

UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE

Outreach Scholars Academy 2009

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1. PROJECT TITLE -

A Study of Community-Based Projects for Children, Youth and Families At Risk (CYFAR): defining effective management practices leading to desired outcomes and sustainability

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In my field of work, practitioners find that effective community-based programs for children, youth and families reduce costs of human services, juvenile justice, and education by equipping those individuals and family units with the skills they need to lead positive, productive and contributing lives.

Since 1991, I have directed three 5-year community based CYFAR projects (Children, Youth and Families At Risk) funded through USDA/CSREES. The goal of these projects has been to improve outcomes for children and youth from high risk environments that include poverty, limited parent education, abuse and neglect, and other factors involving social services. We began by establishing a comprehensive after-school program (grades K-12) in an inner city neighborhood of Manchester (1991-1996). Using what we learned, we worked with community partners to establish similar programs in Boscawen, Claremont and Haverhill (1998-2003), and Hillsboro and the Seabrook / lower seacoast region (2004-2009).

Throughout these projects, nationally sponsored research was conducted on similar projects across the United States and the U.S. territories. The Manchester project was one of 96 CYFAR projects reviewed in the first study, The National Youth At Risk Program Sustainability Study (Mancini, J.A., & Marek, L.I., 1998).ⁱ The resulting framework for sustainability was shared with the 2nd and 3rd cycle of New Hampshire CYFAR projects through training of staff and community partners. Evaluation of strategic planning for sustainability was incorporated throughout the final cycle of projects, and final reports are currently being written by the evaluation team.

The purposes of this project are to assess what we did in these projects to apply the sustainability framework developed through the national research, and prepare a guide to help future communities develop and deliver sustainable programs for at risk youth. New Hampshire is preparing to submit a proposal for a 4th cycle of CYFAR funds. This Outreach Scholars project will review our previous CYFAR projects to identify strategies used to apply Mancini and Marek's sustainability framework, our successes and the obstacles we faced. I hope to use these findings to prepare a model of strategies to help future project managers incorporate both the ongoing research and the lessons we learned in the application of the emerging research.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION/STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES/PROBLEM

Nationally sponsored research on the sustainability of CYFAR projects initially advised a framework for program practices associated with sustainability, including: leadership competence, effective collaboration, understanding the community, demonstrating and disseminating program impact, strategic funding, staff involvement and integration, and program responsiveness. The research has continued with a specific focus on understanding the components of sustainability and how it is achieved, maintained, and enhanced (Marek, L.I., & Mancini, J.A., 2002).ⁱⁱ Moving the research from the resulting framework to practice in New Hampshire's community-based CYFAR programs has proven challenging. As economic resources become increasingly scarce, project managers need a proven model to guide them in moving grant funded projects from conception to implementation while ensuring that sound sustainability practices are quickly put in place. The luxury of five years of funding to accomplish sustainability of CYFAR projects is no longer guaranteed – we need to know what works, help managers avoid delay and overcome barriers to building a sustainable program.

Comment [PG1]:

4. PROJECT DETAILS

Goals and Objectives:

The goal of this Outreach Scholars project is to a) define practical strategies, driven by the latest research, and b) guide project managers in the effective and efficient start-up and long-term oversight of grant-funded programs that will lead to both attainment of desired outcomes and project sustainability.

Specific objectives include:

- Future CYFAR project managers understand the research based framework for sustainable community-based programs
- Future CYFAR program managers apply a model of effective strategies related to the framework. As a result, they achieve desired youth and family outcomes and are able to sustain the entire program or its most effective components
- Findings contribute to the field of practice, and assist project managers in other community-based programs for at-risk children, youth and families

Target Population/Audience:

Project managers of community-based CYFAR grant-funded projects are the intended end-users of project results. Ideally the model, once tested and refined, will transfer to managers of other related projects.

Methods:

1. A partnership of faculty and Cooperative Extension colleagues from across the land-grant system will design an assessment tool from current research concerning sustainability and project management practices of community-based programs. Students may also be involved in some phases of the project, depending on the timing of activities and the recommendations of faculty partners.

