

## **ConnCAT Programs**

Founded in 2011 as an affiliate of the National Center for Arts & Technology, the Connecticut Center for Arts and Technology (ConnCAT) mission is to *“inspire, motivate and prepare youth and adults for educational and career advancement through after-school arts and job training programming.”* With this mission in mind, key goals are to prepare youth and adults for the development of viable careers, life skills with (ideally) a desired job placement.

### **Youth and Adult Programs**

For the most part, ConnCAT programs are divided into program options for youth and adults.

#### **Youth Programs**

1. After-school Program
2. Youth Summer Program

#### **Adult Programs**

1. Culinary Arts Program
2. Medical Billing & Coding Program
3. Phlebotomy Technician Program

## **Career & Workforce Enrichment**

ConnCAT also offers career & workforce enrichment programming. These programs engage participants in life skills and career readiness activities.

1. Career Pathways Program
2. Job Club Program

### **An Overview: Evaluation and Assessment**

In March 2020, the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven commissioned the implementation of an evaluation and assessment of ConnCAT programs. The evaluation and assessment is to provide a report on the overall impact of ConnCAT on individual and institutional beneficiaries of ConnCAT programming since it's founding in 2011. In addition, the evaluation and assessment is to explicate the evolution of the ConnCAT program over the past eight years with respect to programmatic successes, challenges and lessons learned by ConnCAT senior leaders, middle management and junior staff. Lastly, the evaluation and assessment is to provide programmatic recommendations to ConnCAT as this concerns the ongoing sustainability and viability of ConnCAT programs.

### **Evaluation Framework Options**

There are a number of evaluation frameworks that may be employed to evaluate a programmatic initiative.

These frameworks include:

- **A Goals-Based Framework** - entails a narrow focus on the extent to which stated programmatic goals are attained,
- **A Responsive-Based Framework** - entails an open-ended approach to data collection such that the open-ended responses of programmatic beneficiaries drive said data collection,
- **An Expert-Based Framework** - more common in highly specialized programming such that individual experts review a program and provide expert opinion about the efficacy of said programming, and
- **An Outcomes-Based Framework** - the focus is narrowly based on programmatic outcomes to the exclusion of programmatic processes.
- **(Quasi) Experimental Design Framework** - entails the usage of an experimental group (the individuals or groups receiving the programmatic intervention) and control group (demographically similar group that does not receive the programmatic intervention). Performance outcomes of each group are compared to make determinations about the extent to which the programmatic intervention had an impact on the experimental group.

## **Types of Data Methods**

Typically, evaluation and assessment entails three data collection options:

1. **Qualitative Data Collection Method** - data collected through one-on-one interview and focus group technique and archival data that may explain program impact in the form of shared stories (media accounts).
2. **Quantitative Data Collection Method** - data collected through survey technique and some forms of archival data, such as, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data, U.S. Census data, Anne E. Casey data bases or other quantitative data from federal, state, non-profit and philanthropic data bases.
3. **Mixed Method Data Collection** - Mixed method evaluation entails the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data as a means to explain program efficacy.

## **ConnCAT Evaluation Framework**

The evaluator proposed to employ a hybrid framework of evaluation and assessment of ConnCAT programming by drawing from basic tenets associated with the **Goals-Based Framework** and **Responsive-Based Framework**. The evaluation will also employ a **Mixed Method of Data Collection** with the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data.

To this end, the ConnCAT evaluation and assessment will entail:

- Primary Data<sup>1</sup>: One-on-one interview sessions with a sample of current enrollees and adults who graduated (alum) from the Culinary Arts, Medical Billing & Coding

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<sup>1</sup> **Primary Data** is data that stems directly from the evaluation itself. **Secondary Data** is data that typically stems from well-established widely reputable data sources. **Tertiary Data** is data that stems from less widely used and/or less rigorous data sources.

Program, Phlebotomy Technician Program and the GED Program, Career Pathways Program and Job Club Program.

- Primary Data: The administration of surveys to student enrollees in the After-School Program, Youth Summer Program and Entrepreneurship Leadership Academy, Career Pathways Program and Job Club Program.
- Primary Data: Focus-group sessions with a sample of students in the After-School Program and Youth Summer Program, Career Pathways Program and Job Club Program.
- Secondary Data: The collection of relevant archival data that includes data from state and local databases on student achievement, job placement and adult employment.
- Tertiary Data: Media accounts of ConnCAT programming and previous assessment reporting.

