



Preventing Violence among High Risk Youth: An Evaluation of the Northeast Youth Violence Reduction Partnership (NYVRP)

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18th Biennial Violence & Aggression Symposium
June 14-15, 2021

Acknowledgements and Disclaimer: This evaluation was funded by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Corrections, Policing, and Public Safety. The views presented in this presentation are the authors' views only; they do not represent the Ministry's views.



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Introduction

Background

- ❖ Youth violence and gang involvement have been identified as pressing issues in Saskatchewan's north where large youth populations combined with economic, educational, and health disparities as well as limited access to supports and services place youth at increased risk for violence (Allen & Perreault, 2015, Irvine & Quinn, 2016, MCRCHA, 2016; Tanasichuk et al., 2010).
- ❖ Accordingly, the Government of Saskatchewan was awarded up to \$4.5 million from Public Safety Canada's National Crime Prevention Strategy to implement the Northeast Youth Violence Reduction Partnership (NYVRP) over a five-year period (April, 2015 to March, 2020) in three Indigenous communities in Northeastern Saskatchewan to reduce offending among high risk youth and create safer communities.

Target Population

- ❖ The NYVRP targeted **youth who were 12 to 24 years old**, "at risk" or already involved in the criminal justice system; exhibited violent behaviour; and/or were gang-involved or at-risk of gang involvement. Participation in the program was voluntary.

Program Delivery Model

- ❖ Three **theoretical models** informed the NYVRP: 1) Youth Violence Reduction Partnership model; 2) Re-Entry and Intensive Aftercare model; and 3) Risk-Need-Responsivity model.
- ❖ The NYVRP was governed by an overarching **Oversight Committee and local Advisory Committees** (one per community) and staffed by a Project Manager, Manager of Program Operations (MOPO), 6 Health and Wellness Workers (HAWWs, two per community with a maximum combined caseload of 15 youth).
- ❖ **Core Teams**, consisting of representatives from local agencies and NYVRP staff, were established in each community and met monthly to develop and monitor case plans for each youth through an integrated case management process.
- ❖ **HAWWs completed risk assessments** (i.e., YLS/CMI: SV, POSIT, and CYW ACE-Q) with each youth upon entering and, ideally, exiting the program.
- ❖ **HAWWs met with youth regularly** (minimum three times per week) and connected them with appropriate supports and services.

Evaluation Methods

- A combined process and impact evaluation was completed during the final year of the NYVRP to examine:
 - a) Program delivery, including aspects of the program that functioned well, possible areas for improvement, adherence to the program delivery model, reach of the program, and satisfaction with the program.
 - b) The extent to which the NYVRP was able to achieve its intended outcomes.
- A multi-method data collection approach was utilized*

Staff and
Stakeholder
Interviews (N=13)

Community
Stakeholder Survey
(N=25; response
rate of 45%)

Casefile and
Database Review
(N=97)

Analysis of De-
identified Police
Data (N=82)

Youth Participant
Survey (N=7)

**Additional methods were used, but are not included in the current presentation.*

Results: Program Functioning

Program Strengths

- ❖ NYVRP reached its intended target population
 - 151 youth were referred to the program; 97 consented to participate
 - Among consented participants, 68% were male and 75% were aged 12-17 years
 - At least 85% of consented clients met eligibility criteria
- ❖ NYVRP was implemented largely in line with its program model (with some challenges with case management)
- ❖ Planned adaptations to the program model were timely and appropriate, including:
 - Incorporating cultural activities and land-based teachings
 - Placing a greater focus on support and rehabilitation rather than strict supervision
 - Increasing the length of time in program from 12 to 18 months
 - Introducing a Phasing Out process to slowly transition youth out of program
 - Streamlining the risk assessment process to increase the number of assessments completed
- ❖ A dedicated, core contingent of staff who were well-respected and passionate were critical to the program's success
- ❖ Youth were connected with a wide variety of supports, services, and cultural activities

Challenges/Areas for Improvement

- ❖ The functioning of the Oversight and Advisory Committees was hampered by:
 - A lack of interest among local agencies
 - Limited participation by community agencies and leadership
- ❖ Core Team attendance varied by community and would have benefited from greater participation from some agencies
 - Overall, the RCMP, schools, and corrections were the most consistent attendees
- ❖ Staff's limited computer skills and knowledge about correctional principles hampered the implementation of the program (i.e., case management)
- ❖ Case plans were not adequately informed by risk assessments
- ❖ Staff burnout was a key concern
 - In future, it would be beneficial to have a dedicated mental health support worker available to the staff and to consider restructuring the staffing model to have more HAWWs

Results: Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes From Survey and Interview Data

Youth participants believed the NYVRP helped them:

- Achieve better grades and attend school more
- Have more positive friends
- Have stronger relationships with their families
- Develop connections to Elders/Mentors and cultural activities