2. The assessment tool will be used by project partners to review past CYFAR projects and assess the management practices used to achieve outcomes and sustainability.
3. The findings from the assessment will be compared with the current field of recommended practices for sustaining evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs for at-risk audiences (i.e. SAMHSA, public health, juvenile justice). Through this process an emerging set of practical strategies will be identified.
4. The identified strategies will be organized in a manner that will help project managers design, develop, manage and sustain future CYFAR projects.
5. Training plans and written materials will be developed and used to assist future project managers in guiding community-based CYFAR programs to achieve both sustainability and desired program outcomes. As a result of training, the model will be tested within our own future CYFAR projects, and possibly in projects from other states.

Evidence of External Collaboration and Partnership:

Faculty from UNH Departments of Social Work and Family Studies, and PSU Departments of Social Work and Criminal Justice previously served as external evaluators of the CYFAR projects. They are being contacted and invited to participate in designing the assessment tool and developing the model. They will be asked to recommend students to assist. The project provides an opportunity to place students in a meaningful research project leading to results that contribute to an emerging field of practice for working with vulnerable youth and families. I expect faculty partners will benefit from a renewed involvement with CYFAR because of the opportunity it will provide them to review the evaluation reports they prepared, interview project staff they worked with, and help formulate recommendations for future project managers.

Emerging partnerships are also developing as a result of a recent USDA/CSREES posting of an RFA for a collaborative multi-university project to identify and disseminate applied research and best practices of CYFAR programming efforts. Discussions with faculty from Maine about collaborating on a proposal have begun.

Expected Impact:

The faculty partners work in departments that prepare students for careers in human services, social services, and juvenile justice. Many graduates from their programs begin careers with non-profits or government programs that struggle fiscally and frequently provide services through grant funded projects. They may even become managers of those grant-funded projects. The core elements of the project include helping to develop a practical tool to assess program management related to sustainability, and a guide to effective and efficient management practices leading to sustainable programs. These should be valuable in the development of both course content and student experience. We will track any changes in course content and involvement of students to assess this assumption of impact.

Dissemination of findings from this Outreach Project will include initial and ongoing training, as well as monitoring of progress of staff and collaborators in future CYFAR projects. In addition, it may be possible to share the model through the new USDA/CSREES project that will soon be funded to identify and disseminate applied research and best practices of CYFAR programming. There is also an opportunity to submit an article through the peer-reviewed Journal of Extension.

Scholarly Connection:

Having spent the past seventeen years directing New Hampshire’s CYFAR projects, I am interested to see what we can learn from the experience, how these lessons relate to emerging research, and how they can be applied to improve how we manage future projects. By involving faculty and students in the project, we are both reaching out from the university to needy communities with knowledge and expertise, and reaching in to the university with real experiences from six New Hampshire communities. This project will expand my own professional development in new directions, challenging me to see things from a new perspective.

5. EVALUATION PLAN

Assessing the scholarship of the project involves tracking the success of the project in generating new ideas and strategies, adding content to courses, engaging students in new experiences, and having results accepted for dissemination by CYFAR through its professional development strategies. Success of the outreach components includes tracking the participation of previous CYFAR program staff and community partners in the assessment phase, and adoption of recommended strategies by future CYFAR project managers. Tracking these aspects of both scholarship and outreach will provide project partners with enough information to determine whether or not they benefited from participating, and to what extent new knowledge was generated and applied. It will take a few years to evaluate the project’s success in these areas.

ⁱ Mancini, J.A. & Marek, L.I. (1998). Patterns of program survival and organizational support: The national youth at risk program sustainability study. (Publication 350-800). Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Cooperative Extension Service. <http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/family/350-800/350-800.html>.

ⁱⁱ Marek, L.I., Mancini, J.A. (2007). National New Communities Program Sustainability Study: Sustainability factors and partnerships. Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Cooperative Extension Service. <http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/350/350-804/350-804.pdf>