## **Evaluation/Assessment Results**

### **Adult Programs**

Table One (p. 6) provides data on the following:

1. The size of the potential interviewee sample by adult program by gender
2. The size of the final interview sample by adult program and gender
3. The number of interviewees conducted by adult program

The potential interviewee pool consisted of 234 names. Approximately 80 percent of the potential interviewee pool is female and 20 percent male. The final

interviewee pool, which excluded wrong phone numbers, disconnected and/or non-functioning phone numbers consisted of 166 individuals. A total of 55 interviews were conducted, which is approximately 33% of the final interviewee pool.

**Table One  
Adult Sample Population**

	<b>Potential Interviewee Pool</b>	<b>Number Female</b>	<b>Number Male</b>	<b>Final Interviewee Pool</b>	<b>Number Engaged in Interviews</b>
<b>Phlebotomy Program</b>	N=135	n=117	n=18	N=93	n=22 (23%)
<b>Medical Billing &amp; Coding Program</b>	N=56	n=48	n=8	N=42	n=15 (35%)
<b>Culinary Program</b>	N=43	n=24	n=19	N=31	n=18 (58%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>N=234</b>	<b>n=189</b>	<b>n=45</b>	<b>N=166</b>	<b>n=55 (33%)</b>

## **Adult Program Data Collection: Conceptual Guide**

Appendix One is the protocol used to guide the adult interview questions. The questions were designed to collect data from interviewees as this concerns the mission and goals of the ConnCAT program. As indicated earlier, the ConnCAT mission is to

*“inspire, motivate and prepare youth and adults for educational and career advancement through after-school arts and job training programming.”* With this mission in mind, key goals are to prepare youth and adults for the development of viable careers and life skills with (ideally) a desired job placement.

The interview protocol is also influenced by the literature on what has become known as the *Social Determinants of Health*<sup>2</sup>. In this respect, the evaluation sought to understand the extent to which ConnCAT enrollees:

1. Actually secured employment and the extent to which said employment was in the field that they trained for at ConnCAT (Phlebotomy, Medical Billing & Coding and Culinary Training).
2. Pursued and successfully attained education goals through the ConnCAT experience and beyond.
3. Enhanced their socioeconomic stability and network of peers (i.e., establishment of new support systems and community peer groups) through enrollment in ConnCAT programming, and
4. Held and developed a positive outlook about the future for themselves.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the World Health Organizations (2019), *Social Determinants of Health* focuses on understanding how people live and the conditions under which they live with respect to a spectrum of quality of life risks and outcomes. Also see, Kaiser Family Foundation (2020), *Health disparities are a symptom of broader social and economic inequities*.

## Adult Program Results

### ConnCAT Overall Impact on My Life

There was not single interviewee who reported that ConnCAT did not rise to meet its mission when asked, “Overall, please describe your experience as a student at the Connecticut Center for Arts & Technology.” It did not matter what program (Phlebotomy, Medical Billing and Coding, Culinary) they enrolled in – for many the program was life altering. For example, one interviewee was so excited about the impact that the Phlebotomy program had on him he began to hyperventilate during the interview – the evaluator had to work to calm him down in order to complete the interview.

### Interview Question

**Q19:** How would you assess the overall impact of ConnCAT on your life?

**Q20:** What impact has ConnCAT had on your family, if any?

### Sample of Responses

*- I was kind of homeless and ConnCAT gave me my life back . . . now I have a cooking job and can help my family - **Culinary Program – secure employment***

*- I was real cocky and had no humility or willing to learn . . . ConnCAT changed that quick . . . ConnCAT changed me as a person **Phlebotomy Program – life skills***

*- I had some attitude issues . . . ConnCAT showed me the importance of screening my thoughts before I speak . . . I’m getting better at it - **Medical Billing & Coding***

**Program – life skills**



- I came out of being locked up and did not know what I was going to do with my life . .

. ConnCAT saved me - **Culinary Program – secure employment**

- Before ConnCAT I would not even think about buying a home this was too far fetched.

Now I'm thinking about buying a home - **Medical Billing & Coding Program – positive**

**future outlook**

- ConnCAT changed my life after being out of school for a long time after getting my

Associate Degree . . . ConnCAT got me back into wanting to education myself -

**Medical Billing & Coding Program – education attainment**

- Did cooking in Job Corp when I was 11 years old. As an adult, ConnCAT took me to

the gold standard on cooking . . . it changed my life - **Culinary Program – education**

**attainment**

- I am in my 30s and my best friend, who I met in class, is 63 years old. I met so many

people from so many walks of life - **Culinary Program – social network of peers**

- I went back to College and earned my bachelors degree . . . ConnCAT showed me

that I can do more for myself and my son - **Phlebotomy – positive future outlook and**

**education attainment**

### **The Externship Experience and Job Placement**

Interviewees (with the exception of one) expressed tremendous excitement about the externships that they experienced in each adult program with particular regard to the quality of the externship placements. Forty-four of the 55 interviewees

secured jobs in the positions that they trained for at ConnCAT. The eleven who did not secure a position either pursued jobs/careers in other fields (e.g., one left the culinary field to pursue a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) credential and another interviewee lost interest in phlebotomy – this individual also pursued a LPN credential. Another individual took a hiatus from the labor market to enroll in an institution of higher education to gain a College credential. And one student interviewee was on maternity leave at the time of the interview and planned to go back to her medical billing & coding job after her maternity leave ended.

