

A review of prevention programs for at-risk youth, in addition to research conducted by the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, has shown there are several critical elements of effective prevention programs. These include the following:

- Parent/guardian involvement
- A continuum of services, including meaningful incentives, consequences and supports
- Collaboration with community resources, such as law enforcement, mental health, mentoring and social services
- School building-level administrative support and commitment to maintaining youth in the educational mainstream
- Ongoing evaluation, including meaningful and relevant outcome data geared toward increasing protective factors and reducing risk.

There are few programs aimed at reducing truancy that meet these criteria, especially that of collecting outcome data for students, faculty, schools and/or community. Several of the more effective programs in reducing truancy (or increasing school attendance) are not identified as "truancy prevention" programs. Rather reducing truancy or increasing school attendance is just one aspect of the program. The following section contains prevention programs that are effective or appear promising in truancy prevention.

Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT); Los Angeles County, CA

ACT is a program that targets K-6th grade students and utilizes a series of progressively intrusive steps to hold children and parents/guardians accountable for truancy. The steps are as follows: (1) Letter is sent home to parents/guardians whose children have school attendance problems; (2) Parents/guardians and children are invited to a meeting with the deputy district attorney, also present are community based organizations and school personnel to provide parenting classes, counseling and other needed services; (3) Parents/guardians whose children continue to have attendance problems are invited to attend a School Attendance Review Team (SART); (4) Students who continue to have attendance problems are referred to School Attendance Review Board (SARB); and (5) if all of the above steps fail, a case will be filed against the parent/guardian and/or child. In 1993, out of 1379 families that received a letter (and remained at the same address), 83% improved from the letter, 15% improved from the SART, and 2% were referred to SARB. There were no court filings. 1994 statistics reveal that of the 3252 families who received the letter, 88% improved from the letter, 11% improved from SART and less than 1% required court filings. There are 162 schools in 17 districts involved with the program in Los Angeles County. The ACT program has also been implemented in other counties both in and out of the state. For more information, contact Tom P. Higgins, District Attorney, at (909) 620- 3330.

Communities in Schools (CIS)

CIS is a national, nonprofit organization that encourages the coordination of youth oriented services in local communities and schools. The CIS model is based on using existing community resources and services that are integrated and repositioned at school sites to achieve dropout reduction and to mitigate related problems, such as teen pregnancy, gang involvement, violence, and other risky behaviors. The Urban Institute examined CIS efforts and results from the fall of 1991 into early 1994 found that of the 49% of students with high absenteeism before entering CIS, 68% improved attendance. Additionally 49% of the students improved their grades. For more information contact Al Padilla at 1-800-CIS-4KID or visit web site at <http://www.cisnet.org>.

Fulton County Truancy Intervention Project; Fulton County, GA

The Truancy Intervention Project is an early intervention program which provides court resources and procedures for expedited case processing, pro bono attorney representation, individualized needs based client services, the use of community and court resources for children and their parents/guardians, and the use of volunteers as mentors. The program relies on collaboration between the schools, the Atlanta Bar Foundation, the court system, Committed Youth Partners Mentor program, Youth Experiencing Success community based program, and the

Volunteer Instructional Partners program (tutoring program). The program targets children from elementary through high school. There are 25 elementary schools and 14 secondary schools involved with the Project. Based on a random sample of clients representing schools in the Atlanta Public School system, there was a 12% decrease in the rate of truancy for children adjudicated and placed under the supervision of the probation truancy staff. Based on data from January 1992 to December 1994, of the 400 students serviced by the Project, only 5% were adjudicated delinquent. Cumulative statistics will be available after August 1999. For more information contact Jessica Pennington, Director, at (404) 584-9500.

Hennepin County Hope for Kids Project; Minneapolis, MN

The Hope For Kids Project is a partnership of county agencies working together to improve the community's response to truancy and educational neglect. The Attorney's Office, the Department of Children and Family Services, Juvenile Probation, and the Juvenile Division of the district court began the project in 1993. Hennepin County has established multi-disciplinary screening teams that meet weekly and make recommendations for case management by a social worker or probation officer and referrals to diversion or truancy court. Some of the programs included are the Curfew-Truancy Center, the School Attendance Review Boards, the Hennepin County's Truancy Diversion Program, and the Juvenile Court lecture program. In 1996, 74 truancy cases were diverted to the Truancy Diversion program. Sixty-five percent of the cases referred were successfully diverted and did not need court intervention. To date, 78% of the 33 youth that attended the lecture program in Sept. of 1996 have not been re-referred for truancy. For more information contact Christine Curtiss, Assistant Hennepin County Attorney, at (612) 348-5846.

Kern County Truancy Reduction Program (TRP); Bakersfield, CA.

