

# EVALUATION

## YOUTH AT RISK PILOT PROGRAM

### INTRODUCTION

St. John's College and the Belize Police Department developed a Pilot Program for **Youth at Risk**, to provide support for thirty Belize City youth considered at risk for delinquency and eventual incarceration. The primary goals of the Pilot Program were to enhance the self-esteem, increase the self-discipline, and expand the awareness of the selected youth; and to develop a model for a program that could be replicated on a larger scale by other agencies.

The program had as its secondary goals the sensitisation of the Belize Police Department to the needs of underprivileged youth and the demonstration that institutions not traditionally involved in service to children in difficult circumstances could make an effective contribution in this area.

The youths selected to participate in the Pilot Program were drawn from nine high-crime impoverished neighbourhoods of Belize City and comprised ten females and twenty males between the ages of six and fourteen years. The neighbourhoods included were: Yarborough, West Street, Pinks Alley, Pickstock, North Creek, Central American Boulevard, Mahogany Street, Cemetery Road and Banak Street. The selection criteria agreed upon in the initial planning of the program, in addition to neighbourhood of residence, were the age range of ten to fourteen years of age; single parent households or households with parents in unstable union; and at least three of the following four risk factors:

- 1 Condition of housing as indication of low income,
- 2 Immediate family member in jail or released from jail within previous year
- 3 Truancy or unacceptable behaviour in school,
- 4 Illicit drug use in household or yard.

## **Program Description**

### **Phase One**

The Pilot Program took place in three phases. The first phase, from July 7 to 25, 1997, was a three-week session at St. John's College during which the participants were involved in Karate classes, individual Computer lessons, Creative Art classes, Puppetry, discussion groups, sports, and educational trips. During Phase One, nine full-time volunteers worked directly and intensively with the target group. Eight of the volunteers underwent training in basic Conflict Resolution and Behaviour Management techniques prior to the start of the program. About six other volunteers worked intermittently with the program.

### **Phase Two**

Phase Two of the Pilot Program involved pairing each of the twenty-six youths who completed Phase One with a mentor for a one-year period. That phase ended in August 1998. The mentors were adults with positive lifestyles, and positive attitudes towards work. Most importantly, they exhibited a willingness to make a positive difference in a child's life. The mentors were expected to plan and carry out at least one positive activity each month with the child, to demonstrate that the child was worthy of positive attention. Over the course of the year, three meetings were held with the mentors to discuss and evaluate their progress, examine and resolve problems, and develop support systems.

### **Phase Three**

Phase Three was a two-week follow-up summer session with the twenty-six youths who completed Phase One. The goal of this third phase was to assess the progress of the youths and to strengthen their efforts to develop/acquire the necessary skills and attitudes needed to live positive lives. During this phase, six police Zone Beat Liaison Officers were assigned to the program as volunteers. The expectations was that through this assignment, police officers would develop greater sensitivity in working with underprivileged children, youth, their parents, and the community – a benefit that hopefully could positively impact the greater police department. Activities during this phase included Steel Band lessons, Computer classes, Educational visits, and an overnight Environmental Camp.

At present, St. John's College still maintains contact with the participants of the Pilot Program by making informal checks on their educational progress and occasionally planning group activities. The last group activity was a trip to Chaa Creek in May 2000, which involved the young participants, SJC Junior College students and teachers, and one of the police officers who served as a volunteer for Phase III, along with then-current Zone Beat Liaison Officers.

## **PURPOSE OF EVALUATION**

**The purpose of this evaluation is to:**

1. measure how well the program met its goals/objectives;
2. determine the impact of the program on the target group;
3. identify the indirect beneficiaries of the program;
4. examine the effectiveness of the volunteer involvement;
5. examine the impact and efficacy of the mentoring component of the program;
6. record the parents' reactions to the program;
7. ascertain the effectiveness of the program activities;
8. analyse the community support for the program;
9. assess the effectiveness of the collaboration between St. John's College and the Police Department;
10. evaluate the management of the program;
11. provide information for developing recommendations for effectively replicating the program.

## **METHOD OF EVALUATION**

This evaluation was carried out over a six-week period and involved consultations, interviews, questionnaires and group meetings with Program Coordinators, the participants and their parents/guardians. The volunteers, mentors and community supporters (cash, service and kind) were also consulted. Over the period of review the consultant held extensive discussions with Ms. Dianne Lindo, the St. John's College Co-ordinator of the Youth At Risk Pilot Program, and Corporal Christopher Noble, the Police Department Co-ordinator of the same, to thoroughly grasp the varying angles of the program's development and implementation. During the review, the consultant also interviewed a total of seventeen participants, eleven parents, five volunteers, six mentors, and seven community supporters. He also interviewed three former volunteers of the Police Zone Beat Officers, and the Officer in Charge, Sgt. Gilbert Pitts. Interviews were also conducted with the former President of St. John's College, Fr. Timothy Thompson as well as former Commissioner of Police, Mr. Ornel Brooks. The consultant read the extensive background files of the program, which were meticulously kept by Ms. Lindo, and also spent a total of 30 hours over the period of review in six of the nine neighbourhoods from which the youth participants were drawn.

## **FINDINGS**

### **1. How well did the pilot program meet its goals/objectives?**

The goals of this pilot program were:

- To equip a selected group of Belize City youth at risk for crime with the attitudes necessary to lift themselves out of poverty and delinquency;
- To develop a positive support network for youth at risk for crime;
- To develop a sustainable program that can be replicated with other youth.