### **Interview Question**

**Q10:** While in the program, did you participate in a clinical or field experience (externship) and if so, where and how did you feel about the experience?

**Q11:** Did ConnCAT assist in helping you to get a job and, if so, what was this like?

### **Sample Responses**

*- Clearly we were all prepared to go to work after our externship . . . ConnCAT standards, emphasis on cleanliness and being organized was higher than the restaurants and other places we landed jobs - **Culinary Program – education***

### **attainment and employment preparation**

*- I was hired one month after graduating from ConnCAT at St. Rachael's Hospital,*

*OGBYN unit - **Medical Billing & Coding – secure employment***

- Chef Murphy listened to how we talked and presented ourselves – this determined where we would do our externship - **Culinary Program – life skills and secure employment**

- I externshipped at Pacifico Restaurant and loved it! - **Culinary Program – education attainment and employment preparation**

- Quest Diagnostics hired me and the externship helped me to get the job - **Phlebotomy Program – education attainment and secure employment**

- Although I am no longer in culinary . . . I work at Oak Hill Group Home for people with disabilities, ConnCAT gave me work skills like how to interview, work in groups to solve problems, communications that makes me better in my job at the group home -

**Culinary Program – secure employment**

- I did not care for the externship at Yale University Hospital. I ended up getting my LPN but would not have done this if not for ConnCAT . . . there is nothing I would change about ConnCAT - **Medical Billing & Coding – education attainment and secure employment**

- The phlebotomy externship at the rheumatology office gave me the hands-on experience I was looking for - **Phlebotomy Program – education attainment and employment preparation**

- Working at Trattoria A Vucchella was a dream come true . . . I could not have gotten my foot in the door without ConnCAT - **Culinary Program – secure employment**

- I found it hard to get a job in Medical Billing & Coding, so I become a Driving Instructor . . . (despite this) the ConnCAT learning and classes was awesome! . . . I might consider going back to ConnCAT for culinary - **Medical Billing & Coding – education attainment, life skills and employment preparation**

- I did my externship at a French restaurant that wanted to hire me after I graduated from ConnCAT but did not because I did not have a work permit - **Culinary Program – secure employment**

- I am working to set up my own catering company - **Culinary Program – positive outlook about the future and secure employment**

### **Quality, Cost and Affordability**

The ConnCAT organization has garnered a reputation of being a high quality, rigorous program that is free of charge for those who are selected to attend. This is particularly significant for the population of ConnCAT students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds with a minimal ability to pay for post secondary education.

**Q4:** How did you find out about the ConnCAT program?

### **Sample Responses**

- I was told by a friend about the program – once I knew it was free I went

- *Every person is entitled to opportunity if you are willing to work hard – ConnCAT and fact it is free is a great opportunity*
- *Considered going to Lincoln Tech <https://www.lincolntech.edu/careers/culinary/culinary-arts> but could not afford it . . . it was perfect timing finding out about ConnCAT*
- *These people (ConnCAT MBC teachers) changed my life and to think I went through the school and it was free*

### **Academic and Technical Rigor**

#### **With a Relationship-Based Approach**

Repeatedly, program interviewees spoke about the high quality of the program offerings and facilities at ConnCAT. The interviewees expressed satisfaction with the rigor of the program offerings as the staff and administration focused on building trust and respectful relationships between the students, teaching staff, and administration. For many, the relationship-based focus of the program was critical in fostering faith and confidence in the mission of the organization.

