

# Leadership And Youth Development

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The traditional juvenile justice system does not routinely recognize the strengths of youth, nor does it often seek to build on these strengths. Rather, it concentrates on deficits. It asks what is wrong with youth and tries to fix it (Schartz, 2000). But in the early 1990's, this traditional "deficit based" approach to juvenile justice was challenged by a new positive approach to delinquency prevention. This new approach—youth development—gives priorities to the development of competencies that improve a juvenile's ability to be productive and effective at tasks and activities that others value. This approach cannot be identified by a single program or a particular substantive content. Rather, it is the process that is significant. This broad-based strategy includes any intervention that steers juveniles away from antisocial norms and toward conventional adulthood. It emphasizes (but is not limited to) interventions that concentrate on improvements in education, social competencies, employability, and civic and other life skills in order to change the capacity of the youth from a liability to an asset (Bazemore and Terry, 2001).

This new approach is based on a small but growing body of research concerning the relationship between asset building (or competency development) and decreased problems during adolescence. For example, a persistent finding in criminological research is that most delinquents eventually "outgrow" their delinquent behavior, regardless of intervention by the juvenile justice system (Elliott, 1993). A second source of evidence supporting youth development is the body of research on resiliency suggesting that many youths in high-risk environments manage to grow up normally and even thrive as a result of protective factors (Rutter 1985; Werner 1986). For instance, one common protective influence that distinguishes at-risk youths who succeed in not engaging in risk behaviors is an apparent bonding to conventional adults and to groups that facilitate successful maturation by providing opportunities for young people to gain a sense of legitimacy. A third source of legitimacy for the youth development perspective is research suggesting that more assets lead to fewer risk behaviors and to additional positive outcomes such as school success and physical health (Scales, 1999).

The challenge for the juvenile justice system is to use this knowledge of positive development and create environments that are suitable for the successful infusion of these strengths (Bazemore and Terry, 1997).

## **THEORETICAL CONTEXT**

The theoretical basis for youth competency development borrows heavily from control theory (Hirschi, 1969). Unlike other criminological theories, which assume that people naturally want to do the right thing but are prevented by

circumstances from doing it, control theory suggests that it is first necessary to explain why anyone should want to do the right thing. In short, control theory hypothesizes that social controls prevent us from committing crimes. Whenever these controls break down or weaken, deviance is likely to occur.

The theoretical context for youth development programs follows similar logic. Youth development programs are not concerned with why youth commit delinquent acts. Rather, the youth development approach is more concerned with the basic needs and stages of youth development than with simply “fixing problems.” It seeks to provide youth with skills and social competencies in order for them to be productive and effective at tasks and activities that are valued within legitimate social institutions (e.g., work, family, community).

In summary, the positive developmental process seeks to prevent problem behaviors by preparing young people to meet the challenges of adolescence through a series of structured, progressive activities and experiences that help them obtain social, emotional, ethical, physical, and cognitive competencies. This “asset based” approach views youth as resources and builds on their strengths and capabilities for development within their own community. It emphasizes the acquisition of adequate attitudes, behaviors, and skills as a buffer against delinquent behavior (Bazemore and Terry, 1997).

## **EVIDENCE OF IMPACT**

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that youth development programs can produce individual protective factors that increase successes and decrease problem behaviors (Benson and Saito, 2000). For instance, two of the first researchers (Conrad and Hedin, 1981) to study the impact of positive youth development studied 4,000 adolescents in 30 experiential education programs, using survey data. Six programs had comparison groups composed of students in nonexperiential programs. The researchers found that students in the treatment group demonstrated improvement in personal and social development, moral reasoning, self-esteem, and attitudes toward community service and involvement. Other early research on positive youth development demonstrated improved ego, moral development (Cognetta and Sprinthall, 1978), and sense of social responsibility and competence (Newman and Rutter, 1983).

More recently, in a comprehensive syntheses of the scientific literature on positive adolescent development, Scales and Leffert (1999) reviewed several studies concerning the constructive use of time. The authors found that participation in these developmental activities produced several positive outcomes, including

- Increased safety
  
- Increased academic achievement

- Greater communication in the family
- Fewer psychosocial problems, such as loneliness, shyness, and hopelessness
- Decreased involvement in risky behaviors, such as drug use and juvenile delinquency
- Increased self-esteem, increased popularity, increased sense of personal control, and enhanced identity development
- Better development of such life skills as leadership and speaking in public, decision-making, dependability, and job responsibility

But perhaps the most convincing research to date on youth development is a meta-analysis of 25 program evaluations conducted by the Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington (Catalano et al., 1998). The programs included in the analysis all concentrated on promoting competencies and social, emotional, or cognitive development and were evaluated using strong research designs. The meta-analysis found that some of the programs improved many positive behaviors (self-control, assertiveness, problem solving, interpersonal skills, social acceptance, school achievement, completion of school work, graduation rates, parental trust, self-efficacy, and self-esteem). In addition, the analysis found that these programs decreased negative behaviors (hitting, carrying weapons, vehicle theft, school failure, negative family events, teen pregnancy, skipping classes and school suspensions, and alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use).

Finally, in a review of the scientific foundations of youth development, Benson and Saito (2000) argue that the processes for youth development can occur in a variety of settings. These four settings move from the specific to the general and are not necessarily discrete. The settings include programs, organizations, socializing systems, and community.

**Programs.** Programs are semistructured processes, most often led by adults and designed to address specific goals and youth outcomes. A program can be considered a youth development program when it intentionally incorporates experiences and learnings to address and advance the positive development of children and youth. This category incorporates a range of programs from those that are highly structured, often in the form of curricula with step-by-step guidelines, to those that may have a looser structure but incorporate a clear focus on one or more youth development activities (e.g., service learning).

**Organizations.** Organizations provide youth development opportunities in which a wide variety of activities and relationships occur that are designed to improve the well-being of children and youths. Examples include school-based afterschool recreation and co-curricular activities, parks and recreation centers and leagues,

community centers, amateur sports leagues, faith-based youth development opportunities, and the myriad places and opportunities developed by community-based and national youth organizations (e.g., YMCA, YWCA, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts). These kinds of settings can mobilize a wide range of formal and informal youth development inputs.

**Socializing Systems.** Socializing systems are an important array of complex and omnipresent systems intended to enhance processes and outcomes consonant with youth development principles. These include schools, families, neighborhoods, religious institutions, museums, and libraries.

