levels often thought by adults to be impossible. The youth at GripTape are thinking big, envisioning a future in which youth-driven learning is a powerful force, playing a greater role in their development than formal learning environments—a world where all young people have the opportunity to pursue their own interests, and where youth demand and are afforded respect for their own learning passions.

HOW DO WE WORK?
We start by asking teenagers, “What are you interested in learning? Passionate about? And why does this matter to your success?,” and then immediately provide them complete decision-making authority over the design, implementation, and assessment of their learning. To date, more than 400 young people have pursued music, hardware and software design, medicine, engineering, social ventures, business, and countless other interests.

The results are incredible. Teenagers are deeply engaged in learning, developing their agency, and loving it.

Beyond their satisfaction, youth are developing agency—the mindsets (e.g., confidence, perseverance), learner skills (e.g., goal-setting, forethought, self-regulation, self-reflection), and behaviors (e.g., seizing and creating new learning opportunities) critical for success in our world.

agency: a critically important component to a successful transition to adulthood, and defined as the ability to make intentional choices and take an active role in the course of one’s learning.

> 100% OF YOUTH ENJOYED THE EXPERIENCE
> 77% OF NEW YOUTH ARE BEING RECRUITED BY ALUMNI
> 100% OF YOUTH HAVE GREATER SELF-CONFIDENCE AND BELIEVE THAT THEY CAN ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING WITH HARD WORK
> 90% OF YOUTH HAVE GAINED ADDITIONAL LEARNER SKILLS
> 97% OF YOUTH HAVE SEIZED A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY THAT THEY WOULD HAVE PREVIOUSLY IGNORED

We support them with full decision-making authority, grants up to $500, and a Champion who provides belief, interest, and encouragement without advice or direction.

“I loved this! I did it with time that I didn’t even know I had. It made me feel like I am a lot more in control of my future.”
GRIPTAPE YOUTH
HOW ARE WE ACCOUNTABLE?

We now have a multi-year track record of taking big, radical ideas—ones often perceived by others as unrealistic or unattainable—and propelling them from conceptualization to results. The model we use is powerful and scalable.

We have married lean startup methodology and user-centered design to lead a process of constant learning and research. We conduct at least three rapid, iterative learning cycles per year to prototype and test our practices, supports, and model so that we are constantly strengthening youth learner agency and self-directed learning. Our approaches, and the questions and variables that we test, continuously evolve based on data-driven insights and learning from previous cycles.

Beyond programming and processes, we have built an organization and broader effort truly led by youth. The Youth Leadership Board (part of our governing body), Youth Leaders (employees), and program alumni are principally responsible for the direction of the organization and design of our programs and opportunities. Multiple times annually, the young people gather and lead work sessions over several days to identify and analyze growth opportunities, design and prototype solutions, and test and iterate new approaches.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Young people are driving the efforts of GripTape forward all across the country. We know that when youth experience radical levels of learner agency and self-direction, their mindsets, skills, and behaviors change profoundly. Notably, they go on to demand, seize, and create more opportunities to drive their learning. And they activate other young people, and in so doing, seed and grow youth agency.

We will continue to join young people in leveraging this energy by scaling self-directed learning opportunities. We will expand our reach, make financial resources directly available to more youth, and help young people amplify their voices and learning actions. We will flip the current default acceptance of adult-driven and guided learning as the “only game in town.” We imagine a world where youth invent, design, and drive their learning, actively and passionately constructing their paths to success, and we will continue to work tirelessly to realize this vision.

READY TO JOIN US?

Each and every day, GripTape is giving young people the traction they need to take control of their own learning, choose their purposes, and achieve their full potential. Does this mission light up your mind, stir something in your heart? Join us! From young people, to volunteers, to partners and staff, we are an energetic and passionate team. Are you a funder, a researcher, someone who is inspired to ignite the interests and passions of our youth? Join our effort. We want to hear from you, right here—info@griptape.org

“GripTape gives her a new way of thinking of herself. Shows her it can be done, and you can do it. GripTape solidified that ‘the world is her oyster and she just needs to go and get it.”

GRIPTAPE PARENT

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