TRP is a multifaceted prevention program that targets students in grades K-12. It is a collaborative effort of the County Probation Department, the County Superintendent of Schools Office, 39 school districts and several child and family service agencies. TRP's goal is to provide comprehensive integrated services to truant students and their families to reduce delinquent behavior and the risk factors leading to such behavior. Casework methods include initial needs assessment, case investigation, unannounced home contacts, weekly school site contact, counseling with parents/guardians and students, and referring families to appropriate community resources. The program utilizes cross-age mentoring programs and organizations that can provide incentives for students. In 1994/95 nearly a quarter of TRP students had no unexcused absences and 40% had less than four unexcused absences. Results from 1995/96 indicated that 10% had no unexcused absences and 30% had less than four unexcused absences after the intervention. Data collected in 1996/97 revealed that 40% of TRP students have had no unexcused absences and that 60% had less than four unexcused absences after the intervention. For more information, contact Daryl Thiesen, Coordinator, at (805) 636-4757 or visit web site at <http://www.kern.org/schcom/trp.html>

Project Redirect; Colorado Springs, CO

Project Redirect is an integrated community partnership, which addresses fragmentation and duplication of services while incorporating de-categorical funding and performance-based outcomes. Eight community agencies pooled resources to target some of the most distressed youth with multi-system involvement and chronic problems. The program involves both case management and a strong mentoring component. Outcome data from 1994, 1995, and 1996 reveal steady increases in-school attendance of 10 to 15%. Additionally, increases in academic achievement are concurrent with decreases in substance abuse, runaways, and police contacts. For more information call Art Navalta at (719) 444-5402.

Ramsey County Attorney's Truancy Intervention Program (TIP); St. Paul, MN

TIP was modeled after the Los Angeles District Attorney's truancy program (ACT, see above). TIP is a pre-court diversion program designed to provide an alternative way to intervene and provide services to truant students ages 12 to 16. It is a three-step process involving progressively intrusive interventions to improve student's attendance. The three steps include (1) a parent/guardian and child meeting with the assistant county attorney and school personnel; (2) referral is made to the School Attendance Review Team (SART); and (3) a truancy

petition is filed in juvenile court. A specially assigned assistant county attorney and administrative assistant work collaboratively with schools, parents/guardians, community organizations, human services and correction personnel to improve the student's attendance. Data gathered during the 1996-97 school year indicated that there was a 72.8% decrease in truancy petitions filed compared to petitions filed in 1994, the year preceding the implementation of TIP. School personnel were asked to complete surveys and provide information about the students who were referred to TIP. Over 50% of the students referred improved their attendance as a result of the TIP parent/guardian meeting. Of the students referred to a SART hearing, 50% improved their attendance. Sixty-one percent of the students referred to court and placed on probation improved their attendance. As a result of the first two interventions, 71.5% of the students referred improved their attendance and did not need court intervention to solve their attendance problems. For more information, contact Renee Mechelke, administrative assistant at (651) 266- 3135 or Kate Santelmann, Program Director at (651) 266-3125.

Truancy Habits Reduced, Increasing Valuable Education (THRIVE);Oklahoma City, OK

The THRIVE initiative is a comprehensive anti-truancy program that involves an ongoing community partnership of law enforcement, education and social service officials. THRIVE serves truant school aged youth, which benefit by being removed from negative influences on the street and returned to a safe educational environment. Police take a suspected truant to a community-operated detention center. Officials assess the youth's school status and release the youth to a parent/guardian or relative. Information regarding the child's attendance is provided to the parents/guardians and referrals are made to social service agencies as needed. Long-term follow-up is conducted for each child that passes through THRIVE using records from the center, school, juvenile bureau and police. At the end of the 1997-98 school year, out of 1,080 youth, less than 10% had two referrals, 2% had three referrals, and less than ½ percent had four or more. Local law enforcement agencies report a 30% reduction in daytime crime since the inception of the THRIVE program. For more information, contact Jacqueline K. Howard, Program Director at (405) 557-6987.

WESTMARC Truancy Prevention Partnership; Glendale, AZ

The Truancy Prevention Partnership is an immediate community intervention directed at truant youth aged 6-16 and their parents/guardians. A diversion program is offered, rather than prosecution for truancy. If parents/guardians and youth complete the terms of the program, the case is dismissed. The diversion program includes group counseling, educational programs, an assessment of family risk factors and a recommended after-care maintenance program. The Partnership is sponsored by WESTMARC, a coalition of businesses, utilities, educational institutions, development firms, property owner organizations, industries, cities and towns in Maricopa County (in the greater Phoenix metropolitan area). As Of February 1997, WESTMARC has had contact with over 873 truant students. For 67% of the youth served, the truancy problem was corrected after a letter was sent home. Only 49 students repeated truant behavior and were transferred to Juvenile Court. In 1996-97, WESTMARC expanded to 25 school districts with a student population of more than 150,000. Just recently, WESTMARC turned over the truancy program to the individual school districts. For more information contact Lisa Glenn at (602) 435-0431.