**Community.** Community is not only the geographic place within which programs, organizations, and systems intersect but also the social norms, resources, relationships, and informal settings that dramatically inform human development—both directly and indirectly.

In summary, the evidence concerning the impact of positive youth development programs is small but growing. This growing body of research suggests that youth development programs are a promising tool in the arsenal of programs designed to decrease problem behaviors.

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## **Programs**

### **All Stars™**

#### **Intervention:**

All Stars™ is a character-based approach to preventing high-risk behaviors such as substance use, violence, and premature sexual activity in teens ages 11 to 15. The program is based on strong research identifying the critical factors that lead young people to begin experimenting with substances and engaging in other high-risk behaviors. It is designed to reinforce positive qualities that are typical of youths at this

age. It works to strengthen five specific qualities vital to achieving preventive effects:

- Establishing positive norms
- Building strong personal commitments
- Promoting positive parental attentiveness
- Developing positive ideals and future aspirations
- Promoting bonding with school and community organizations

A program specialist or regular classroom teacher can implement the program. All Stars™ consists of whole classroom sessions, small group sessions outside of the classroom, and one-on-one sessions between the instructor and the child. The program is interactive, including debates, games, and general discussion. Homework assignments are given to include parents in the program and to increase parent–child interactions. All Stars™ is also used in community-based settings such as afterschool programs, faith-based communities, Girls and Boys Clubs, and community centers.

#### **Evaluation Methodology:**

The most comprehensive evaluation of All Stars™ consisted of a single-cohort longitudinal design with pretest, posttest, and 1-year follow-up. Sixth and seventh grade students in 14 middle schools participated in the evaluation. The sample consisted of 1,655 students, of which 55 percent were female and 69 percent white, 25 percent African-American, and 6 percent Hispanic. Schools were matched and randomized to the specialist-run treatment condition (n=629), teacher-run treatment condition (n=287), or control condition (n=739). Pretest and posttest questionnaires measured substance use, sexual behavior, violence, and the mediating variables of bonding, commitment, ideals, and perceived norms.

All Stars™ was then reevaluated using a similar technique. Fourteen middle schools (n=1,857) were randomly assigned to the specialist treatment group, teacher treatment group, or control group. The sample was 54 percent female and 69 percent white, 23.3 percent African-American, 7.7 percent other ethnicities. All participants were 11 to 13

years old. Students were given a pretest before program implementation and a posttest at the end of the school year to assess sexual behavior and alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use.

#### Performance Measures:

Measure: Decrease frequency of AOD use	Source: n/a
Measure: Delay onset of sexual activity	Source: n/a
Measure: Increase normative beliefs	Source: n/a
Measure: Improve attitude toward high risk behavior	Source: n/a
Measure: Increase level of parent-child communication	Source: n/a
Measure: Increase level of parental supervision	Source: n/a

#### Evaluation Outcome:

The comprehensive evaluation of All Stars™ indicated that when implemented by teachers the program influenced the mediators of problem behaviors for white students. However, these were only short-term changes. When a specialist delivered the program, there were delayed effects on mediating variables for Hispanic students. And there were delayed effects for African-American students regardless of who implemented the program. This evaluation showed limited positive results for the All Stars™ program.

The next evaluation resulted in more positive changes, though the evaluation looked only at short-term results. When teachers implemented the program, there were significant reductions in the use of alcohol, cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, and inhalants. Although there were no significant effects for marijuana use or sexual activity, there were changes in the desirable direction. The program had a significant effect in changing normative beliefs, lifestyle incongruence, commitment to school, impulsive decision-making, and sensation-seeking behavior. These results were found only for the teacher-implemented program.

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## Teen Outreach

## Intervention:

Teen Outreach (TO) is a preventive program that uses volunteer community service to reduce teen pregnancy, school failure, and school suspension rates among high school students. The program targets both males and females who enroll voluntarily into the program as a health curriculum elective course in response to a teacher's or guidance counselor's suggestion. TO has an explicit developmental concentration, helping teens understand and evaluate their future life options, such as those surrounding career and relationship choices. This emphasis attempts to further teens' progress in the developmental task of establishing their competence and autonomy in a context that maintains their sense of their relationships to important adults.

The TO program consists of three interrelated elements: supervised community volunteer service, classroom-based discussions of service experiences, and classroom-based discussions and activities related to key social-developmental tasks of adolescence.

Students select volunteer activities under the supervision of trained staff and adult volunteers. These activities, which are intended to respond to the needs and capacities of both students and local communities, include work as aides in hospitals and nursing homes, participation in walkathons, peer tutoring, and a wide range of other work. TO sites are required to provide at least 20 hours a year of volunteer service for each participant. In addition to volunteer service, students participate in classroom discussions at least once a week during the school year, led by trained facilitators—often schoolteachers or guidance personnel.

All classroom discussions and activities are based on the *Teen Outreach Curriculum*, which is designed to engage students through structured discussions, group exercises, role plays, guest speakers, and informational presentations. Service learning discussions concentrate on helping students prepare for their service experiences, think about what they have experienced while volunteering, and listen to others share their experiences.

In developmentally oriented classroom discussions and activities, the facilitator leads small groups of students in activities and topics of particular interest to young people. Topics for classroom discussions and activities include understanding oneself and one's values, life skills, dealing with family stress, human growth and development, and issues related to the social and emotional transitions from adolescence to adulthood.

### **Evaluation Methodology:**

This program was evaluated with a true experimental design study of 25 randomly assigned sites. In addition, students were randomly assigned to either the treatment program or a control condition (traditional health curriculum) at the student level (students were randomly selected to the treatment or control condition because of an excess of students interested in the program) or, less frequently, the classroom level (classrooms were randomly selected to offer TO in lieu of the regular health curriculum). The sample included 342 students who participated in the program and 353 control students, all in the 9th through 12th grades. Students sought to enter the program as part of their health curriculum, as an academic elective, and as an afterschool activity before being randomly assigned to the participant or control groups. Both participant and control groups were similar in age (15) and ethnicity (majority African-American), with both groups having more than 80 percent females. However, the control group demonstrated higher levels of prior teen pregnancy, course failure, and school suspension. Self-report questionnaires were used to provide demographic information and assess students' problem behaviors. Students were assessed during the 1st several weeks of the school year and then again at program exit at the end of the school year. The evaluation measured teen pregnancy, school failure, and school suspension rates of the students in both participant and control groups.