The objectives of the pilot program were to enable the participants to:

- expand their awareness of the positive elements of the world around them;
- enhance their self-discipline;
- create links between themselves and positive role models;
- develop a healthy sense of self and a positive self-image;
- develop a strong sense of purpose.

#### 1.1

The review determined that while the Youth at Risk Program was able to accomplish its five stated objectives it was only able to reach one of its three stated goals.

#### 1.2

The program accomplished its objective of exposing 30 youth from different parts of Belize City, who were at risk for crime and delinquency, to positive alternatives by expanding their awareness of positive elements of the world around them. Within its limitations the program was able to place these youths in environments that enhanced their self-discipline and provided them with positive role models as well as helped them to develop a healthy self-image and sense of purpose. These objectives were realized with the positive learning environment that Phase I and III provided.

#### 1.3

Sixty percent (60%) of the participants (all boys) demonstrated some form of discipline problems, like truancy, staying out late, not listening etc., before the implementation of the program; however, by the end of Phase I these same ten boys had stopped 'giving trouble' and were showing positive changes according to their parents.

#### 1.4

. The general response from the fourteen of the seventeen (17) participants interviewed is that during and since the program they have benefited from what they learnt while in the program. Some highlighted the trips to Cockscomb or the caye as learning experiences they had never had before or have not had since the program. Others spoke of personal conversations they had with volunteers that helped them with a personal problem. Ninety percent (90%) of the parents/guardians consulted reported that during Phase I and III, they saw the positive effects of the program's influence on their youth reflected, for example, in less discipline problems

#### 1.5

Seven of those participants interviewed (40%) indicated that they were in school or working. One participant credits her mentor with the focus she has in her education and feels she is doing better in school because of her. Another mother credits the program for her son's ambitiousness. It could not be said that the program was the major factor in the progressive behaviour of this group but that it was a significant contribution.

#### 1.6

On the other hand another forty-percent (40%) has not made any recognizable change. While they were not involved in any criminal or anti-social behaviour at the time of the review they seemed not to have taken advantage of opportunities as others have. This of course could not be attributed only to the failure of the program to reach its goals/objectives since there are many other socio-economic factors at play in these youth's lives since the program.

#### 1.7

Twenty percent (20%) of the participants interviewed reflected unhealthy practices, like aimlessly hanging out on the corner. By association one would assume that they were into some of the illicit activities going on around them, but again, during the review, they were not rude or disrespectful in any way. They had good memories of the program and spoke of their benefit but the combination of urban pressures and low skill development coupled with lack of ambition made them appear regressive.

## 1.8

The program had three stated goals:

- To equip a selected group of Belize City youth at risk for crime with the attitudes necessary to lift themselves out of poverty and delinquency;
- To develop a positive support network for youth at risk for crime;
- To develop a sustainable program that can be replicated with other youth.

Of these three goals only the last was partially achieved.

## 1.9

The goal of equipping youths with “attitudes necessary to lift themselves out of poverty and delinquency” may have been too ambitious a goal considering the shortness and temporary nature of the exercise in the context of overwhelming opposing forces.

## 1.10

What became apparent from the review was that the achievements were short-lived because of the lack of a sustainable support system within the program. Some of the main connectors of such a support would have been the mentors who would have needed a specific orientation to sustain such a support system. Other players such as the Police Department’s ZBLO would have also had to be prepared to play a part in such a support system. One would assume that other agencies that work with at risk youth would have also been included in such a network. No observable actions were taken in this direction therefore no positive sustainable support network was achieved.

## 1.11

The Youth at Risk Program was sustainable during its program life. As you will see in other sections of this report it had a unique situation that allowed it to direct its resources properly to get maximum out of its fund raising. It provided a formula that has many lessons that can be used for like programs targeting youth at risk. I have highlighted some of these in the Recommendation Section.

## **OBSERVATION**

***It is very important to spend time selecting the goals and objectives of programs such as this one. The first things that must be taken into consideration are the many limitations that prevent the full realization of goal/objectives. The use of terms like ‘enhance’, ‘expand’, ‘develop’, etc. are qualitative terms that are very hard to quantify in evaluating the impact of such programs***

## 2. Impact of the Program on the Target Group

The program sought to provide opportunities for the participants to: ***expand awareness of the positive elements of the world around them; enhance self-discipline, develop a positive self-image and a sense of purpose and expose them to positive role models.***

### 2.1

During Phase I and III there was intense involvement in program activities that focused on enhancing the self-esteem and self-worth of the participants and the majority of youths surveyed had good stories about the positive effects of these phases of the program on their lives. During this period the youths were also exposed to positive role models who engaged them in discussions about the challenges they faced in their lives.

### 2.2

Parents/guardians reported observable changes in their youth during these two phases. Excitement and enthusiasm were two most noted attitude changes but the child's displaying a sense of discipline was also mentioned. If for example they were staying out late at night during the program they would come early. They listened more; they got into less mischief. One mother recounted that the program came at a time when gangs were influencing her son and that the counsellors he met in the program helped him to refocus. During the program the majority of the participants manifested a spirit of optimism and a sense of hope in the future.

