Bay County Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Grant
Baseline Study Findings

Introduction:

As a result of a comprehensive need’s assessment in Bay County, Michigan State University-Extension identified several risk factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency. The factors identified included: low neighborhood attachment; family management problems; community laws and norms favorable toward drug use, fire arms, and crime; a lack of commitment to school; and early and persistent antisocial behavior.

To tackle this community issue, the Bay County Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Project with the local title “VIP Program of Bay County” was initiated in the Summer 1995 under MSU-Extension in Bay County. The project goal is to address priority risk factors identified by local leaders and members of the community by creating an opportunity for youth and adults of the community to come together. Specific program objectives included: (a) enrollment of 300 youth and attainment of an average daily attendance of 240 youth in the After School Program; (b) registration of 270 youth and attainment of an average daily attendance of 200 youth in the Summer Recreation Program; and (c) diversion of 70% of the alcohol and cigarette offenders and 70% of nonviolent offenders referred to the Prosecutor’s Office to the VIP Program of Bay County.

A variety of activities are offered at each program site. Program activities varied from one day to the next. Examples of the first year activities included basic recreation, visited to the Boys’ and Girls’ club, swimming, video production, painting and bus tour to museums and other locations unfamiliar to some children. In year two, objectives also include the identification and development of Parent Education Program.

Methods and Procedures:

The Center of Evaluative Studies at Michigan State University was asked to conduct a baseline study during the Summer 1995. The evaluation instrument was developed by the program staff and was given to participants at the completion of the Summer program, and results were compiled. The purpose of this baseline study was to gain a better understanding of the family and economic situations of these youths and their perceptions on a number of issues (i.e., smoking, drinking, neighborhood attachment, community laws and norms, etc.).

Risk factors were identified by the VIP Task Force members and through a review of related literature. The risk factors identified included: low neighborhood attachment, family management problems such as youth discipline and parenting issues, community laws and norms favorable toward drug use, fire arms and crime, a general lack of commitment to school, and early and antisocial behavior. The project offered a number of methods and opportunities to address these risk factors. Activities available to youth and families were coupled with increased volunteer and leadership opportunities for caring adults and improved access to existing
community resources.

The Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Task Force, VIP, has joined forces with other coalitions to develop collaborative efforts and to serve the recreational and social needs of children and families in bay County and to reduce the duplication of services.

The data for this baseline study were gathered from administering a survey among program participants, parents and school staff during Summer 1995. In evaluating this project, the survey information will be supplemented by information gathered through daily logs that provide insight into how the participants view the community, the family, and authority figures. The log will also be used to determine daily participation. At least one additional survey will be administered during this project. The Task Force will use both sources of information to determine the impact of various, directed programs on the participants.

Findings:

There were 395 youths between the ages of six and 12 who participated in the 1995 Summer Program (Table 1). These came from Bay City and Pinconing, and were involved in the Fast Track program, a Summer Recreation Program. Of these 395 participants, 51.8% were boys and 48.2% were girls (Table 2). The majority of the participants were Caucasian (76.3%) while 9.4% were from mixed ethnic background, 5.5% were African-American, 3.02% were Hispanic, and 0.9% were Asian (Table 3).

As 138 parents and school staff were an integral part of this program, they were also asked to participate in this evaluation. Of the 138 parents and staff, 40% were male while 60% were female. The majority of the staff was Caucasian (89.7%) while 5.1% indicated the “other” category, and Hispanic and African-American had equal representation with 2.6%.

In order to gain a clearer picture of the participants’ backgrounds, they were asked a series of questions concerning their living situation. Of the 395 youths, about half or 198 live with their mother/step-mother while 155 live only with their father/step-father. The remainders live with their sister (119), brothers (113), grandfathers (8), grandmothers (12), other relatives (13), non-relatives (12), or alone (2). When asked whether they spend time at home with no adult present, almost two-fifths (58%) indicated that they have an adult present at all time. One out of seven (14%) indicated that they are home alone about less than an hour; 14% are home alone about 1 to 2 hours. Fewer children (8%) indicated that they do not have adults present for more than 3 hours (Table 5).

The majority of participants’ parents are employed. The employment rate of participants’ father was higher than that of their mothers. Participants’ mothers employment rate ranged from 69 to 75 percent where as fathers employment ranged from 79 to 90 percent (Table 6).

The participants were asked to indicate their interest in different activities. The most frequently checked activity was to watch TV/videos with 255 followed by going to the park with 235 participants. These activities were followed by going swimming with 224, playing computer
games with 220, playing baseball with 200, and going to the library with 215 (Table 7).

Survey participants including the parents and school staff were asked to rate their perceptions on five issues: smoking, drinking, neighborhood attachment, family management, and community laws and norms. For each of these risk factors, a series of statements was provided and respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree with each statement.

Participants, parents, and school staff were given a series of statements about various risk factors and they rated them on a Likert scale with 1=strongly agree and 5=strongly disagree. For the statements concerning smoking and drinking, the statement “I would be really upset if I found out my child smoked cigarettes” received the lowest scores with 1.33 in Bay City, 1.36 in Pinconing, 2.17 in the Fast Track program, 1.42 amongst parents. This indicates that majority of the respondents strongly agreed with this statement.

The statement that received the majority of the highest scores with 4.13 in Bay City, 4.17 in the Summer Recreation Bay City, 3.75 in Pinconing, 4.26 amongst parents, and 3.64 with school staff was “It’s okay for teens to drink if they have their parent’s permission” demonstrates that the respondents did not agree with the statement (Table 8). Except for Fast Track group, school staff, parents and participants agreed that “alcohol is a drug.”

Specific questions concerning cigarette and alcohol use revealed that the majority of respondents will not try cigarette smoking during the next twelve months nor accept a beer or alcoholic drink (Table 9 and 10).

The respondents’ perceptions concerning neighborhood attachment did not waver greatly. For the most part, they responded that they did not know or their scores illustrated that they neither strongly agreed nor strongly disagreed. For example, the statement, “My community shows concern for all people” received scores that did not waver greatly in all six categories--3.0 in Bay City, 3.03 in Summer Recreation, 3.81 in Pinconing, 2.53 in Fast Track program, 3.57 with the parents, and 3.00 with school staff (Table 11). In general, parents tend to possess a stronger attachment to the neighborhood and feel that their community is a good place to live.

Family management is a category that is important in the upbringing of young adults. In this section of the baseline study, the majority of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, “My child has to ask for my permission to do most things.” On the opposite side of the scale, the majority of respondents did not have loud arguments with their children/parents about rules and decisions (Table 12).

Parents and school staff felt that “it should be illegal to sell cigarettes to children” while the participating students from all four programs indicated that they “don’t know” about this issue. Several respondents feel “adults who allow kids to drink at parties in their homes should be arrested.” Most of the respondents felt that the laws in their communities were not strict enough to protect them from crime (Table 13).

Parents/guardians/caring adults and school staff were asked a series of questions regarding their
perceptions of kids’ behavior. Both parents and school staff feel that academic performance is important to most kids in the special program. They disagreed with the statement: “Most single parents do not motivate their kids to excel in school.” Similarly, respondents felt that self-esteem development is influenced by several factors and not just by the family (Table 14).

To conclude the baseline study, parents and school staff were asked their perceptions concerning family. Both parents and school staff felt that self-esteem development is not influenced by the family alone. Parents agreed that youth in city neighborhoods are often identified with vandalism of public property while school staff agreed that drive-by shootings are a concern of families in their communities.