### **Evaluation Outcome:**

The evaluation found that program participants experienced significantly lower levels of teenage pregnancy, school failure, and school suspension rates, even after accounting for baseline levels of the behaviors and for sociodemographic characteristics of students. The risk of teen pregnancy in the participant group was 41 percent as large as the risk for the control group. The risk of school failure in the participant group was 42 percent as large as the risk for the control group. The risk of school suspension in the participant group was 39 percent as large as the risk for the control group.

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# Vocational/Job Training

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## INTRODUCTION

It is well established in the scientific literature that prison inmates are, in general, less well educated and have fewer marketable job skills than the general population (Andrews and Bonta, 1994). As a result, providing youths with employment opportunities is a common strategy to discourage future delinquency and incarcerations. These strategies can be directed toward several different points in the juvenile justice continuum, including early intervention, residential intervention, and aftercare. This section concentrates on early intervention strategies that are designed as prevention programs either to divert youths from entering the juvenile justice system or to prevent youths from continuing their involvement within the system (Frey, 1999).

Over the last few years, large sums of money have been used to develop various vocational training and work experience programs for youths in high crime and high unemployment communities (Bushway and Reuter, 1998). In general, these programs are designed to increase earnings, raise self-esteem, instill a positive work ethic, bind juveniles to conventional norms, occupy idle time to decrease the opportunities for delinquency (Ploeger, 1997). These employment and vocational programs tend to take three forms, arrayed below in order of increasing expense and program intensity (Bushway and Reuter, 1998). These types of programs include the following:

- *Summer work and subsidized employment.* These types of programs generally last about 3 months. An excellent example is the Department of Labor's Summer Youth Employment and Training Program. It provides minimum wage jobs and some education to disadvantaged youths and school to work programs.
- *Short-term training with job placement.* These short-term vocational skills programs generally last 6 months and help youths find employment after graduation. A well-known example of this type of program is the Job Training and Partnership Act.
- *Long-term intensive residential programs.* These programs provide vocational and life skills training, general education, and job placement after graduation. The well-known JobCorps is one such program.

## THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Vocational training and employment programs are intended primarily to increase earnings. A second and more important objective, however, is to improve participants' social and educational functioning (Ploeger, 1997). There are several major theoretical explanations that link employment and crime (Fagan,

1995; Uggen 1994; and Bushway and Reuter, 1998). Two of the most prominent are economic choice theory and control theory:

- *Economic Choice Theory* implies that individuals choose work that is more rewarding and attractive, even if that work is illegal or criminal (Ehrlich, 1973). However, education attainment plays a mitigating factor in framing that choice. In other words, if the legal labor market opportunities appear weak, a youth is less likely to make adequate investment in acquiring the human capital necessary for success in the legal labor market. Subsequently, low educational attainment puts youths at risk of frequent periods of unemployment and of achieving only low paying jobs. Consequently, bolstering vocational skills and employability theoretically provides a buffer to the drawl of the illegal labor market.
- *Control Theory* posits that employment exerts social control over an individual (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). On an individual level, the absence of employment leads to a breakdown of positive social bonds and increased criminal or delinquent activity. Thus, reduced future offending is not a product of an increase in employability but rather stems from an increase in opportunities for social control.

Depending on their focus, vocational training and employment programs may address several risk factors, including academic failure, alienation and rebelliousness, association with delinquent and violent peers, and low commitment to school. Protective factors enhanced can include opportunities to acquire job experience, job skills, and recognition for work performed.

### **EVIDENCE OF IMPACT**

There have been several evaluations of major youth employment and training programs in the last decade. Bushway and Reuter (1998) reviewed the findings of 19 job training programs specifically connected to the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, most of the programs had negligible or only very modest success, suggesting that the impact of employment and vocational skills training on delinquency and protective factors is mixed.

For instance, Career Beginnings provides a combination of educational and employment services to high school students. Specifically, it targets students with average grades from economically and/or educationally disadvantaged family backgrounds who are unlikely to attend college. The program provides workshops, classes, and counseling on educational and career planning and preparation. The evaluators used a true experimental design to assess program impacts at seven sites across the United States. At each site, program applicants who met the eligibility criteria were randomly assigned to the experimental or control group. The results indicated that experimental youths had a significantly higher rate of college attendance at 1-year follow-up (Cave and Quint, 1990).

One of the most renowned employment programs is JobCorps, a 33-year-old national training and employment program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor and delivered primarily through residential settings to economically disadvantaged young people. Participants in the program must be 16 to 24 years old, economically disadvantaged, be a high school dropout, not be on probation or parole, have no serious medical or behavioral problems, come from a disruptive background, and stay in the program for approximately 8 months. An evaluation by Mathematica Policy Research found that JobCorps substantially increased the education and training services that participants received, improved their educational attainment, and generated positive employment and earnings by 3 years after random assignment (Schochet, Burghardt, and Glazerman, 2000).

Another employability program based on the JobCorps model is JOBSTART. JOBSTART provides a long-term combination of basic skills education, occupational training, support services, and job placement assistance to young, low-skilled dropouts—but at a lower level of intensity than JobCorps and in a nonresidential setting. JOBSTART was evaluated (Cave et al., 1993) at 13 sites across the United States, with eligible youths randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. At the 48-month follow-up, significantly more participants (42 percent) than controls (29 percent) had earned a GED or high school diploma. There were also significant long-term program impacts on reducing public assistance for women who did not live with their children. Finally, JOBSTART participants who had not been arrested between age 16 and entry into the program were significantly less likely to be arrested in the first year. This effect, however, disappeared in subsequent years. In summary, however, the overall program did not significantly affect earnings or employment, except during program training. A limited benefit-cost analysis showed no overall economic benefit from the program. This conclusion was not based on all program outcomes (such as criminal behavior and drug use) and may be premature, given that the net overall benefits were steadily increasing over the last 2 years of the 4-year follow-up period.

The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) is another major source of employability and vocational training programs. Bloom and colleagues (1994) evaluated the impact of the programs under this act. The programs included a diverse set of interventions for out-of-school youths between ages 16 and 21, including classroom training in occupational skills, on-the-job training, job search assistance, remedial education, and miscellaneous other services. In 16 sites, JTPA applicants were randomly assigned to an experimental or control group. Thirty months later, there were no significant program impacts on earnings or employment. At 36 months after the program, however, male experimental youths who had not been arrested before were significantly more likely to be arrested. A cost-benefit analysis showed that JTPA produced greater costs than benefits.

In summary, the available evidence regarding employment and vocational skills training programs is mixed.

