

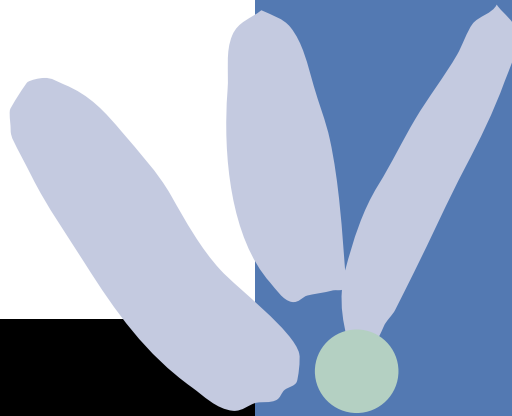
PROGRAMS FOR PRETEENS

Benchmarks of Success

Highlights from a report on the
preteen grantmaking program
of the Lucile Packard
Foundation for
Children's Health

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ABOUT THE STUDY

This study posed a key question:

What kinds of programs are most likely to promote positive, long-lasting behavioral and emotional health in young people?

The question is of interest to funders, policy-makers and those who work directly with youth. The Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health (the Foundation) takes a particular interest in preteens, ages 9-13, because research indicates that early adolescence is the time when young people begin to adopt behavior patterns that can have life-long consequences.¹ Prevention efforts at this point could shape the development of enduring healthy behaviors.



In March 2002, the Foundation commissioned Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), a national nonprofit social policy research organization, to assess the experiences of 40 grantees that received grants from the Foundation. The grants, ranging from \$20,000 to \$313,000 over one to three years, were awarded to community- and school-based programs in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties in California that promoted the behavioral and emotional health of preteens.

The Foundation was a newcomer to the grant-making world in 2000, so the goals of the assessment were to provide information about the effec-

tiveness of the Foundation's early grantmaking approaches and to offer lessons for future directions. The study was designed to assess how well the funded programs collectively were succeeding in achieving the goal of fostering resilience and preventing high-risk behaviors; to determine whether the grantees were implementing quality programs; and to identify challenges that grantees faced and how they addressed them.

Data to address these questions were gathered from organizational surveys administered in June 2002, and through site visits to a sample of grantees conducted in summer 2002 and 2003.

Note: This is a report on the highlights of a two-year study. The complete results may be found at

<http://www.lpfch.org/grantmaking/ppvevalfull.pdf>

¹ Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 2000; Eccles et al., 1993a; 1993b; Eccles and Midgley, 1989; Simmons et al., 1987; Walker and Arbretton, 2001. <http://www.lpfch.org/grantmaking/ppvevalfull.pdf>

THE GRANTEES

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The grantees in the study operated youth development programs for preteens. The majority of their clients (60%) fell in the 12- to 13-year-old age range.² The grantees tended to serve economically needy youth, and the young people generally reflected the overall ethnic profile of the two counties, with about one-fifth identified as English language learners.

The Foundation funded both school- and community-based programs, providing services to a balanced

group of preteens: The grantees that were school-based worked with youth who were likely to be older and more racially/ethnically diverse, while community-based grantees served youth across the preteen age and English-speaking proficiency range.

Most grantees, regardless of whether school-based or community-based, stated that their participants were at risk for not realizing their full potential due to academic, social or economic challenges. Partici-

THE FINDINGS

To examine the effectiveness of the grantees as a group, Public/Private Ventures looked at the extent to which grantees met benchmarks of quality that the evaluation literature associates with positive outcomes for youth.

P/PV synthesized the literature and developed a set of seven benchmarks of program quality (page 3).³

Using this set of benchmarks, P/PV found that 11 of the grantees (31 percent) achieved a high-quality profile (i.e., met six or seven of the seven benchmarks).⁴ Another 21 (60 percent) achieved a medium-quality profile (i.e., met four or five benchmarks). Finally, 3 grantees (9 percent) were categorized as low quality (i.e., met three or fewer benchmarks).

Without benefit of the knowledge that would come with longitudinal outcomes, it is expected that the grantees that were found to be high quality are most likely to contribute to the long-term outcomes of interest to the Foundation. The few grantees that met

hardly any of the quality standards may be less likely to produce the long-term outcomes of interest to the Foundation and the youth development field more generally (although they may be successful in meeting other, short-term goals).

It is more difficult to predict the effectiveness of those grantees that fell into the medium-quality profile category. To a degree, it may depend on the specific benchmarks that they did or did not meet. In this study, all benchmarks were given equal weight.

Several characteristics tended to be present among those grantees rated as high quality. The high-quality profile grantees are most likely to:

- Have established more collaborative relationships
- Provide an academic program component
- Cost more per participant (Not surprising, as high-quality grantees also tend to offer a greater variety of services over a longer term)

² Another 26 percent fell in the 9- to 11-year-old range, 3 percent in the under 9 range and 10 percent in the 14- to 18-year-old range.

³ The full report provides a more detailed literature review for each of these benchmarks. <http://www.lpfch.org/grantmaking/ppvevalfull.pdf>

⁴ Out of 35 grantees that completed and returned organizational surveys.

pants also were described as susceptible to poor health and life outcomes. Many grantees described their service areas of Santa Clara and San Mateo counties as having high rates of teen pregnancy, gang involvement, and poor health outcomes.

