

Executive Summary: Outcome Evaluation of Programs Offering Youth Leadership Training, 2002 – 2004

Prepared by **Ronald M. Sabatelli, Stephen A. Anderson, Jennifer Trachtenberg, and Julie Liefeld** in April 2005

The Center for Applied Research conducted a two-year evaluation of youth leadership activities within community youth development programs in Connecticut. Four different types of youth programs were included in the evaluation. Despite offering different programming content, all programs were required to provide youth with leadership opportunities. The participating programs included Combating Underage Drinking, Juvenile Review Boards, Youth Advisory Committees, and Title V: Delinquency Prevention.

A youth leadership program was defined as one that offered young people supports and opportunities to participate actively in the planning, decision-making, and implementation of the programs in which they participated; and engaged youth in frequent and regular contact with adults who modeled responsible behavior and provided ongoing validation and support for youth's active involvement. Youth involved in leadership activities were contrasted with a comparison group of youth who participated in a variety of in-school or out-of-school activities that did not include leadership programming.

Youth involved in the leadership programs generally found their experiences to be very rewarding. When asked to retrospectively report on their year in the program, a large majority felt safe, involved, supported by the staff and stimulated by the activities.

Youth involved in the leadership programs reported an improved sense of support from their local communities compared to youth in the comparison group. That is, youth involved in leadership programs viewed their neighborhoods as offering more support, help, and protection, and they saw people working more closely together. Leadership training also appeared to offer an added benefit to males. Males who participated in leadership activities reported significant improvements in their social self-efficacy when compared to other subgroups of youth (females in leadership groups, youth in comparison groups). Social self-efficacy refers to a belief in one's capacities to organize and execute the actions needed to manage interpersonal and social situations.

Another important finding was that youth who participated in the leadership programs appeared to be a uniquely talented group of individuals. They scored higher initially on a variety of youth outcome measures when compared to youth who participated in the comparison group.

Despite the generally high level of functioning of participants overall, there was a subgroup of youth engaged in leadership activities that was less socially and emotionally skilled. It was this subgroup that was most likely to report positive changes over the evaluation period. Those who started the year at a lower level of overall functioning on a general index of youth development were most likely to report significant improvements on such outcomes as social self-efficacy, self-assertive efficacy, engagement in neighborhood activities, and an increased presence of caring adults in their lives.

Separate analyses of the different types of programs involved in the youth leadership evaluation showed some differences across the different program types. Implications of the findings and recommendations for youth programs and future evaluation are presented in the report for the State of Connecticut, Office of Policy and Management.