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### [Vocational/Job Training Programs](#)

## **Supporting Adolescents with Guidance and Employment (SAGE)**

### **Intervention:**

Supporting Adolescents with Guidance and Employment (SAGE) is a violence-prevention program developed specifically for African-American adolescents. The program consists of three main components, namely a Rites of Passages (ROP) program, a summer jobs training and placement (JTP) program, and an entrepreneurial experience that uses the Junior Achievement (JA) model.

The purpose of the first component, ROP, is to develop a strong sense of African-American cultural pride and ethnic identity in the participants and instill a sense of responsibility in their community, their peers, and themselves. In seminars held every other week over 8 months, the program curriculum (developed in 1993 by the Durham, N.C., Business and Professional Chain) also promotes self-esteem, positive attitudes, and the avoidance of a range of risky behaviors. Instructors cover topics such as conflict resolution, African-American history, male sexuality, and manhood training. Mentors from the community provide outreach experiences and tutoring.

The second component, the JTP experience, places youths in summer jobs at desirable worksites such as dentist offices, local museums, and recreational centers. Site supervisors are encouraged to provide structure. Youths are trained in appropriate business behavior and dress. Job counselors work with the youths to resolve issues such as transportation.

The third component, JA, teaches how to develop and implement a small business. With the guidance of volunteer advisers from the local business community, youths form a legal corporation, develop a business plan, elect officers, and sell stock to family and friends. They also market and sell a product (e.g., T-shirts, caps).

The overall approach of SAGE is based on the theory that positive gains in personal and social responsibility, educational aspirations, and academic achievement—in tandem with employment training and opportunities fostered by community mentors—will make a positive impact on reducing violence among the participants.

#### **Evaluation Methodology:**

SAGE was assessed using a longitudinal, randomized field trial in which program applicants were assigned to one of three programmatic conditions: 1) guidance plus employment (ROP, JTP, and JA), 2) employment only (JTP and JA), and 3) a comparison group eligible for delayed participation in JA only. Survey data collection points occurred at baseline, at 18 months, and at 30 months after the program began. After completion of baseline questionnaires, the 255 eligible youths (African-American males ages 12–16) were assigned to each group: 86 to the guidance and employment (ROP/JTP/JA) condition, 84 to the employment-only (JTP/JA) condition, and 85 to the comparison condition. The mean age of the participants was 14. Fifty-three percent reported receiving free lunches at school; 18 percent reported that their mothers had not completed high school; and 50 percent were not living with a father. Self-report and archival data was used to assess the effectiveness of SAGE on behavioral outcomes for a variety of risk behaviors (e.g., violence-related behaviors such as physical fighting, carrying or using a weapon; alcohol-, tobacco-, and other drug-related behaviors such as use, abuse, and commerce; and risky sexual behaviors). In addition to outcome measurements, the self-report survey included questions regarding process measurement. Baseline data indicated that during the previous year, many had engaged in various violence-related behaviors, including fighting (63 percent) and carrying a gun (22 percent) or a knife (30

percent).

### **Evaluation Outcome:**

Despite the absence of statistical significance, the pattern of results from the evaluation provides tentative evidence that participation in SAGE can reduce the likelihood of violence-related and other health-risk behaviors among African-American male adolescents. At the 18-month follow-up, the mean number of problem behaviors reported by the employment-with-guidance group declined, in contrast to the slight increase of the comparison group and to no change in the employment-only group. Examining each behavioral outcome individually, differences in a positive direction for employment-with-guidance were observed for 8 of the 10 outcomes, relative to the control group. For the employment-only group, positive differences were observed for 7 of the 10 outcome measures. Of the 10 behavioral outcomes examined, the program seemed to have the greatest benefits for reducing reports for carrying a gun, selling illegal drugs, and injuring others with a weapon. However, programmatic gains were not sustained over the 30-month follow-up. Assessment of the psychosocial constructs (e.g., increasing self-esteem, educational aspirations, beliefs supporting aggression) found no statistically significant effects. The relatively small group sizes in this study may have diminished the possibilities for finding statistically significant effects. In addition, the analysis was performed on all participants according to the group to which they were randomly assigned, regardless of their actual level of exposure to the programmatic components. This “intent to treat” approach is viewed as the most rigorous approach for assessing programmatic effects in randomized designs, but it is also a conservative one that may underestimate the actual impact if all the young men had participated fully in the intervention activities. Including all participants—regardless of their level of exposure to treatment—may have contributed to the lack of statistically significant findings and may have underestimated the actual impact of the program.

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## Afterschool/Recreation

The hours between the end of the school day and when parents return from work is a risky time for young people. In contrast to the statistics for adults, serious violent crime committed by juveniles increases during the hours immediately after school. “In general, the number of violent crimes committed by adults increases hourly from 6 a.m. through the afternoon and evening hours, peaks at 11 p.m., and then drops to a low point at 6 a.m.,” according to Snyder and Sickmund (1999). “In stark contrast, violent crimes by juveniles peak in the afternoon between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m., the hour at the end of the school day.” This same research reports that “19 percent of all juvenile violent crimes occur in the 4 hours between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. on school days.” Moreover, a comparison of the crime patterns for school and nonschool days finds that the 3 p.m. peak occurs only on school days (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999).

Juveniles are also at the highest risk of being victimized during this critical period. Recent analyses of the FBI National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) data indicates that juveniles are at the highest risk of being the victims of violent crime in the 4 hours following the end of the school day (roughly 2–6 p.m.). In fact, victimization surveys find that even more delinquent acts occur between noon and 6 p.m. (which includes the hours after school) than indicated by the NIBRS data. For example, the National Crime Victimization Survey indicates that “half (51 percent) of all robberies occur between noon and 6 p.m., while the police data show that only 32 percent of juvenile robberies occurred during this period” (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999).

This dramatic temporal discrepancy in delinquent activity is likely due to children returning after the school bell to homes with in little or no supervision, because their parents are at work. Research findings estimate that 35 percent of 12-year-olds are left by themselves regularly while their parents are at work. In fact, the gap between parent work schedules and child school schedules can total 20 to 25 hours per week (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). This unsupervised time is a risk factor for serious and violent behavior among youths. The evidence supports the proposition that children “who are unsupervised during the hours after school are more likely to use alcohol, drugs, tobacco . . . , receive poor grades, and drop out of school than those children who have the opportunity to benefit from constructive activities supervised by responsible adults” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Moreover, Gottfredson, Gottfredson, and Weisman (2001) find that youths who are unsupervised during afterschool hours are found to be more delinquent at all times and not only after school.

