

Texas A&M University- Corpus Christi
Federal Initiatives Request FY2010

Title:

Supporting and Training At-Risk Students (STARS): A Preventative and Proactive Program Designed to Dispel Problem Behaviors in Court-referred Teens & At-risk Youth

Description:

STARS is designed to decrease delinquency, violence, drug use, teen pregnancy and school dropout, in court-referred and at-risk teens and their families living within the barrio of Corpus Christi, Texas. The program utilizes doctoral and masters counseling students to employ a “therapeutic” approach to help both at-risk students and their families combat these problems.

Relevance and Background:

In Corpus Christi and Nueces County, students and families continue to struggle with many of the problems that face our youth today. Based on statistics provided by the *Youth Opportunities United (YOU) Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment* conducted by Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi in 2001, four risk factors contributing to delinquency, violence, drug use, teen pregnancy and school dropout were identified for Nueces County as: (1) Family Management Problems and Family Conflict, (2) Extreme Economic Deprivation, (3) Early Academic Failure and Lack of Commitment to School, and (4) Early Initiation of the Problem Behavior. These YOU report illustrates the specific needs of this community and the vast number of students are at-risk.

Many Nueces County families lack support to help them cope with these problems. Research indicates that families that are poorly managed, in conflict, or suffering economic deprivation and/or stress, are generally not supportive of their children’s participation in school. These families too often experience domestic violence, including child abuse. In 2000, the number of confirmed victims in Texas was 8.3%; in Nueces County the number was 14.6%. Research supports the impact that child abuse, domestic violence, family conflict, and failure of parenting have on juvenile delinquency and adult criminality. The odds are high for youth experiencing any of these to grow up and become abusive parents themselves.

Nueces County leads the twelve surrounding South Texas counties in the number of juvenile arrests. The Nueces County Juvenile Department reports 3,727 juveniles arrested in the county in 2001. Alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) abuse by children age 10 to 17 is a problem of enormous proportion and impact on the citizens of Nueces County; research demonstrates that early onset of substance use is correlated with longer and more serious lifetime use. One in three young people in Nueces County lives in poverty. This is a significant stress factor for families. The 2000 Census estimated the county median household income at \$31,925, with 33.3% of the population at \$19,999 or less. In addition, Nueces County ranks the highest among the eleven most populated counties in Texas in teenage pregnancy. The services offered by the STARS program are much needed in this community.

Amount Requested: \$250,000

Budget/Cost:

Salaries & Wages (director & student workers)		\$177,320
Program director	\$25,000	
2 Counselor Supervisors (doctoral students)	\$40,000	
10 Graduate Assistants/Interns (masters students)	\$112,320	
Fringe Benefits		\$24,028
Program director	\$5,750	
2 Counselor Supervisors (doctoral students)	\$4,800	
10 Graduate Assistants/Interns (masters students)	\$13,478	
Travel		\$9,102
Supplies		\$20,943
Other Costs		\$18,607
Security	\$16,607	
Utilities Assistance	\$2,000	

Funding History:

FY 2004 Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention	\$247,369
FY 2005 Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention	\$246,661
FY 2006 Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention	\$246,787
FY 2008 Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention	\$178,870

Anticipated Non-Federal Resources:

The proposed plan includes the in-kind salaries of 50% of the director's salary (\$26,000), the salary of the administrative assistant (\$26,520), and unpaid program staff such as counselor graduate students who must include practicum and internship services as part of their curriculum requirements in educational and counseling graduate studies. This service, estimated at a minimum of 1000 work hours is valued at \$20,000 per year (1000 @ \$20 per hour). Referrals to the Counseling and Training Clinic, a counseling clinic staffed by College of Education counseling students, will provide additional counseling services to families that need it at no cost to them. These additional services, at a conservative estimate of twenty referrals per year, would cost approximately \$7,200 (20 referrals x 6 sessions @ \$60 per session). The total value of in-kind services is estimated at **\$79,720** for one year of programming.

