

# Effectiveness of a Community- based Evaluation Training Program



585 Joseph Avenue, Rochester, New York 14605  
phone (585) 325-8123 fax (585) 546-1491  
email: [mctp585@hotmail.com](mailto:mctp585@hotmail.com)

## **Effectiveness of a Community-based Evaluation Training Program SUMMARY REPORT**

# introduction

## **The Metro Council For Teen Potential**

**T**he Metro Council for Teen Potential (MCTP) is a community coalition that promotes a comprehensive, coordinated and community-wide strategy to foster youth development; and encourage young people to make healthier choices. MCTP members include many youth development organizations, the City School District, the City of Rochester, the Monroe County Health Department, the Rochester Monroe County Youth Bureau, and other concerned citizens and youth-serving institutions. Along with the University of Rochester and the City of Rochester, MCTP is a member of the Rochester Coalition Partnership for the Prevention of Teen Pregnancy, and receives major funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Baden Street Settlement is the host agency for MCTP.

MCTP assists its member agencies in incorporating “best practice” models into their existing youth programs, conducts research-based needs assessments and identifies gaps in service. It supports multi-agency collaboratives that deliver services to young people, provides staff training and program evaluation, and coordinates a faith leaders networking project. A media campaign to reach out to young people, to share information about healthy choices, relationships and sexuality; and to encourage young people to make full use of community resources is in production for release in the fall of 2002.

## **A Study to Determine the Effectiveness of a Community-based Evaluation Training Program**

**P**rogram evaluation is an important part of any public health practice or youth development program; and provides vital information about program quality and impact. To encourage and improve the evaluation of programs they support, MCTP, the United Way of Greater Rochester and several partner agencies conducted evaluation training and technical assistance workshops for local community agencies.

Following the evaluation training and technical assistance sessions, MCTP, in cooperation with the University of Rochester, studied the effectiveness of the training to determine the overall impact on programs' evaluation designs. This summary reports on the impact of this community-wide evaluation training and technical assistance intervention.

# the study

## **Training Overview**

From November 1997 to February 1998, 235 individual participants attended a series of four workshops on the topic of designing and using evaluation data. MCTP, the United Way of Greater Rochester, Rochester Monroe County Youth Bureau, Monroe County Department of Social Services, City of Rochester, Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation and Rochester Area Community Foundation provided funding. Philliber Research Associates conducted the four 3-hour evaluation training sessions. Following the training, Philliber offered 200 individual technical assistance sessions.

The evaluation training covered evaluation design, process evaluation, outcome evaluation, impact evaluation, data management and data analysis. The individual technical assistance sessions focused on developing a specific evaluation for one of the agency's programs, refining the evaluation designs and identifying appropriate measures.

136 of the individual participants completed post-training surveys. The surveys indicated a high level of satisfaction on the part of the participants. Nearly a third of the respondents reported that they were "incorporating evaluation for the first time into their programs, or streamlining/increasing existing evaluation efforts as result of the training."

## **Overview of Outcomes/Methods**

Although the survey responses anecdotally indicated a high level of satisfaction and positive intent on the part of the evaluation training participants, scientific methodology was undertaken to determine the effect of the training on the quality of the individual agency program evaluation designs. The study involved reviewing 156 written program descriptions from funding proposals of United Way-funded programs completed before the training (1997) and after the training (1999). Programs that did not submit applications in both years were considered ineligible for the study.

Research staff were blinded to the program's participation in the training sessions to control for bias. Reviewers scored each of the following components of each program's evaluation design on a scale of 1 – 4: objectives to be measured, targeted client groups, description of service delivery, data collection, basis or standard of comparison and data analysis. Reviewers noted applicants' use of pre/post analysis and logic models as well as mention of future plans for improving their evaluation. Each program description was independently reviewed by two researchers, and differences between reviewer's ratings were resolved through a consensus process.

Level of exposure (high, medium and low) to training was determined from individual workshop attendance records. Programs whose staff attended at least three sessions and one individual consultation, or whose staff attended all four sessions were coded as "high exposure." Programs whose staff attended two or three of the sessions were coded as "medium exposure". Programs whose staff attended one or none of the sessions were coded as "low exposure".

Several community factors, such as staff turnover, or additional evaluation training for staff, could have influenced the scores. However, these factors are likely to bias our results towards finding no difference between the 1997 and 1999 groups, and thus the findings likely reflect real and lasting results from the training and technical assistance sessions.

## Summary of Results

This study provides initial evidence that offering community-based program evaluation training leads to better evaluation design. Overall, most community-based service agencies improved their ability to report on their evaluations and improvement was seen even among the groups with the “low” exposure to the training.

156 programs submitted United Way applications in both 1997 and 1999. Reviewers tallied the component scores for these 156 programs. The total evaluation score for all the 156 programs rose significantly between 1997 and 1999. The area of greatest improvement overall was found in service delivery description.

Programs whose staff participated in most or all of the training programs improved their evaluation practices more than those whose staff did not attend training.

## recommendations:

A comprehensive strategy to improve youth programming should include efforts to support agencies in designing and using effective program evaluation techniques. Given staff turnover, this type of training should be offered on a regular basis. Programs will benefit from individual technical assistance.

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*For more information, contact Sheila Driscoll, Director, MCTP (585)325-8123. Full report prepared by Jonathan D. Klein, MD, MPH, University of Rochester. Summary report prepared by Christine Christopher. This summary also includes information from “Summary Report: Philiber Evaluation Training Survey” prepared by Rebecca Koladycz and Karen Reixach.*

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