Because the hours directly after school can be so dangerous for school-aged children, delinquency prevention programs should be used to reduce the probability of these incidences. Quality afterschool programs are widely supported as a buffer against the danger of delinquency. Nearly 100 percent of those polled agreed that it is important for children to have an afterschool

program that helps them develop academic and social skills in a safe, caring environment (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). But despite this support, there is a lack of affordable, accessible afterschool opportunities in many communities. For instance, in some urban areas, the supply of afterschool programs was expected to meet only about 20 percent of the demand by 2002 (GAO/HEHS, 1997).

## **THEORETICAL CONTEXT**

Quality afterschool programs that reduce risk factors and increase protective factors for the youths served can offer a host of intriguing and rewarding experiences for youths and their families. Afterschool programs keep children of all ages safe and out of trouble because they meet family needs by providing responsible adult supervision of children during nonschool hours. They also offer rewarding, challenging, and age-appropriate activities in a safe, structured, positive environment. In fact, research has identified three major functions provided by afterschool programs. They 1) provide supervision, 2) offer enriching experiences and positive social interaction, and 3) improve academic achievement (Fashola, 1999). As a result of these functions, studies indicate that afterschool programs can

- Improve students' social skills
- Improve their self-confidence
- Improve their homework quality
- Give them higher aspirations
- Enhance their academic achievement
- Increase their interest and ability in reading
- Encourage them to develop new skills and interests
- Improve school attendance and reduce dropout rate
- Prevent negative influences that lead to risky behaviors
- Increase family and community involvement with children
- Reduce grade retention and placement in special education
- Prevent crime, juvenile delinquency, and violent victimization

## **EVIDENCE OF IMPACT**

Afterschool programs come in all shapes, sizes, and modalities, and there is no

single formula for their success. Some programs concentrate on recreational activities. Others address academics or cultural enrichment. Some of the best programs are traditional scholastic extracurricular activities. Research indicates that scholastic extracurricular activities have numerous social benefits. For example, Mahoney and Cairns (1997) and McNeal (1995) find that extracurricular participation is related to a decrease in school dropouts, particularly during the early years of high school and for high-risk youth. Gerber (1996) found that extracurricular participation is not detrimental to student performance and that participation in such activities promotes greater academic achievement. Mahoney (1997) found a link between participation in extracurricular activities and reduced rates of criminal offending. Youniss, Yates, and Su (1997) find that adolescents involved in a broad range of activities report lower levels of substance abuse. Finally, Eccles and Baber (1999) find that participation in prosocial activities of any kind is linked to positive educational trajectories in middle to late adolescent development and to low rates of involvement in risky behavior.

Specifically, interscholastic athletic participation has been demonstrated to produce prosocial outcomes. This research suggests that, compared with non-athletes, individuals who participate in athletics have higher educational aspirations (Braddock, 1981; Holland and Andre, 1987; Otto, 1982; Picou and Curry, 1974; Otto and Alvin, 1977; Snyder and Spreitzer, 1977) and higher self-esteem (Braddock, 1981; Hanks, 1979) and achieve greater educational attainment (Anderson, 1998). They also show increased academic performance (Silliker and Quirk, 1997; Gerber, 1996), are less likely to drop out of school (McNeal, 1995; Melnick, Sabo, and Vanfossen, 1992), and have increased earnings when they enter the work world (Ewing, 1995; Long and Caudill, 1991).

Other than traditional interscholastic programs, practitioners and researchers find that the best afterschool programs combine several different activities. For instance, an evaluation of the Quantum Opportunities Program—a year-round program that provides a balanced sequence of educational, development, and service opportunities to small groups of youths from families—find that the participants had more positive outcomes in educational attainment and social achievement (Hahn et al., 1994). In addition, Gottfredson, Gottfredson, and Weisman (2001) argue that factors such as social competencies, social bonding, and inadequate supervision produce delinquency during afterschool hours and that the effectiveness of afterschool programs for reducing delinquency will depend on their ability to address these other factors.

Specifically, the types of activities found in a quality afterschool programs include

- Mentoring
- Computer instruction

- Homework assistance centers
- College awareness and preparation
- Activities linked to law enforcement
- Employment preparation or training
- Courses and enrichment in culture and the arts
- Volunteer and community service opportunities
- Drug and violence prevention curricula and counseling
- Supervised recreation and athletic programs and events
- Language instruction, including English as a second language
- Youth leadership activities (e.g., Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, academic clubs)
- Tutoring and supplementing instruction in basic skills, such as reading, math, and science [U.S. Department of Justice, 2000]

Poor programs, by contrast, allow children to spend far too much time in passive activities such as watching television or movies. They also exhibit poor facilities, staff, or both. Research demonstrates that successful afterschool programs have several common elements:

- **Goal setting and string management:** Programs need to set and communicate goals from the beginning, develop a solid organizational structure, and be managed effectively.
- **Quality staffing:** Staffing arrangements vary according to a program's size, management structure, and goals. But all programs need staff who are qualified and committed, have appropriate experience, have realistic expectations, and can interact productively with regular school staff—whether the program is school-based or not.
- **Attention to safety:** Programs should be safe, close to home, and accessible to all children and youth who want to participate. They should have adequate space for a variety of indoor and outdoor activities. Safe transit can be provided through means such as public transportation, staff escorts, and crossing guards.
- **Effective partnerships with community-based organizations:** Implementing quality afterschool program activities requires collaboration among diverse partners—not only parents and educators but also community residents, law

enforcement agencies, service providers, community-based and civic organizations (e.g., the United Way, YWCAs, YMCAs, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Junior Achievement, Boys and Girls Clubs), colleges, employers, arts and cultural institutions, museums, park and recreation services, and public officials. Effective programs aim to draw on all of a community's diverse resources, including the participation of children and youths in program planning, to best address the concerns of the entire community.

■ **Strong family involvement:** Thirty years of research shows the level of difference family involvement makes in children's learning and chances for adult success. Family involvement in afterschool programs is just as important. The success of an afterschool program depends on the involvement of both families and the community.

■ **Enriching learning opportunities:** By providing structured enriching learning opportunities, afterschool programs can be a vital resource for improving academic performance, as well as for meeting social, emotional, and physical development needs.

■ **Linkages between school-day and afterschool personnel:** Quality programs support and coordinate their activities with the school in a way that supports true partnership. In those afterschool programs physically housed in school buildings, there is the opportunity to link together school-day and afterschool personnel and resources in a seamless continuum of activities that concentrate on the well-being and growth of participants.