### 2.3

The participants gave examples of their learning experiences from the visit to prison and the visit to Maya Center village in the Cockscomb. These experiences expanded their awareness and provided these youths with opportunities to grow in civic and social awareness. Fourteen or 80% of the participants have had no contact with the Police since the program and 20% have had only minor contact such as being stopped and cautioned during routine Police surveillance. Forty percent is employed or going to school.

### 2.5

When compared to the larger group twenty percent (20%) of the participants interviewed showed little change of attitude and one, no change at all since the program. These were

youths who during the review seemed impressed with what occurred during the program but did not reflect the enhanced self-image, self-discipline and sense of purpose that the others displayed. The program obviously provided a positive experience in their lives but they were not able to translate that experience into a source of continuing motivation as others have.

## 2.6

The program impacted a significant number only while activities were going on but that faded into insignificance after Phase I and was not revived in Phase II, perhaps because of the inconsistencies of the visits from their mentors or the absence of one. The lack of proper orientation/training and inconsistency of some of the mentors may have contributed to this, (see section on mentors).

## 2.7

The scheduled classes and outdoor activities have received overwhelming praises from both the participants and their parents/guardians. This sector of the program had a tremendous impact on the target group because it enriched their lives and provided an experience that no one can ever deny or take away.

## 2.8

More than three years after this program, the majority of the participants interviewed are still reflecting positive impacts by avoiding some of the negative societal traps. (i.e. teenage pregnancy or problems with the law).

## **OBSERVATIONS**

**Many of these youth live in a social/economic environment that presents a daily challenge to their quest to achieve stability and forward mobility. Low levels of opportunity for education and employment make the "standard" models of success a difficult goal for many of them to achieve. For many, the lack of necessary remedial support structures to advance themselves makes those "standard" models an unfair criterion for judging their abilities. Other models must be rationalized to get a clearer picture of their measure of success. Therefore, to rationalize the long-term impact of a program such as this one these exceptional factors must be considered.**

### **3. Indirect Beneficiaries of the Program**

There were many who indirectly benefited from the Youth at Risk Program including the parents, the implementers (i.e. coordinators, volunteers, mentors), teachers, Police Department, St. John's College, and Belize City in general.

#### **Parents**

The parents benefited because the quality of the activities and those positive persons involved assisted them in providing the much-needed support their children needed to help make important choices. The mentoring aspect of the program was of special benefit since it provided another 'caring' individual in the child's life to reinforce what the parent may have already been saying, or may have wanted to say but didn't know how. The lessons learned in Phase I and III, from the classes and from the field trips, were also rewarding experiences for these youth.

#### **Implementers**

The implementers (i.e. coordinators, volunteers, mentors) benefited from the sense of purpose that is realized in doing a useful and effective program like this one. They also gained experience which could be duplicated elsewhere. The fact that most of the implementers had no prior experience working with youth at risk or any professional background to prepare them for this work is a clear indication that "professional expertise" is not a requirement for one who wants to make a significant impact in the life of an underprivileged child.

#### **Teachers**

The teachers and schools also benefited since the program helped to reinforce the importance of discipline in the children's lives. The program provided valuable lessons that helped to broaden students' scope and it had a residual effect on their performance upon their return to the classroom. That the importance of education and staying in school was reinforced in the program was indirectly beneficial to teachers and schools.

## **Police**

The Police Department also benefited because a greater part of the youth who eventually get into trouble with the law come from backgrounds such as these participants. The Police gained because every child who is turned away from delinquency and possible incarceration is one less that they have to tackle in the streets. The program's secondary goal of sensitising the Police to the needs of underprivileged youth was also realized by having their ZBLO participate in the program and to learn directly the antecedents of criminal behaviour.

## **St. John's College**

St. John's College administration and its student community benefited by having the program initiated and implemented from their campus. The Jesuit mission of **"men and women for others"** was practically realized through this program. The involvement of the academic community in tackling the issues of social justice can only have long-term benefits for those who were directly involved with the implementation of the program as well as all of those associated with it.

## **Nation of Belize**

Finally, Belize in general and Belize City especially benefited from this program. As Ms. Lindo has pointed out, "programs aimed at positive interventions in the lives of children and youth, before they become school dropouts, pregnant teenagers and young incarcerated statistics, are critically needed in Belize at this time." This was one such program and sharing the results generally may spur an increase of quality services to children and youth in difficult circumstances.

## ***OBSERVATIONS***

**There were many indirect beneficiaries to this program who may not have realized that they were recipients of its benefits. Considering the value of a program based on its indirect beneficiaries may be an important indicator for valuing future programs**

## 4. The Effectiveness of the Volunteer Element

Volunteers provided a critical support to the success of this program. Broadly speaking “volunteers” were those who gave of their time and effort, without remuneration, to provide these young people an opportunity to experience something positive in their lives. There were many such persons in this program, but for the sake of this evaluation we narrowed the definition of volunteers only to those who acted as supervisors and coordinators in Phase I and III. In Phase III, Zone Beat Liaison Officers (ZBLO) from the Police Department were **assigned** to assist in the coordination but were also regarded as “volunteers”.

According to the records this program sought volunteers who were: **self-confident, mature, patient, and possessing initiative; those who were capable of working effectively with the target group; persons who accepted the idea of using their positive experiences to build self-esteem and self-discipline in the youth.** During the first phase of the program there were nine full time volunteers: two high school graduates, one junior college graduate, five junior college students and one junior college lecturer. They worked directly in supervising the participants who were grouped into five teams of six. Eight of the volunteers went through 4 days of training in Basic Conflict Resolution, Behaviour Management, and Positive Discipline Techniques prior to the start of the program. Three former gang members from the Conscious Youth Development Program (CYDP) assisted in this training. They added a unique perspective to the volunteers, and later also worked informally with the target group. Six other volunteers worked intermittently with the program.

