

Executive Summary

The Family YMCA's Española Teen Center

The overarching goal of Department of Education grant U215K1000078 under the Fund for the Improvement of Education program for \$125,000 awarded to The Family YMCA's Española Teen Center, was to promote high school graduation. The grant supported operation of the center and enabled the Y to study key indicators that may have implications for larger applications. Currently, there is a volume of work for prevention programs in school settings, but there is a lack of material on positive development programming in out-of-school time centers. The measurements we gathered lend support to the ideal that resources in after school programming aimed at middle to high school age youth promote high school graduation.

The grant supported the provision of academic and enrichment programming for at-risk youth in New Mexico's Española Valley, a rural community of 9,688 that serves a county of 40,000, both of which have critical needs for services. Both the county and community are nearly double the national average of families and individuals below the poverty level. The socio-economic profile of the community as per student nutrition free/reduced percentage is 72%. The middle school dropout rate is 13.7% and the high school is 8.7%. Also, a 2007 New Mexico Public Education reports said 73% of Española high school graduates in college need remedial classes. The county population is 72% Hispanic and 14% American Indian.

A November 2009 NMDOH Epidemiology report, "Unintentional Illicit and Prescription Drug Overdose Death Trends, 2008," cited Rio Arriba County with the highest drug overdose death rate in our state at 52.2 per 100,000, comparable with the 7.1 in the United States (Center for Disease Control report, February 9, 2007, citing 1999-2004 statistics). A 2004 NMDOH drug abuse trends report, beyond citing the county as having severe multi-generational drug-addiction problems, also reports the rural community as having fractured community services.

The State of New Mexico's Uniform Crime Report (<http://www.dps.state.nm.us/index.php>) details monthly crime statistics per reporting agency and county. In 2008, Rio Arriba County had the highest Assault and Burglary rates in the state, and was second only to the large urban center of Las Cruces in Larceny rates. In a comparison of counties in the state with similar population sizes, Rio Arriba County has double and sometimes triple the amount of total crimes. This summary reveals that our

county has the highest rate of crime of those reporting, which was 11,578.9 per 100,000.

Additionally, city and county governments face economic and personnel shortages that affect their ability to adequately meet public safety and community service needs.

The challenges facing this population are multiple, but the measurements we tracked during the two-years the grant supported the teen center reveal some remarkable indications of success.

Main grant objectives were to A) increased educational support for the Española-area teen population through four-times per week tutoring after school and through other educational programs. Secondary objectives were to B) increase choices for healthy lifestyles among the Española-area teen population through weekly activities; and C) increase support for at-risk youth through community service, service learning activities and through mentoring.

The center opened in October 2007 and ran for two years prior to this grant, which provided a basis for numbers served. By the year 2009, the center had fully intergraded into the community and that year's numbers provided a solid basis of service for comparison against the two years of support the grant funded.

One key indicator for Objective A was tracking the tally of youth who stayed in school as a result of center support. In 2007-09, two years prior to funding, the total youth who stayed in school due to center mentoring was 12. During the two-year period of funding, from 2010-2011, the number was 21, which is a 75% increase over the first two years.

Another indicator for Objective A was to compare tallies of youth attending the center, tutoring sessions, tutored youth and educational programs offered. The base year of 2009 saw 72 youth tutored, and the last two years averaged 115 youth tutored, for a 59% increase. Yearly attendance at the center increased from 221 youth in 2009, to 521 youth in 2011, a growth of 135%. The amount of tutoring sessions grew as well, from 128 in 2009, to an average of 203 during the grants funded years, a growth of 58%. Education, skills-based offering grew from 8 in 2009, to having 13 in 2011, which is a 62% growth.

The connection between amount of youth tutored, amount of tutoring session, and amount of educational programs offered is directly tied to funding support. In 2009, the center struggled to cover the cost of tutors and educational programs. Funding support may very well be the reason that attendance at the center grew: the center was able to offer engaging programs that drew the youth. The basic discovery behind this principal is

that interesting, engaging programs are needed, and thus funding, to draw the youth to tutoring and toward support for staying in school.

Indicators of Objective B, increase choices for healthy lifestyles, are revealed through an analysis of all programs offered for the year 2009, to 2010 and 2011, and total visits to the center. In 2009, we offered 20 program categories, in 2010 it was 23 and in 2011 it was 22, an increase of 10%. Gross visits to the center in 2009 were 4,898; 2010 were 5,108; and 2011 were 6,995. Gross visits grew by 42%.

A measure of Objective C is a comparison of community service projects for the 2008-2009 years, versus the years funded in regard to number of services projects and number of youth involved. In the first two years, the center had 27 projects involving 232 youth. In the 2010-2011, we had 36 projects involving 416 youth. The growth in projects during the latter two years was 33%, and the growth in youth served was 79%.

The most unexpected outcomes, upon final review of the numbers served during this grant period, was the amount of pure mathematical data that showed growth in numbers served and effective outreach. The main reason we attribute to this is that during the two years of the grant, we had secure funding and were able to offer the programs to meet the needs of the youth. The year prior to this in 2009, we had severely cut back on tutoring hours and programs.

These numbers lend support that out-of-school time enriching activities can keep youth on a track to graduate. Of course the benefit to graduation is that individuals are more likely to gain access to employment with health insurance and thus less likely to rely on social service health care systems. A benefit of the community service projects is the likelihood of decreased crime because youth have a vested interest in building their community versus being destructive or harmful. The overarching goal is that youth will be connected to their community and that they will become leaders and positive influences.

A significant barrier to supporting the development of some students is that funding has been cut in various areas within the district. These funding cuts impact students that may struggle in the typical 7-hour school day, and who are in need of alternate forms of education to encourage them to succeed. Some of the barriers are transporting students to and from some of the special programs; our community is spread out across northern New Mexico. Many of our students have grown up in poverty-stricken communities, and lack the basic fundamentals to become productive citizens because of a variety of reasons to include multigenerational drug use, domestic violence and other contributing factors.

3/30/12-Diana Martinez,
Senior Program Director

Another analysis that could be useful is that of the amount of the grant to how many youth stayed in school (21); and how many youth were connected to healthy activities for those two years (331 in year 2010, and 521 in year 2011). Looking only at the youth we mentored to stay in school and graduate, those 21 were an investment of \$5,952.38 each. This investment has the potential to lessen their impact on the health care system, and indeed help them contribute positively to the economy. Looking at 852 youth served in those two years, the investment is a cost of \$146.71 per student. Other studies may more closely dissect the cost-benefit analysis of positive youth development programs, but a cursory look at the numbers seem to indicate that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.