■ **Evaluation of program progress and effectiveness:** Afterschool programs are, by nature, varied and complex. No matter how well designed they are, programs must also take into account experience. Effective afterschool programs have a continual evaluation component built into their design, so program planners can objectively gauge their success based on the clear goals set for the program. [U.S. Department of Justice, 2000]

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## **Boys and Girls Club Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach**

### **Intervention:**

The overall philosophy of the program is to give at-risk youths ages 6 to 18 what they seek through gang membership (supportive adults, challenging activities, and a place to belong) in an alternative, socially positive format. There are four components of the initiatives as stated by the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA): 1) community mobilization of resources to combat the community gang problem; 2) recruitment of 50 youths at risk of gang involvement (prevention) or 35 youths already involved in gangs (intervention) through outreach and referrals; 3) promoting positive developmental experiences for these youths by developing interest-based programs that also address the youths' specific needs through programming and mainstreaming of youths into the Clubs; and 4) providing individualized case management across four areas (law enforcement/juvenile justice, school, family, and Club) to target youths to decrease gang-related behaviors and contact with the juvenile justice system and to increase the likelihood that they will attend school and improve academically.

### **Evaluation Methodology:**

The evaluation included 21 Boys and Girls Clubs that used the prevention approach and 3 Clubs that used the intervention approach. BGCA selected the sites through a competitive process in summer 1997. All of the prevention Clubs began using Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach (GPTTO) either simultaneous with the start of the evaluation or 1 year beforehand. The intervention Clubs developed their projects between 1 and 3 years before the start of the evaluation. The study included 932 prevention youths and 104 intervention youths who were recruited to each Club/project over about a 10-month period. The target youth survey subsample consisted of 236 prevention and 66 intervention youths. Given the complexity of the Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach and GPTTO models, the evaluation used multiple methods for gathering information, including a review of case management records, questionnaires, and interviews and focus groups with program youths and Club directors.

### Evaluation Outcome:

The evaluation concluded that more frequent GPTTO Club attendance is associated with the following positive outcomes: 1) delayed onset of one gang behavior (less likely to start wearing gang colors); 2) less contact with the juvenile justice system (less likely to be sent away by the court); 3) fewer delinquent behaviors (less likely to steal and less likely to start smoking pot); 4) improved school outcomes (higher grades and greater valuing of doing well in school); and 5) more positive social relationships and productive use of out-of-school time (engaging in more positive afterschool activities and increased levels of positive peer and family relationships).

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## Broader Urban Involvement and Leadership Development Program (BUILD)

### Intervention:

Chicago, Ill.'s BUILD (for Broader Urban Involvement and Leadership Development) program combines several popular gang prevention strategies in an ambitious attempt to curb gang violence in some of the city's most depressed and crime-ridden neighborhoods. Founded on the principle that youths join gangs because they lack other, more constructive opportunities and outlets, BUILD tries to "reach out to young people and provide alternatives to increasing violence" by

- Deploying trained street workers, who seek to establish a rapport with gang-involved youth and serve as positive role models
- Organizing afterschool sports programs and other recreational activities for at-risk and gang-involved youths
- Designing and delivering violence prevention curricula in local

schools

- Designing and delivering a violence prevention curriculum at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center
- Providing career training, college counseling, and financial aid to students from low-income schools
- Working with corporate sponsors, community leaders, parents, and activists to coordinate local antiviolence initiatives and coalitions

Established in 1969 to address gang violence in Chicago's West Town community, BUILD has since expanded its activities to six other low-income, high-crime areas (Cabrini–Green, Humboldt Park, Logan Square, Ravenswood, Lakeview, and Uptown). The program's violence prevention curriculum at the local detention center reaches both male and female youths from throughout Cook County. BUILD estimates its various activities to date have involved more than 77,000 youths from around the Chicago area.

#### **Evaluation Methodology:**

In 1999 a team of researchers from Loyola University examined the impact of BUILD's detention center curriculum on detainees' recidivism rates. Their evaluation used a quasi-experimental design—comparing a random sample of 60 BUILD students with a matched random sample of 60 detainees who received no BUILD instruction. While some girls were included in the program, most participants were African-American males, ages 10–17. Juveniles in both the treatment and control groups were released into the community after their stays and followed for 1 year to determine their rates of recidivism and time to recidivism. The amount of time (or number of classroom days) BUILD participants were involved in the program was also tracked to determine whether length of stay affected recidivism patterns.

In the mid-1990s the Center for Latino Research at DePaul University also conducted an 18-month nonexperimental process evaluation, assessing the implementation of all of BUILD's programs in two of its target communities: Cabrini–Green and Uptown. This evaluation collected service records and qualitative data from interviews with staff, clients, focus groups, site visits, and monthly reports to form a subjective impression of how well BUILD staff were meeting their stated objectives of

community resource development, prevention, and remediation.

### Evaluation Outcome:

The Loyola study of BUILD's detention program found that BUILD youths had significantly lower recidivism rates than their counterparts from the control group. According to the study, only 33 percent of BUILD youths recidivated within 1 year, versus 57 percent of non-BUILD participants. BUILD participants who did recidivate also had a longer average time to recidivism than youths from the control group (9.6 months versus 7.6 months). Finally, the study found that BUILD students who recidivated spent significantly fewer days in the BUILD classroom (an average of 6.17) than nonrecidivators (an average of 9.35 days).

The Center for Latino Research's process evaluation of BUILD found that the program was extremely well implemented. Overall, the team reported, "the program's objectives were accomplished and in many instances exceeded, [owing] to the efforts of BUILD's dedicated staff." BUILD's policy of hiring staff with strong connections to the local community (including former gang members) and its strong emphasis on staff development were repeatedly identified as critical factors in the program's success.

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## Project Back-on-Track

### **Intervention:**

Project Back-on-Track is an afterschool diversion program designed to help divert youths in early stages of delinquency from committing future crimes. It uses a multifaceted approach that targets factors contributing to delinquent behavior. Program youths participate in a 4-week cycle of treatment consisting of group and family therapies, parent groups, educational sessions, community service projects, and empathy-building exercises. These youths attend the program 2 hours a day for 4 days a week, allowing 32 hours of contact with the program per cycle. Parents attend the program 15 hours per cycle. Most youths (93 percent) are referred to the program by the District State Attorney's Office. Referrals are based on a youth's being an early career offender and living in the local juvenile justice district. The program accepts violent offenders (domestic assault, aggravated assault, sexual assault), drug offenders, and property offenders.