#### 4.1

Volunteers provided a support structure and spent the most direct time with the participants.

#### 4.2

They exhibited a willingness to make a positive difference in a child's life.

4.3 Zone Beat Liaison Officers provided logistical support and added an important element to the program by allowing the target groups to see another side of the police.

#### 4.4

Volunteers ended up with responsibilities that superseded their original commitment of supervising, mentoring or coordinating.

#### 4.5

Some volunteers were ill equipped and insufficiently prepared for the program. One ZBLO was asked not to return when she displayed inappropriate behaviour toward the participants.

#### 4.6

Some volunteers had difficulty dealing with rowdiness and discipline problems, of the youths. One volunteer noted that she didn't know exactly what to do when a youth started to fight, so she would seek help.

### ***OBSERVATIONS***

**In the review it became evident that certain aspects of the volunteer element were weak and needed re-examining if shortfalls are to be avoided in the future. The volunteers represented those who spent the most direct (hands-on) time with the participants. They were expected to not only be supervisors and coordinators, but because of the nature of the target group also found themselves in the role of counsellors, motivators, disciplinarian, and even part-time surrogate parents. This proved an enormous challenge to those who were interviewed. It appears that there was need for more training to properly prepare them for the responsibility for which they were volunteering.**

## **5. Impact and Efficacy of the Mentoring Component of the Program**

The second phase of the program involved pairing each of the twenty-six youth who completed Phase I with an adult mentor or mentor family for a one-year period. **The mentors were adults who had positive attitudes towards life and work, lived positive lifestyles, and wanted to make a positive difference in a child's life. Mentors were expected to plan and carry out at least one positive activity with the youth each month, whether it was visiting the child at home, helping with homework, going to church or any other positive activity that showed the child that he or she was worthy of positive attention.**

### 5.1

Three meetings were held with mentors during the period of mentorship to discuss and evaluate progress, examine and resolve problems and develop support systems.

### 5.2

Seventy percent (70%) of the mentors interviewed had no previous experience; of the 30% who had some experience, one was a trained counsellor.

### 5.3

Fifty percent (50%) of the mentors felt that they would have been better prepared to take on the responsibility if there was a structured orientation prior to meeting the mentee.

### 5.4

Seventy percent (70%) of the mentors interviewed met regularly with their mentee throughout the year.

### 5.5

As can be noted from the questionnaire in the Appendix some mentors offered very structured time with their youth.

5.6

The review indicated that one mentor checked almost daily with her mentee at one point, while another visited infrequently, only to sit in the car outside speaking to the child. The average mentor, however, spent quality time with his/her mentee but not necessarily in any set place or any set time.

5.7

Six youths were not paired with a mentor because some potential mentors were deemed unfit for the responsibility and other, appropriate, willing people, could not be found. Clearly there is a shortage of potential candidates for this task and future programs will have to work with area like religious and educational institutions to get candidates to volunteer.

5.8

The mentorship phase of the program attempted to provide a quality support system for youths at a pace closer to their normal everyday existence. Mentors were asked to involve the youth in activities that were closer to the normal state of things, i.e. sports, church etc.

### ***OBSERVATIONS***

**The mentoring component had the potential to be the most significant aspect of the program because it envisioned the caregiver spending quality time with the youth at a pace closer to the normal every day existence of the youth. The objective of this phase, it seemed, was to create a quality support system of interaction between mentors, mentee and parent that would have replicated, in some respects, the 'commadre/compadre' system that was so beneficial to adolescents' maturity in early Belize. In some instances it was able to achieve that because some mentors went beyond the call of duty. For others however the mentorship was a person who cared enough to visit that child from time to time to spend some quality time then disappears until next time. Clearly, the ideal is to find a mentor who will establish a quality relationship with his/her mentee during the program and remain a long-term supporter and counsellor for life.**

## 6. Parents' Reactions to the Program

All of the parents/guardians interviewed spoke highly of the program and its positive impact on their child/children who participated. **Some parents seemed relieved to have gotten the quality of help that the program provided especially in exposing their youth to the opportunities for a life outside of their immediate surroundings. Parents of male participants were especially worried about their boys joining gangs, being involved with drugs or getting in trouble with the police.** One hundred percent of the parents interviewed commented that the program was "too short" and wanted to know when the next program like it would occur.

### 6.1

Some parents were relieved to have gotten quality help in exposing their youth to the opportunities for a life outside of their immediate surroundings.

### 6.2

Some parents expressed happiness that someone else cared enough to come and visit their children on a regular basis, while others complained and criticized mentors for not coming regularly.

### 6.3

Some parents stretched the privilege by sending notes soliciting financial assistance from the mentors.

### 6.4

Many parents felt that more effort could have been made to make them more acquainted with the intricacies of the program's goals and objectives.

### 6.5

All parents interviewed commented that the program was too short and inquired about the next one.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

In the majority of parents interviewed the mother and father of the participant were not living together. In most cases it was only the mother or female guardian that was present for the interview. In all cases the living environment presented enormous challenges for that parent. Money was short and this contributed to a spiral of scarcity that affected everything from proper nutrition to adequate school supplies. Some parents appeared shell-shocked by their circumstances yet they seemed to have developed unique coping skills to deal with their situation.