On average, the grantees offered between six and seven different services. Many sites were able to offer multiple services because of collaborative relationships, which provided not only participant referrals,

physical space, and greater community awareness, but also special activities for the youth.

Two-thirds of the grantees provided some form of mentoring (peer, adult or both). Two-thirds also offered some type of health promotion and prevention class. In keeping with the youth development focus, those classes were coupled with leadership/decision-making activities, group discussions/participation activities, and community service or mentoring.

Seven Benchmarks of Program Quality⁵

Exposure. It is critical that youth participate in a program for enough time to make a difference in their lives. Although no definitive threshold has been set, most studies indicate that changes in long-term outcomes occur only after many months of frequent attendance. **1**

Cultural Competence. Having staff who can understand and work with cultural differences, and respond to language needs of participants, promotes accessibility and responsiveness. **2**

Variety. Offering a variety of well-implemented services and activities and providing choice are related to a program's ability to attract and retain youth. **3**

Staff Retention. When staff retention is low, programs find it challenging to maintain continuity and coherence of program goals, and have difficulty sustaining relationships with participants and collaborating partners. **4**

Staff Training. Training for staff and volunteers is a critical component that reflects a strong programmatic infrastructure for implementing a well-designed curriculum. **5**

Evaluation & Assessment. Evaluations that look at the quality of program implementation often find that outcomes are poorer in programs that do not have any way of internally assessing their progress. **6**

Supportive Relationships. Positive relationships with adults and peers are key components that serve to attract and retain youth and have been linked to positive developmental outcomes. Thus, intentional strategies to promote opportunities for relationships are important. **7**

⁵ Research suggests that a well-implemented curriculum related to a specific outcome of interest (e.g., reading or math achievement) is also an important benchmark (Lauer et al., 2003); however, because the specific goals of the various grantees were diverse, P/PV did not include a benchmark specific to curriculum.

Why Use a Benchmarking Approach?

P/PV chose this approach as a way to examine grantees' program quality given several limitations. First, not all the individual grantees had yet collected longitudinal data on outcomes. Second, the Foundation had intentionally funded a wide variety of approaches designed to serve their target age group, which necessitated comparing these programs across a very general set of standards. Third, the outcomes of interest to the Foundation (emotional and behavioral health) are broad, so the evaluation looked for wide-ranging measures of effectiveness as well.

Although the methodology used for this study did not allow for a direct answer to whether high-risk behaviors are ultimately prevented by the programs, in the absence of a more costly longitudinal outcomes evaluation, it provides information that begins to answer this question.



Grantees' Major Challenges

- The grantees have high rates of staff turnover that are particularly deleterious in light of the priority they give to building supportive relationships between youth and staff, which clearly require continuity.
- Engaging and educating parents is vital, but language barriers, transportation difficulties and cultural norms that favor privacy present substantial challenges to service providers. In response, grantees have developed such approaches as providing interpreters, child care, incentives for participation (such as small stipends or prizes), and specially targeted strategies to attract and engage parents.
- Restricting Foundation-funded programming to 9- to 13-year-olds, though welcome and very much needed, presents problems to grantees, especially those based in schools with wider age ranges. To accommodate youth outside the target ages, some grantees continue to serve older youth but do not report them as part of meeting the Foundation's grant goals; serve older youth with funds from other sources; and serve needy families by identifying a family member of the appropriate age.

Over the course of the evaluation, despite the variety of programmatic approaches undertaken by the grantees, common and thematic challenges and responses were revealed.

Lessons and Recommendations

Funders can promote cross-site learning to help grantees navigate common challenges, such as reaching parents and retaining staff.

- ✦ Both considerable resources and longitudinal evaluation are necessary to determine the long-term effects achieved by services for preteen youth; and proper timing of such costly evaluation is critical.
- ✦ In lieu of more costly longitudinal evaluation, this set of common benchmarks related to program effectiveness may be a useful tool for guiding funding strategies and assessing interim outcomes — with the caveat that certain benchmarks may warrant greater emphasis, depending on the specificity of funders’ goals.
- ✦ Programs must work to provide supportive relationships for youth while facing the challenge of retaining skilled and qualified staff.
- ✦ Funders can promote cross-site learning to help grantees navigate common challenges—such as reaching parents, retaining skilled staff, and recruiting and retaining preteen participants — and implement programming more smoothly.
- ✦ If a goal of the grantmaking strategy is to prevent high-risk behaviors, an approach that targets specific subgroups of youth is likely to have the greatest impact.
- ✦ A balanced strategy of school-based and community-based programming makes sense for reaching preteens.

Acknowledgements

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The research was conducted by Public/Private Ventures from 2002-2004. This report covers highlights of the full report.

Find the EXECUTIVE SUMMARY at

<http://www.lpfch.org/grantmaking/ppvevalsummary.pdf>

and the FULL REPORT at <http://www.lpfch.org/grantmaking/ppvevalfull.pdf>

For more information, e-mail grants@lpfch.org Visit our website www.lpfch.org



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