Stakeholders and program staff believed the NYVRP led to:

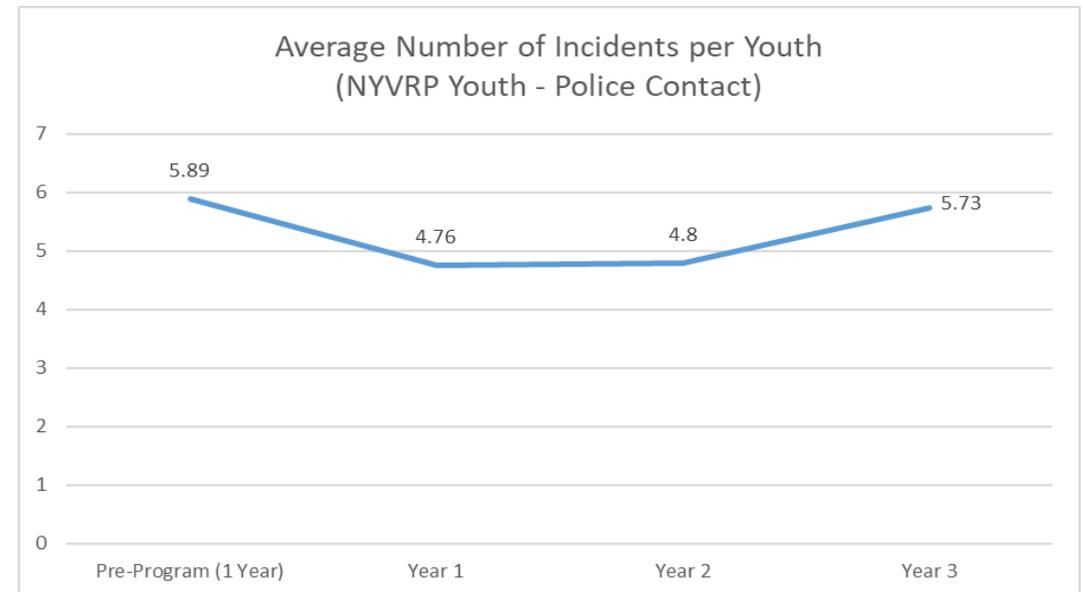
- Reduced violence and fewer interactions with the police
- Moderate reduction in gang involvement
- More positive attitudes toward police and school staff
- Better understanding of the importance of rules
- No change in youth's academic success, school attendance, or employment-related activities

Unintended outcomes observed included the youth having:

- More self-esteem and confidence and being more open and communicative with their thoughts and feelings
- A positive, trusting relationship with the HAWWs (something which most lacked before the NYVRP)
- Their basic needs met (e.g., NYVRP provided food)

De-Identified Police Data (N=82)

- RCMP data indicated that the average number of encounters participants had with the police decreased during the first two years of the NYVRP and increased in the final year after most youth had exited the program, suggesting that the effects of the program dissipated over time.



Discussion

- ❖ The results of the final NYVRP evaluation were mixed, revealing areas where the program is performing well, as well as areas where improvements are required. Important findings were:
 - Land-based learning, cultural activities, and connections with Elders and Mentors were among the NYVRP's most valuable elements.
 - Staff became more adept at adhering to the program delivery model as they became more experienced with it.
 - A dedicated core staff was essential to the sustainability of the program.
- ❖ Impact evaluation findings indicated that the NYVRP has helped the youth achieve many of the program's intended outcomes, such as reduced violence, increased involvement in cultural and prosocial activities, and increased mental health.
 - Effects of the NYVRP may dissipate once youth are no longer actively involved in it.
- ❖ A number of limitations characterized the evaluation:
 - Challenges staff encountered with record-keeping resulted in missing data for the case file and database review.
 - Limited data was collected directly from youth participants due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic which prevented most site visits.
 - It was not possible to access school data, also due to the pandemic and resulting closure of schools.
- ❖ Moving forward, we offered the following recommendations for consideration in the future:
 - ❖ Staffing of the NYVRP should be enhanced by modifying the staffing model and caseloads, hiring an administrative assistant, increasing staff's administrative skills and correctional practices, and promoting their wellbeing.
 - ❖ Case management practices should be enhanced by ensuring that: a) risk assessments are utilized to inform case plans; and b) Core Teams place a greater focus on explicitly developing and refining case plans for youth.
 - ❖ The functioning, purpose, and organization of the Oversight and Advisory Committees should be refined to have a greater focus on problem-solving to increase engagement and participation.
 - ❖ The program delivery model should be further modified to: a) allow youth to remain in the program for 24 to 36 months to allow sufficient time to heal; b) establish explicit criteria for the Phasing Out process; and c) formally adapt a peer mentorship component to allow program graduates to become program mentors and maintain their connection to the NYVRP (as initial attempts with this approach were successful).