What became obvious in talking to parents was that they could have been a vital link or partner in the team effort to impact these youth lives; a link that should have been given more attention in some form of training or orientation prior to the start of the program. Some effort should have been made to at least make them more aware of the intricacies of the program's goals/objectives and to engage them more directly; after all, at its root, this program was an attempt to give their children what they may not have been getting at home.

## **7. Effectiveness of the Program's Activities.**

The main activities of the Youth at Risk Pilot Program were in Phase I and III. The base for these activities was the St. John's College campus in Landivar, Belize City. The thirty participants were divided into five groups of six with careful attention given to gender mix, neighbourhood, and family members within each group to encourage new experiences and discourage cliques. Each group of six was under the supervision of a Volunteer Coordinator.

### **7.1**

The activities were divided into Training classes, i.e. Karate, Computer, Art, Sports, Field Trips and Group Discussions.

### **7.2**

In Phase I, the 3-week daily schedule ran from Monday to Friday, from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm., plus some Saturday activities. The two-week program for Phase III ran from 9:00am to 3:00pm.

### **7.3**

The activities of the program were subjected to many changes. Schedules had to be rearranged and some subjects had to be substituted but the managers were effective in keeping the focus of the program and hence minimized the distraction.

#### 7.4

Art and karate classes, for example, were set activities that took place two or three times a week respectively.

#### 7.5

Puppetry training was offered every day for the last two weeks of Phase one.

#### 7.6

The planned computer classes had to be cancelled but a few computer lessons were still offered on a scaled-down individual basis.

#### 7.7

Educational field trips and sports were planned around classes.

#### 7.8

Each day the Program Coordinators assisted the Volunteers in defining specific themes for the day and guided them in positive planning for that day's activities.

#### 7.9

Volunteer Coordinators ran small discussion sessions with their groups that focussed on broadening self-awareness and building self-esteem of the participants.

#### 7.10

At times there were group discussions with the entire group of thirty.

#### 7.11

The variety of activities also showed that the program organizers had a vision of building a consciousness in the participants by exposing them to various experiences.

#### 7.12

The program included things that were fun to do like field trips to Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Reserve, English Caye, Corozal and other fun spots.

### 7.13

It also included a visit to the Hattville Prison, where some participants had relatives.

### 7.14

Ninety percent (90%) of the participants interviewed had never participated in the type of activities offered in the program and as a result were exposed to new adventures that were also a learning experience.

### 7.15

Some participants spoke of waking up in the morning in anticipation of what to expect that day. Even the food became an activity to look forward to, perhaps because of the sureness of 'nice food' that came from several popular eating spots around the City who donated to the program. The highlights, however, were the field trips that took them out of town and the karate classes, perhaps because of the fact that they got to keep their Karate T-shirts.

### 7.16

The review revealed that more planning was necessary in order to avoid the shortfall that occurred when there were not enough activities to fill the day. On several occasions, according to the volunteers, there were days when they had to be creative and come up with innovative ways to occupy the youth because a planned activity did not work out. This also highlighted the fact that some of the volunteers were not equipped with the management skills to adapt to these unplanned circumstances. There were also plans to involve the youth in community projects, an idea that eventually had to be abandoned because of "logistical problems" with time management and transportation, and "the fear that the rowdy behaviour of some of the participants might lead to unsafe situations".

## 8. Analysis of the Community Support

There were several categories of support that came from the community for the Youth at Risk Pilot Program. There were the volunteers and mentors who were the actual implementers; the auxiliary teachers who taught the various classes that were offered; and those supporters who gave in cash or kind to help meet the resource requirements of the program. All the afore-mentioned represented the wide support this program enjoyed from the community.

### 8.1

Without support from many sectors of the community, the program would not have been realized.

### 8.2

Cash donations amounting to just over \$3,000.00 were received from twenty-one individuals and organizations.

### 8.3

In-kind contributions valued over \$40,000.00 (from almost sixty organizations and individuals) helped to make the program possible.

### 8.4

To get an example of how the contributions were allocated it was useful to note that according to the record, Phase I of the program cost approximately \$21,579.00 to implement. This was broken down as follows:

~ Salaries of Coordinators (paid by Belize Police and St. John's College)	\$3,522.00
~ Value of Volunteers' time (contributed by Volunteers)	\$4,515.00
~ Training and Motivational Activities for Volunteers (contributed)	\$370.00
~ Value of Guest Presenters' time (contributed)	\$1,610.00
~ Classroom, Gym, and other facilities (contributed by SJC)	\$3,750.00
~ Educational Materials – pens, paint, stationery (donated and bought)	\$672.00
~ T-Shirts for Participants (donated and bought)	\$527.00
~ Food – lunches and snacks (donated and bought)	\$3,403.00
~Transportation – bus, fuel (contributed, fuel bought)	\$3,210.00

8.5

The **Coordinators** were able to devote full-time effort to the program for the initial phase, often putting in fourteen-hour days, since they had the full support of their employers, namely Belize Police Department and St. John's College. The effort of the **volunteers** and **guest presenters** was exceptional – they freely contributed their time and energy to the program with no financial compensation.

8.6

The use of all **educational and office facilities** at St. John's College was made available to the program. These facilities provided the home base for the program.

