Executive Summary: Evaluation of the People Empowering People Program

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The Center for Applied Research conducted an evaluation of the People Empowering People (PEP) Program—an innovative training program designed to build upon the strengths of adults and older adolescents with limited financial resources. Rooted in the concept of empowerment, the PEP program emphasized each participant's unique strengths, life experiences, and capacities, and fostered connections between the individual and the community.

The program that was evaluated in this study involved 10 two-hour interactive skill-training sessions that covered topics such as values, verbal and nonverbal skills, active listening skills, problem-solving skills, and parenting styles. The final sessions focused on connecting individuals to their communities by teaching them how to assess community needs, work with community leaders, and design projects to enhance their local community. Following the completion of the ten training sessions, participants attended a workshop relevant to their needs and interests, and they then worked on community projects. Eleven facilitators, ten of whom were women, implemented the program. Six worked in a prison setting, while 5 were out in the community.

The evaluation of the PEP program was conducted between October 2002 and April 2004. Self-report survey instruments were administered at three different points in time—prior to starting the program, at the end of the 10-week structured workshop sessions, and three months after the participants had completed a community-related project. The survey included demographic information, questions about participants' satisfaction with the program, and outcome measures of participants' assertiveness, locus of control, parenting satisfaction, community involvement, and family communication.

A total of 122 ethnically diverse individuals from various locations throughout Connecticut participated in the program that was evaluated in this study. The majority of participants completed the PEP program while incarcerated at the time (73%). The remaining 27% of the participants attended PEP programs in their local communities. The majority of participants (68%) were male. Twenty-five percent stated they were married while the others indicated they were single (37%), divorced (12%), unmarried and cohabiting (9%) or separated (4%). Most reported having children.

The results of this evaluation showed that the seventy participants who completed the post-workshop survey reported a very high level of satisfaction with the program. They averaged 9.3 on a 10-point scale. One hundred percent reported that they felt accepted and supported in the program, that they were involved in stimulating and engaging activities, and that their group leader really cared about them. Ninety-nine percent reported feeling like they belonged. Finally, analyses of the surveys completed by thirty of the original 122 participants who completed the third, post-workshop survey, demonstrated that PEP participants had reported significant pre-test/post-test changes on all outcome measures.

Implications of the findings and recommendations for the PEP program were presented in the report for the University of Connecticut, Cooperative Extension System.