### **Evaluation Methodology:**

The evaluation used a quasi-experimental design with a nonequivalent control group and a 1-year follow-up. The study participants were the first 30 youths who were referred to and completed the afterschool diversion program. These youths, ages 9–17 (with 19 of them female, 19 African-American, 10 white, and 1 Hispanic), were enrolled between July 1997 and July 1998. Most study youths (16 of them) are first-time juvenile offenders. The repeat offenders (the other 14) had committed a mean of 1.57 offenses before committing the referral offense. The comparison group (n=30) was created by matching age, sex, race, and delinquency stage. Both groups were assessed for recidivism rates and psychopathology.

### **Evaluation Outcome:**

The evaluation indicated that Project Back-on-Track completers were significantly less likely than the matched controls to have committed subsequent criminal offenses within 12 months following their participation in the program. In addition, they had significantly fewer subsequent criminal charges at 9- and 12-month follow-up intervals than the controls. Finally, by decreasing the frequency of criminal recidivism, it was estimated that the program resulted in a savings of \$1,800 per youth enrolled after 1 year.

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## SMART Leaders

### Intervention:

SMART Leaders is a 2-year booster program that follows from Stay SMART (for Skills, Mastery, And Resistance Training). Both are components of SMART Moves, a comprehensive drug and sexual activity prevention program offered through the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA). Stay SMART is a curriculum-based program for 13- to 15-year-olds that teaches a broad spectrum of social and personal competence skills to help youths identify and resist peer and other social pressures to smoke, drink, and engage in sexual activity. The program consists of 12 sessions: 1) gateway drugs, 2) decision-making, 3) advertising, 4) self-image and self-improvement, 5) coping with change, 6) coping with stress, 7) communication skills, 8) social skills: meeting and greeting people, 9) social skills: boy meets girl, 10) assertiveness, 11) relationships, and 12) life planning skills.

SMART Leaders reinforces the skills and knowledge learned during Stay SMART and encourages participants to stay involved in prevention activities and to be positive, drugfree role models for their peers. SMART Leaders I involves five small group sessions consisting of role-playing and videotapes about identifying different peer pressures to use drugs and engage in sexual activity and learning to resist those pressures. SMART Leaders II is taught in a three-session video format, with one session dedicated to resisting alcohol, one session to resisting drugs, and one to resisting early sexual activity. Participants are encouraged to become involved in other programs and activities at the BGCA and encourage their peers to be drugfree.

(SMART Moves includes the Family Advocacy Network Club, which is designed for the parents of high-risk, early-adolescent youths involved in the drug prevention program. This aspect of SMART Moves is designed to strengthen the parent–child bond through four types of activities: basic support, parental support, educational programs, and leadership activities.)

### **Evaluation Methodology:**

A pretest–posttest nonequivalent group design was used to evaluate the SMART Leaders and Stay SMART programs. Fourteen BGCA clubs were chosen on the basis of their performance in the pilot study on the effectiveness of SMART Moves. Five clubs offered Stay SMART, five offered Stay SMART plus the 2-year booster, and four served as the control group (offering no prevention program). The 14 clubs were located in cities with populations of 17,000 to 630,000 in every region of the country—many in urban areas, and all in economically disadvantaged areas. For treatment sites, all 13-year-old club members were invited to participate in the program, until 24 youths had enrolled. For control sites, all 13-year-old club members were invited to participate in testing, until 30 youths had signed up. At baseline the average age was 13.6. Forty-five percent of participants were white, 42 percent African-American, and 14 percent Hispanic. Seventy-five percent were male.

Over the 27-month testing period, 161 of the youths completed all treatment sessions and testing that was required to be included in the study (52 in Stay SMART Only, 54 in Stay SMART + Boosters, and 55 control). Using an analysis of variance (or ANOVA) the researchers found that those who dropped out of the study had at baseline perceived more social benefits from using alcohol and marijuana and had more marijuana-related behavior. Researchers also found that those in the Stay SMART + Boosters and the control groups who stayed through the end of the project were predominantly white, while those who stayed in the Stay SMART Only group were predominantly African-American.

Outcomes were assessed using a confidential self-report questionnaire administered by program staff for the two program groups and BGCA staff for the control group. Questions addressed attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge of alcohol, marijuana, other drugs and cigarettes. The pretest was conducted before the Stay SMART program began. Three posttests were conducted: 1) after the completion of Stay SMART (3 months), 2) after the first booster (1 year), and 3) after the second booster (2 years).

### Evaluation Outcome:

Over the course of the evaluation, the Stay SMART + Boosters group came to perceive fewer social benefits from drinking alcohol, while the Stay SMART Only and control groups came to perceive more social benefits from drinking. The youths in the Boosters group also perceived significantly fewer social benefits from smoking marijuana than those in the other two groups. However, both the Stay SMART Only and the Stay SMART + Boosters groups reported less marijuana-related behavior. Both the Stay SMART Only and the Stay SMART + Boosters groups reported less alcohol-related behavior than the control group, though this finding was only marginally significant. Both program groups showed significantly less drug- and cigarette-related behavior and significantly more knowledge concerning drug use than the control group.

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St. Pierre, Tena L., D. Lynne Kaltreider, Melvin M. Mark, and Kathryn J. Aikin. 1992. "Drug Prevention in a Community Setting: A Longitudinal Study of the Relative Effectiveness of a 3-Year Primary Prevention Program in Boys and Girls Clubs Across the Nation." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 20(6):673–706.

# Wilderness Camp

Wilderness camps or challenge programs generally are residential placements that provide participants with a series of physically challenging outdoor activities, such as backpacking or rock climbing. These programs vary widely in terms of settings, types of activities, and therapeutic goals. But their treatment components are grounded in experiential learning that advocates "learning by doing" and facilitates opportunities for personal growth. Such programs have their origins in two distinct sources: forestry camps for youthful offenders and the Outward Bound model, originated in Wales during the Second World War (Roberts, 2004).

While military-style boot camps have consistently failed to demonstrate any positive impact on juvenile offenders' recidivism rates, the data on wilderness camps is much more encouraging. Lipsey's meta-analysis (2000) of 29 different studies of wilderness programs, involving more than 3,000 juvenile offenders, indicates that program participants experience recidivism rates that are about 8 percentage points lower than comparison subjects (29 percent versus 37 percent). However, these moderately positive results do not reflect the marked inconsistencies in individual program results.