8.7

**Educational materials** were bought through donations made to the program and some were donated directly. The costs for two sets of T-Shirts, both for the karate classes and some to serve as identification for the participants, were also donated.

8.8

**Various supporters of the program donated all meals and snacks as well as drinks and even ice.**

8.9

**Daily transportation** to pick up the participants from their home and bring them to St. John's then every evening pick them up again to return them home was also donated. The caye trips and travel to other parts of Belize were all donated.

8.10

Clearly, without support from the community the Youth at Risk Pilot Program would not have happened.

8.11

**One of the unique aspects of this program is that approximately 90% of its cost came from in-kind contributions while only 10% was actual cash contribution.** This immediately makes it a program apart from like programs that usually depend heavily on cash donations to make up the greater percentage of their resource

requirements. Another unique aspect was that this program depended completely on support from inside Belize. According to the Coordinators, **“this is a Belizean problem and Belizeans with the means should support any effort to do something about it”**. This strong sentiment on the part of the Coordinators seemed to have been their ‘battle cry’ whenever they approached any potential donor. According to one supporter, “they were not going to take no for an answer”.

8.12

**The commitment of the Coordinators** was a critical factor in the response of the community since they spent a considerable amount of time through letters, visits and follow up to insure that they got what they were asking for. There were of course those who just gave because they were asked, some couldn’t quite remember the program and had to be reminded, but others remembered quite vividly the appeal of Ms. Lindo.

8.12

All community supporters when asked if they would be willing to support a program like this in the future had a resounding “yes”.

## **9. Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Collaboration between St. John's College and the Police Department**

### 9.1

Because St. John's College is an academic institution and the Police Department is in the business of fighting crime they may appear, at first sight, to be the most unlikely candidates for collaboration on a program aimed at youth at risk. But a second look will reveal a natural match for these two institutions who both have "service" as part of their motto. St. John's College, while focused on academic training of its students, in keeping with its Jesuit mission of "men and women for others", has an active community service component as part of its curriculum. The Police Department on the other hand, while fighting crime is its main focus, has also been involved in contributing to the community through such dynamic programs as the Conscious Youth Development Program, the First Time Offenders Program and the Police Youth Cadet Corps.

### 9.2

It is important to look briefly at the history of this program to understand what initially contributed to the collaboration between these two institutions. Christopher Noble, working in the 'belly of the beast', saw the effects of the war on crime in the neighbourhood that he traversed on a daily basis as a Constable in the Police Department. He saw the conditions that many of the criminals he was dealing with came from and he wanted to do something about it. He wanted to make a difference but he didn't quite know how. He saw the success of the Conscious Youth Development Program (CYDP) but realized that that program was dealing with youth after they had already been involved with crime and wanted to see a program that focused on catching youth before they got into crime. But all he had was an idea and a burning desire to do something. He was told about Ms. Dianne Lindo, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at St. John's College.

### 9.3

When he approached Ms. Lindo her initial response was negative. Having already formed an impression of the Police and their tactics in dealing with youth in difficult circumstances she was unsure of the likelihood of collaboration. However, after the two had a "long, genuine, sincere dialogue", common ground was reached where the original ideas of Officer Noble were sifted, moulded and eventually structured into a Pilot Program for thirty Youth at Risk in Belize City. This was the beginning of what was to become the collaboration between the St. John's College and the Police Department.

### 9.4

St. John's College made a huge commitment to the program by providing Ms. Lindo to work full time on the project at full salary. SJC also provided the facilities of its gym for Phase I and III. It also provided logistical facilities of an office, computer, and copier, telephone-- all very necessary for the coordination of the program. Fr. Thompson, who served as President of SJC during the time of the program, thought that the program gave students and faculty of the college a chance to work in an area beyond the "walls of academia". He also thought that it was a great public relation benefit to the college since it utilized the campus in an area of service to the community in which it was not normally seen. He said while there were "moments of headaches" because of undisciplined behaviour by the participants, overall the program gave SJC a chance to live up to its mission, which is: SERVICE. He said he would recommend more programs like it.

### 9.5

The Police Department for their part were not as enthusiastic but they did provide Officer Noble with time off at full pay to work full time for the duration of Phase I and Phase III. In Phase III they also assigned six Zone Beat Liaison Officers to work as volunteers on a rotational basis in the program. The Police Department did not show the kind of enthusiasm for the program---in fact on several occasions they had to be prodded to respond according to promised cooperation. Most of the day-to-day logistics for the program had to fall on SJC. None-the-less this was a model for future cooperation between Police and other community institutions, especially academic ones, to collaborate on issues of community concerns. The aim of the program was to go to the root causes of anti-social behaviour among these youth and the Police involvement in this exercise was a vital component.

## 10. Evaluation of the Program's Management

### 10.1

A most critical aspect of this program was its management. The two Program Coordinators, Ms. Lindo and Officer Noble both showed personal commitment and their service to the success of the Youth at Risk Pilot Program was nothing short of a 'labour of love'. As key managers of this program it is obvious that they were on a mission rather than a job.

### 10.2

A review of the program schedule reflects that the broad objectives were well thought out. It is obvious that some planning went in trying to get the appropriate activities to reach the overall goals. However, things did not always work as planned. There were occasions when activities had to be rearranged or rescheduled because of unexpected events and disappointments. The coordinators' obvious zeal may have contributed to some haste in the planning, which resulted in some drawbacks.