Agency Targeted:

Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention

Background and Contacts:

Congressman Solomon Ortiz

PI: Dr. Robert Garcia
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Project Activity:

The STARS program continues to serve court-referred at-risk youth and their families in the Corpus Christi area. Local justices refer adjudicated youth to the programs offered through STARS. To date, over 750 households from 18 different zip codes in the Corpus Christi area have participated in programming. With the help of the Nueces County Juvenile Justice Center, program staff were able to gather information on the number and percentage that were referred for new offenses through a sample of 330 youth. Of the 330 youth, 243 (74%) have not repeated, i.e., have not resurfaced at in the judicial system. All have returned to school. Eighty-seven youth did reoffend, with 37 of them had been referred for 2 or more new offenses, and several have been referred to the Center. Our goal is to provide students that reoffend with intensified individual/family counseling to [seek additional methods that will](#) help deter problematic behaviors.

An added benefit of the STARS program is the hands-on training it provides for College of Education graduate students. Doctoral students, under the supervision of Counselor Education professors, serve as part-time counselor supervisors and provide mentoring to master's level practicum students, counselor interns, and graduate students delivering services in the program. To date, 56 College of Education students (20 doctoral and 36 master's level) have benefited from the STARS program. Graduates and current participants describe the experience as invaluable to their personal and professional development. An unanticipated outcome from this work is that approximately 2/3 of these graduates are now incorporating this training in their professional practice and school counseling programs to deal with adjudicated and other troubled youth thereby amplifying the outcome of this work.

The different programs offered through STARS include:

- **Family Connections** promotes familial bonding. The program activities allow parent and child to open lines of communication while developing family unity and teamwork.
- **Healthy Interactions** addresses self-esteem, peer relationships, participant and familial substance abuse, participant victimization, choice and consequences, and coping skills by providing assessment, counseling, and prevention/intervention programs.
- **Academic Success** provides students an opportunity to enhance their academic skills through individualized tutoring and mentoring. During sessions, students envision plans for their future, share them with counselors and fellow students, and explore the means to achieve them.
- **Anger Management Classes** encourage students to see differently the situations that make them angry. Designed to change thinking processes and reactions, the sessions consist of process and psycho-educational groups.

- **Family Night Out**, held every other Friday, provides local families with family counseling in the form of activities and games. The program emphasizes family communication and support.
- The **Youth Leadership Academy** is a summer camp designed to enhance the leadership capabilities of court-referred students. It has been offered the last three summers.
- **GED Help Sessions** are offered to students ordered or wishing to obtain their high school equivalency. Additionally, web-based resources are provided to assist them in developing the necessary skills to pass the GED exam.

The students attending these programs range in age from 11 to 18 with an average age of 14.5; the greatest numbers have come from ninth grade. When asked ethnicity, eighty nine percent of participants indicated Hispanic, eight percent Anglo-American, two percent African-American, and one percent other. The average age of the primary caretaker of students attending the STARS program is 39. Only 28 percent of the students live with both parents. Forty-seven percent live with one parent (39 percent with mom and 8 percent with dad); 15 percent live with one parent and a step parent; five percent live with grandparents, and five percent live with a guardian.

Justices throughout Nueces County find the programs at the Garcia Center effective and require adjudicated youth to attend. Community groups and special services including Child Protective Services, the Women's Shelter, Family Outreach, Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce, CASA of the Coastal Bend, and the United States Coast Guard strongly support the programs and collaborate with STARS to meet the needs of families within the Corpus Christi area.

The STARS programs offered on-site at the Garcia Center, now accepted as successful ventures by the community, provide structure, accountability, and guidance to young people and their families; families continue to express appreciation for the changes they see in their youth. The STARS program is evolving into a national best practices model that could easily become a template for reaching at-risk students in other communities. The program is one that the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, the Antonio E. Garcia Arts & Education Center, and TAMUCC's College of Education can refer to with pride. Continued STARS funding is requested to sustain this program of service and education for at-risk youth and their families.