Lipsey (2000) found that programs involving a combination of "relatively intense physical activity and therapeutic enhancement such as individual counseling, family therapy, and therapeutic group sessions" were especially effective, while those that involved less physically challenging activities and little or no therapeutic content had a less significant impact.

One of the best-known and most studied wilderness programs in the United States is VisionQuest. Founded in 1973, this national program provides alternatives to incarceration for serious juvenile offenders. VisionQuest youths typically spend 12 to 15 months in various challenging outdoor impact and therapeutic treatment programs. A normal treatment course often includes a 3-month stay at a wilderness orientation program (where the youth live in tepees or comparable primitive conditions); a 5-month adventure program (during which juvenile offenders can embark on wagon train odysseys, cross country biking trips, or ocean voyages); and a 5-month community residential/therapeutic program. The program also features an aftercare program called HomeQuest that offers support to youth and families upon reentry.

Controlled studies of VisionQuest have consistently demonstrated its efficacy in lowering participants' recidivism rates. One evaluation, performed by the RAND Corporation in the 1980s (Greenwood and Turner, 1987), found that VisionQuest graduates consistently outperformed a control group from a conventional correctional facility, despite the fact that the VisionQuest group contained more serious offenders. When differences in group characteristics were statistically

controlled, VisionQuest youth were about half as likely as subjects in the control group to be rearrested after 1 year (Howell, 1998).

Despite such promising results, numerous questions about the efficacy of wilderness programs remain unanswered. Lipsey's meta-analysis (2000) found that the length of wilderness programs seemed to have an inverse effect on treatment results (i.e., the longer the program, the less chance of its achieving statistically significant results on treatment outcomes). Such a finding seems counterintuitive and puzzling in light of the success of some long-term programs, such as VisionQuest.

Lipsey (2000) and others have also noted that, thus far, the majority of participants in wilderness programs have been white male juvenile offenders. Little is known about the program's effectiveness with African-Americans, Hispanics, and females. Additional research is still required to conclusively demonstrate the efficacy of such programs across different treatment types and diverse target populations (Fuentes, 2002).

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## Validated Programmes

### VisionQuest

#### **Intervention:**

VisionQuest is a wilderness challenge program that provides an alternative to incarceration for serious juvenile offenders. It also offers youths a consistent educational plan that extends throughout the program and an individualized treatment plan that is constantly reevaluated.

Most VisionQuest youths are committed to the program by the juvenile court. VisionQuest staff interview youths prior to placement to ensure that they are appropriate candidates. Eligible youths must then make four commitments before entering the program—that they will a) complete three high-impact programs, b) abstain from drugs, sex, alcohol, and tobacco, c) participate for a minimum of 1 year, and d) face their problems.

Program youths spend 12 to 15 months in various challenging outdoor impact programs. The program is divided into three phases: a) 3 months in an orientation wilderness camp, b) 5 months in an adventure program, and c) 5 months in a community residential program.

The first phase of the VisionQuest program is a wilderness camp where youths live outdoors in tepees, with a tepee family of 6 to 10 youths and a counselor. In this phase, juveniles receive an orientation to the program and undergo educational, psychological, and behavioral evaluations. They also undergo an intensive physical conditioning program in addition to their regular schoolwork.

The second phase involves an adventure program, such as a wagon train. On a wagon train, youths travel across the western States on mule-drawn wagons and assume responsibility for everything from feeding the animals to setting up nightly camps. Each wagon train consists of about 50 youths and 50 staff. The wagon train experience teaches juveniles the value of cooperation, self-discipline, and the work ethic. In addition to the wagon train, youths may engage in various quests that differ in theme, scope, and duration. Examples include ocean voyages, cross-country bike trips, hikes through wilderness, and “breaking” mustangs or camels.

In the last phase, youths enter the residential program, where they live in group homes. This living situation is designed to prepare youths to return to home by concentrating on educational goals, family relationships, and plans

for the future.

### **Evaluation Methodology:**

The evaluation employed a quasi-experimental design with nonequivalent comparison-groups design. The first group studied consisted of 257 male juveniles placed at a probation camp. The second group (the treatment group) consisted of 90 males released from the VisionQuest program. Notably, one fourth of the juveniles rejected their assignment to the VisionQuest program and became the third group in the study. These 66 males were assigned to various placements. Although the experimental VisionQuest group consisted of more serious offenders than the comparison group, the differences between the groups were controlled statistically through the careful selection of relevant variables. Recidivism was the primary outcome measure in an 18-month follow-up.

### **Evaluation Outcome:**

The evaluation revealed that VisionQuest youths were substantially less likely to be rearrested in the 1st year after release than the traditional group (55 percent compared with 71 percent). When differences in group characteristics were statistically controlled, 1st year re-arrest rates for VisionQuest youths were about half that of the control youths. In addition, a cost-benefit analysis showed that VisionQuest was more expensive to implement than the comparison programs, but the authors show that the benefits of reduced recidivism outweigh these higher costs.

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# **Insights into adolescents' mental health during Outward Bound programs**

James T. Neill  
Bernd Heubeck

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## ***Abstract***

Mental health is an important outcome for outdoor education and personal development programs. Two factors - psychological distress and psychological well-being - are considered to be separate but related aspects of mental health. The effects of Outward Bound Australia high school programs on the mental health factors were examined using the General Well-Being (GWB), a 35-item self-report instrument. There were three mental health assessments: pre-program (one to two weeks before the program), during program, and followup (six to eight weeks after the program). The experimental group consisted of 143 males and 108 females. A control group consisted of 56 males and 59 females. Overall, adolescents reported experiencing a temporary reduction in the quality of their mental health during the Outward Bound program. In followup results, however, the adolescents reported gains in the quality of mental health, above what they had reported experiencing prior to the Outward Bound program. These apparent improvements in mental health are confounded by significant control group results. Hence full confirmation of the findings awaits further control group testing. The results also presented some gender differences. Generally, female adolescents tended to report better mental health than male adolescents. Male adolescents reported a greater increase in psychological distress during their Outward Bound program. Males also reported less psychological well-being during the Outward Bound program than females. However, these differences could have been contributed to by non-gender factors, such as different high schools and different weather conditions during the programs. According to these findings, temporary reductions in mental health quality can lead to longer-term mental health benefits. This notion highlights a moral and ethical dilemma. If outdoor organisations and leaders are knowingly putting people through experiences which can cause temporary compromises in the quality of mental health, it is imperative that there are proven long-term benefits. On the other hand, simply conducting programs which are enjoyable may be to forgo a vast range of developmental opportunities.