### 10.3

The managers were very hands-on and were there every step of the way making sure that they readjusted to the unexpected and to eliminate what was not useful. For example, it became obvious that one of the ZBLO officers was not ready for the task at hand and was making statements inappropriate to the vision and goal of the program. She was given a choice to quit the program, which she did. The managers were there on a daily basis to set the tone for the day's activities and to motivate the volunteers who at times lost focus and showed signs of frustration.

### 10.4

**Perhaps the most serious aspect of the management of this program can be seen in the coordination of the over 50 persons who were directly involved in the implementation; the approximately 60 sources of in-kind contributors of food, drinks, T-Shirts, transportation, etc. and the approximately 21 cash donors.** All these persons had to be contacted personally and their support for the program coordinated in such a way that they felt appreciated. This was an awesome feat in management skills by the two managers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There are several components to be considered in the replication of the Youth at Risk Program:

- a) The commitment and administrative skill of its core sponsors and coordinators
- b) Clarification of goals and objectives
- c) The selection and training or orientation of volunteers
- d) The selection, orientation and networking of mentors
- e) The interactive role that parents should play in the program
- f) Effective program activities
- g) Proper management and on-going evaluation
- h) The community support and financial sustainability.

All must be given sufficient attention in any replication effort.

### **a. The commitment and administrative skill of the core sponsors and coordinators:**

A most critical aspect of a program like this one is the commitment of its core coordinators and the logistical wherewithal of its sponsor. The two Program Coordinators in this Pilot, Ms. Lindo and Officer Noble, both showed personal commitment and their service to its success was nothing short of a 'labour of love'. As key managers it was obvious that they were on a mission rather than a job. Their commitment was also a critical factor in the response of the community since they spent a considerable amount of time through letters, visits and follow up to insure that they got the community support in cash, kind and service. However, without the logistical support given by both St. John's College and the Police Department the success of the program would not have been realized.

- **Coordinators must possess:**
  - a personal commitment to make a difference with youth at risk;
  - an awareness of the nature of the problems that afflict the target group;
  - a willingness to work long, quality hours, (beyond employment to mission);
  - administrative skills to manage a program;
  - a source of income to allow time needed to work with the program.
  
- **Sponsors must possess:**
  - logistical necessities to provide salaries, telephone, computer, copier, space for activities, and extra manpower when needed.
  - commitment

## **b. Clarification of goals and objectives**

What is important for at risk programs is to be clear about their goals and objectives before they begin to implement activities. What desired result will be produced by the specifically directed actions of the program? What is to be accomplished? What difference will it make? When this is made clear in the beginning it serves as a guide for the development of activities in the program and also helps to bring the program back on course if it strays. When the goals are too lofty, as was the case with some of the goals of the Pilot, the program is left open to the criticism that such results cannot be quantified. So goals and objectives, while somewhat idealistic, must be realizable within the span of the program and beyond.

### **c. The selection and training or orientation of volunteers**

The volunteer element is very critical to the success of this kind of program since it provides the support structure that contributes to its effectiveness. The volunteers represent those who spend the most direct (hands-on) time with the participants. They are expected not only to be role model supervisors and coordinators, but because of the nature of the target group, they can also find themselves in the role of counsellors, motivators, disciplinarians, and even part-time surrogate parents. This can prove to be an enormous challenge to those who are not properly prepared for the weight of the responsibility for which they are volunteering. Many people who volunteer in this type of program come to the task with just a good heart and a general idea of what the 'problem' is, but what they actually meet once they get started is an eye opening experience to some and a cultural shock to others. Therefore, the selection, screening, and training of volunteers is critical.

#### **Volunteers should be :**

- self-confident, mature, patient, and possessing initiative;
- capable of working effectively with the target group;
- persons who accept the idea of using their positive experience to build self-esteem and self-discipline in the target group;
- those who have had quality previous experience in working with the target group.

#### **Their training should include:**

- no less than 10-14 days duration;
- field visits to the area being targeted;
- opportunities for interaction with the parents/guardians;
- an examination of poverty, education of youth at risk;
- exploring strategies for working with underprivileged youth;
- techniques in resolving conflicts peacefully and crisis management;
- behaviour management and positive discipline;
- personal stress management strategies;
- techniques of motivation and communication.
- planning

#### **d. The selection, orientation and networking of mentors**

Mentors should be mature persons who have the QUALITY TIME to give. They should have a positive attitude toward life and work, live positive lifestyles, and want to make a positive difference in a child's life. Mentors should be able to plan and carry out regular, positive activities with the mentee, whether it is visiting the home, helping with homework, going to religious service or any other positive activity that shows the child that he or she is worthy of positive attention. . A background check may become necessary for those individuals who are completely unknown in the community.

#### **e. The interactive role that parents should play in the program**

Parents are a vital link or partner in any team effort to impact youth at risk. They are a link that should be given more attention in the form of training or orientation prior to the start of the program. Some effort should be made to engage parents directly with the intricacies of the program's goal/objectives; after all, at root, these programs are an attempt to give these youth what they may not have been getting at home. Most parents in the Pilot seemed only to have a general idea of what the program was attempting to do; this must be addressed in other programs.

