



BACKGROUND

Velocity Adventure Program (Velocity) is a promising intervention that helps youth overcome adversity, create and enhance their connections in the community, and make healthy lifestyle choices. Velocity is based on research that demonstrates the effectiveness of outdoor adventure-based programs in helping troubled youth channel their energy into more positive behaviours. Overall, Velocity's programming is comprised of trust and communication activities, goal-setting, life skills, experiential learning, high adventure pursuits and health promotion.

The National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) provided funding of \$574,014 to the Community Youth Network (CYN) in St. John's, Newfoundland, to implement Velocity from March 2009 until August 2012. The project was extended for two years to February 28, 2014.

Velocity targets youth, aged 13 to 18 years, who are at risk of, or who have already been involved in criminal activity. The program addresses key risk factors associated with involvement in crime, including aggressive and anti-social behaviour, substance abuse, and poor attachment to school.

OBJECTIVES

The impact evaluation, conducted by Ference Weicker & Company Limited, began in March 2010 and ended in November 2013. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of Velocity in reducing risk factors associated with criminal behaviour among participating youth.

METHODS

The evaluators used a mixed methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Data sources included: administrative data, community partner surveys, document reviews, program advisory committee interviews, financial reports, literature reviews, observations, parent/guardian surveys, referral sources surveys, staff interviews, staff reports, participant focus groups and youth client surveys.

Three standardized tools were administered at program start (pre-test), at program completion (post-test) and one year after program completion. A descriptive analysis of participant and comparison group members was completed. Multivariate analyses were used to control for confounding variables.

High-risk males and females primarily between the ages of 12 and 17 completed 67 pre-tests, 44 post-tests, and 25 second post-tests. The comparison group consisted of 45 youth from a local high school who completed pre-tests, 16 of which also completed post-tests. The comparison group was found to be very different from the participating group on key characteristics (gender, risk factors, etc.). This in turn limited the capacity to attribute the findings to the intervention.

FINDINGS

- Velocity is considered a promising initiative by stakeholders. Velocity seems to improve youth self-confidence, create a positive attitude towards school and education, and expand social skills.
- Police data (RNC Constabulary aggregated data) identifies a decrease in involvement in criminal behaviours among Velocity participants. According to police records before, during and one year after Velocity, youth participants had fewer police contacts in the year after Velocity than they had before participating in the Program. Police contacts were reduced by 61% to 114 incidents during Velocity. One year after Velocity the number



increased to 148 incidents, which still represents an overall reduction of 49% compared to before Velocity. Mixed findings were found in regards to severity of police contacts.

- Results of pre- and second post-tests (within group analysis) indicate a statistically significant improvement in youth perception of their ability to handle substance use problems, and motivation to reduce their use ($p=.025$; $p=.041$).
- While Velocity is perceived as a worthwhile and relevant initiative that is being implemented as planned, attracting at-risk youth and moving towards its intended outcomes, the comparison group's lack of comparability with the Velocity participants (the groups were not matched on risk factors) is an evaluation weakness and limits ability to attribute observed results to the intervention.
- Overall, in line with findings from other outdoor activity based crime prevention programming, Velocity remains a promising but still unconfirmed practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Further research using a more rigorous design (e.g., matched comparison group) is recommended in order to determine the efficacy of the Velocity Adventure Program.

SOURCE

Ference Weicker & Company Ltd, "Evaluation of the Velocity Adventure Program, St. John's Newfoundland" v. 2 Final Report Dec. 17/2013. Submitted by Beth Garner to Public Safety Canada.

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