**Q7:** Tell me, when you were engaged in the program, what was it like for you?

#### **Sample Responses**

- *We were treated like equals . . . I was never treated like a equal – ConnCAT respects everybody . . . and the staff t ConnCAT wants us to be successful*
- *They gave us a lot of confidence*

- They treated us like family . . . Yes we argued, we fought, we loved each other like a family because the staff treated us this way but they made the program hard – they pushed us
- ConnCAT is very patient with young people
- They were very kind to me
- The building always has a positive vibe
- They (ConnCAT staff) put trust in us and we put trust in them
- Mr. Clemons is very charismatic – made us feel wanted and very respectful
- All the teachers (MBC) were great, very professional, showed they cared, they were not just doing this as a job – they have heart

## **Summary**

Without question, from the standpoint of the adult student interviewees, ConnCAT is a highly efficacious program. The success of the program appears to be rooted in the following factors:

1. The programmatic offerings (Phlebotomy, Medical Billing & Coding and Culinary<sup>3</sup>) are in job demand.
2. The academic rigor of the program offerings in state-of-the-art facilities.
3. The entrepreneurial nature of the programs, which promotes self-sufficiency with an emphasis on pursuing small business opportunities particularly in the

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<sup>3</sup> Although the job demand for culinary has declined with the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic and food industry closures.

culinary and catering fields. This entrepreneurial nature also permeates other facets of the organization as ConnCAT seizes opportunities in the broader community to promote the health and well being of New Haven and surrounding communities. This holistic approach to promoting community is consistent with a focus on *Social Determinants of Health* (see References).

4. The *relationship-based* focus of ConnCAT is embedded in an institutional value system that promotes trust, respect, confidence building, encouragement and success – this is what sound relationships are all about. In other words, learning and training appears to be grounded in sound relationships – without these relationships, you have no learning.

Each of the factors above are very consistent with the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven’s (CFGNH) vision and mission statement and, in particular, Goal 2 – to *Create opportunity, promote inclusion, and reduce inequities through inclusive growth across Greater New Haven.*

## **Recommendations**

The ConnCAT adult program is a highly regarded and needed program in New Haven for a number of reasons:

- It is a rigorous, high quality and highly efficacious program offering based on the reporting from the sample interviewee population in this study.
- The adult program focus on training and employment, which is a critical and growing need in New Haven - given unemployment trends. In December 2019,

unemployment in New Haven stood at 3.90%. As of July 2020 unemployment stood at 11.80% - a nearly four-fold increase in unemployment over a 7-month period (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

- ConnCAT is a well-run institution with staff that is passionate and committed to the organizational mission and the education, career development and job placement goals that emanate from this mission. In addition, the mission and goals of the institution are consistent with the national movement in community building that promotes more holistic approaches to community problem solving – the new and emerging focus on *Social Determinants of Health* as a way to grow viable and healthy communities.
- One area that may need attention concerns a possible need to target recruitment and intervention strategies toward increasing male enrollment in ConnCAT adult programming. Females in each of the programs may be disproportionately represented.
- More assistance may be needed to encourage and help students to pursue and prepare for state certifications following the completion of the Medical Billing & Coding Program and the Phlebotomy Program.
- ConnCAT may consider establishing a **ConnCAT Alumni Network** that would allow for systematically maintaining communication with ConnCAT graduates and occasionally bring said graduates back to ConnCAT as mentors or inspirational speakers to support and encourage up and coming adult enrollees.



## **References**

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# **APPENDIX ONE**

Interview Protocol Guide

# ConnCAT

## External Evaluation and Assessment One-on-One Phone Interview Protocol

### Confidentiality Statement Here

1. Are you originally from New Haven?
2. What is there about New Haven that you like most?
3. What would you change about New Haven if you had the opportunity to change something?
  
4. How did you find out about the ConnCAT program?
5. When were you enrolled in the \_\_\_\_\_ program at ConnCAT?
6. Out of all of the program offerings at ConnCAT, why did you enroll in the \_\_\_\_\_ program?
7. Tell me, when you were engaged in the program what was it like for you?
8. Did you know anyone else in the program before you knew about ConnCAT?
9. How do you think other students in the program felt about ConnCAT and the program you were enrolled in?
  
10. While in the program, did you participate in a clinical or field experience (i.e., restaurant, medical office) and if so, where and how did you feel about the experience?
11. Did ConnCAT assist in helping you to get a job and if so, what was this like?
12. If you secured a job, who was the employer?
13. Do you remain in the job that you secured after graduating from ConnCAT?
14. What impact has the job had on your quality of life?
  
15. If you had to do it all over again, would you enroll in ConnCAT as a career choice – if yes, please explain and if no, please explain?
16. Do you have brothers, sisters or other relatives who have enrolled in ConnCAT programs and if so, which program?
17. What impact, would you say, did ConnCAT have on them?
18. Over the years, have you recommended others to enroll in ConnCAT programs?
19. How would you assess the overall impact of ConnCAT on your life?
20. What impact has ConnCAT had on your family, if any?
21. What impact do you think ConnCAT has on the community?
  
22. Is there anything else that you would like to share about ConnCAT and the role of ConnCAT in your life?

Bruce Jones, Ph.D. (May 2020)