***NOTE: MOST OF THE SUBJECTS IN THE VOLUNTEER TRAINING SYLLABUS ABOVE CAN BE USED IN TRAINING/ORIENTATION OF THE MENTORS AND THE PARENTS.***

#### **f. Effective program activities**

Ninety percent of the participants in the Pilot had never participated in the types of activities offered and as a result exposed to new adventure that was also a learning experience. From their point of view the activities were the most memorable and rewarding part of the program. A review of the program schedule revealed that the broad objectives were well thought out and it was obvious that some planning went in trying to get the appropriate activities to reach the overall goals. However, things did not always work as planned.

There were occasions when activities had to be rearranged or rescheduled because of unexpected events and disappointments. The activities also provided opportunities for interaction with positive role models. Being around people who provided examples for structured, disciplined, motivated life styles afforded the participants models of what it would take for them to move forward with their own lives.

### **Activities must:**

- i. reflect that the organizers have a vision of building a “consciousness” in the participants though the activities -- i.e. means to an end;
- ii. be well thought out and planned to fill the entire day; disappointment affects the program;
- iii. be recreational as well as educational; youths are at their highest level of attention when activities are dynamic;
- iv. provide opportunities for various experiences i.e. cayer, karate, computer, prison, etc;
- v. have a base of operation that provides enough space;
- vi. have Program Coordinator/s who oversee the activities on a daily basis and are there to make adjustments when necessary;
- vii. break participants down into manageable numbers; consideration should be given to a mix of gender, neighbourhood, and family members within each group to encourage new experiences and discourage cliques.
- viii. have Team Leaders (volunteers) who act as role models and who keep participants focused and motivated; and are capable to working with challenging behaviour
- ix. have back-up activities in case of failures.

## **g. Management and on-going evaluation**

- i. Managers must be hands-on and ready every step of the way to make any adjustment to the unexpected changes and to eliminate what was is useful;
- ii. They must be there on a daily basis to set the tone for the day's activities and to motivate the volunteer who may at times lose focus and show signs of frustration;
- iii. Managers must be able to coordinate the many persons who are directly or indirectly involved in the implementation;
- iv. Managers must be prepared to personally contact those who support the program and coordinate that support in such a way that donors feel appreciated;
- v. Managers must make daily and weekly evaluation to ensure that goal/objectives are being met;
- vi. Managers should meet program implementers i.e. volunteers, presenters, mentors etc. regularly, and definitely at the end of program cycle to evaluate.

## **h. The community support and financial sustainability**

One of the unique aspects of this program is that approximately 90% of its cost came from in-kind contributions while only 10% was actual cash contribution. This immediately makes it a program apart from like programs that usually depend heavily on cash donations to make up the greater percentage of their resource requirements. Another unique aspect was that this program depended completely on support from inside Belize.

### **Community support:**

- i. should be sought from Belizeans first;
- ii. should depend on greater in-kind contributions than cash for resource needs;
- iii. should focus bulk of resource on program implementation rather than administration;

## **CONCLUSION**

The value of the Youth at Risk Pilot Program is clearly documented in this evaluation. The program addressed the needs of a targeted group of youth and positively influenced their lives, albeit, for a short period of time.

This program cannot be easily duplicated because it had its own unique features, the apex of which was the dynamism of its coordinators. As was pointed out, theirs was a mission that took on a personal dimension. However, there are many lessons that can be learnt from this Pilot. In the recommendation section, we highlighted aspects of the program that could serve as guideline for agencies that would replicate certain aspects in their area of service delivery to at risk youth. There are six (6) specific areas of the Pilot that provide valuable lessons: volunteers, mentors, parents, activities, community support and collaboration.

The need for proper training and orientation of volunteers, mentors and parents was a valuable lesson learnt. Not only was it important to have skill training to enhance the effectiveness of these players, but also it was also evident from this evaluation that a series of meetings to orient volunteers, mentors and parents, together, about the program's goal/objectives would have been a useful investment. The idea that "it takes a village to raise a child," suggests that all those actors who directly influence the youth should have opportunities to share information and experiences together, more than once during the program.

Another important lesson was that activities should be "a means to an end" rather than an end in itself. The creative learning experience that can come through well planned activities indicate that they can be effective tools for behaviour modification program such as this one.

The community support that this program enjoyed and the way those contributions were disbursed is also a model for other programs. First, the focus of the support was local; secondly, ninety percent of the support was in-kind, while ten percent was in-cash; and thirdly, the majority of community support directly benefited the participants, while only a small percent was used for administrative purposes.

**Finally, another important lesson that came from the Pilot was that of collaboration. There is room in Belize for more collaborative effort to reach common objectives with these kinds of innovative programs. For example, there can be multi-faceted programs that are facilitated by several organizations or sponsoring agencies simultaneously. One agency can provide the facilities and logistical support while another provides the coordinators to run different phases of the program, while yet another facilitates the mentorship aspect, etc. This holistic approach is the direction in which all human services in Belize should be heading in providing multiple services to the whole person.**

The number of youth in Belize that fall into the "at risk" category is expanding. There is a need for many intervention programs designed to engage these youth in positive goal-setting and life-management exercises to lesson their chances of ending up further marginalized. The **Youth at Risk Pilot Program** was one positive step in this line of needed interventions. Hopefully, its success and impact will serve as an encouragement to those who want to do more of this work in the future.

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# **A P P E N D I C E S**

**EVALUATION  
OF  
YOUTH AT RISK  
PILOT PROGRAM**

**Developed and Implemented by  
St. John's College and  
Belize Police Department  
1997 - 1998**

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