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## ABSTRACT

Athletes Coaching Teens (ACT) is a school-based prevention program for seventh grade students in Richmond, Virginia. The project is a collaborative effort between the Department of Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Richmond City Public Schools. The ACT program is directed at preventing and changing health-compromising behaviors, such as alcohol and other drug use, unsafe sexual practices, violence, and delinquency. High school athletes are used as peer leaders in seven sessions which teach life skills, including learning to set goals, developing plans to attain the goals, identifying and overcoming roadblocks, solving problems effectively, developing social support, and rebounding. The high school athletes receive special training provided by the ACT staff with the assistance of Virginia Commonwealth University's college athletes. Because these high school students are regarded as positive role models who have grown up in Richmond, they are felt to be in a unique position to be effective teachers for middle school youth. A shortcoming of the ACT program is the need for a context in which students can apply and generalize the skills learned. This project proposal describes progress made in the second year of the program and plans for the third year. (JDD)

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ATHLETES COACHING TEENS (ACT)  
FOR  
SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION

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## AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- o To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- o To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- o To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- o To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

### 1. ATHLETES COACHING TEENS (ACT)

The ACT project is funded by a three year grant from the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Psychology. It will be officially completed in September, 1990, although a renewal and a no cost extension have been submitted. The project is being conducted in collaboration with the Richmond City Public Schools.

Professional, college, and high school athletes are involved in various stages of program implementation. Professional and college athletes make presentations at school assemblies where they discuss the importance of goal setting and the problems associated with drug involvement and other problem behaviors such as teen pregnancy, violence, and dropping out of school. The college athletes also assist in training selected high school students to be ACT leaders. These high school students are chosen by their schools for their academic performance, leadership qualities and athletic involvement. They receive special training in communication skills and group leadership by the *Going for the Goal* staff. Additionally, they receive supervision from staff on their teaching performance. Because these high school students are regarded as positive role models who have grown up in Richmond, they are in a unique position to be effective teachers for middle school youth. Once high school athletes complete the ACT training program they implement a seven session program in middle school health classes.

The ACT *Going for the Goal* curriculum consists of seven 45 minute workshops. Each workshop includes a review of the concepts taught in the previous workshop, a brief skit featuring "Goal Seeker," "Goal Buster," and "Goal Keeper" introducing the lesson for the day, and activities to teach and practice the lessons. A description of each workshop follows:

- Workshop 1 **Dare to Dream**--in this workshop the ACT program and the high school leaders are introduced. Participants discuss the importance of dreams and learn to dream about their future.
- Workshop 2 **Setting Goals**--in this workshop three characteristics of a reachable goal are presented (make the goal important to you, positive and specific). Participants convert their dreams from Workshop 1 into reachable goals.
- Workshop 3 **Making a Goal Ladder**--in this workshop the focus is on the importance of making a plan to reach a goal. Participants are taught

the relationship between long and short term goals by selecting a current goal that directs them toward a future goal. Then they develop a goal ladder with a series of small steps to help them reach their current goal. One of these steps must be something they can accomplish during the ACT program.

- Workshop 4 **Roadblocks to Reaching Goals**--in this workshop participants learn how various roadblocks such as drugs, teen pregnancy, dropping out of school and fighting can prevent them from reaching their life goals. Using timelines and developing original stories they see the impact of roadblocks on the outcome of youths' lives.
- Workshop 5 **Overcoming Roadblocks**--in this workshop a problem-solving strategy called S\*T\*A\*R (Stop and chill out; Think of your choices; Anticipate the consequences of the choices; Respond with the best choice) is taught. Students practice using S\*T\*A\*R in situations they could encounter at home or in school.
- Workshop 6 **Rebounds and Rewards**--in this workshop participants' goal ladders are used to discuss rewards for accomplishing a rung on the ladder. Participants also discuss how to rebound from temporary setbacks such as when a goal becomes too difficult to reach.
- Workshop 7 **Putting Your ACT Together**--in this workshop participants are involved in a series of "games" which provide an opportunity to integrate and apply the information covered in the previous workshops. This workshop is best conducted in a gym or outdoors.

As of Spring 1990, 683 middle school students from five schools have participated in the ACT program and 117 ACT leaders have been selected and trained from five of the Richmond high schools. A Student Leaders Manual, a Student Activity Book, and an ACT Operations Manual have been developed for the project.

Athletes Coaching Teens (ACT) is a school-based prevention program for seventh grade students. The project is a collaborative effort between the Department of Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Richmond City Public Schools. The ACT program was developed as part of a three-year substance abuse prevention demonstration project funded by the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention.

The ACT program is directed at preventing and changing health-compromising behaviors, such as alcohol and other drug use, unsafe sexual practices, violence, and delinquency. The focus of the program is on teaching middle school students "What To Say Yes To" using high school athletes as peer leaders.

ACT is a seven session program directed at teaching six life skills as a means to minimize health-compromising behaviors and promote health-enhancing behaviors. The first skill is learning to set dreams and goals. Students are taught that dreams that are important can be changed into goals. If a goal is to be achieved it must be more important to the goal-setter than to anyone else, phrased positively, and be specific. A student can have more than one goal. In fact, students are encouraged to set goals that would apply to each of the health domains.

The second skill is how to develop plans to attain these goals. Students learn the importance of planning ahead and how to develop a goal ladder with specific steps toward their goal. Thirdly, they learn to identify and overcome roadblocks, such as using drugs that may interfere with goal attainment. Fourth, the students are taught effective problem-solving. This skill involves learning four steps: stopping to relax, thinking of all options to the problem, anticipating the consequences of each option, and responding with the best plan. The fifth skill is developing social support. Students are taught to identify the kinds of support needed to reach their goals and the means to acquire that support. The sixth skill is rebounding, trying new ways to reach a goal when it becomes difficult or impossible to reach (see Appendix B for a brief description of each session).

The ACT program is delivered by high school student-athletes. These students are chosen by their schools for their athletic involvement, academic performance, and leadership qualities. They receive special training provided by the ACT staff with the assistance of the university's college athletes. Because these high school students are regarded as positive role models and understand what it is like to grow up in an urban setting, they are in a unique position to be effective teachers for middle school youth.

With the support of a small grant from the Virginia Governor's Council for Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse, the ACT project was able to hire several high school leaders to conduct the ACT program in a variety of summer community settings. This opportunity allowed us to determine the transferability of the program in non-school settings. It was well received at all settings and requests have been made for next summer.

Several observations from the ACT program have greatly influenced the development of Project GOLD. Middle school age youth benefit enormously from the peer contact of positive high school role models who are from

neighborhoods similar to theirs. In addition to discussing the workshop content, students had opportunities to discuss their concerns about going to high school, problems with peers, and sought information about involvement in activities in the area. The level of satisfaction with the program and the ability to learn from peer leaders in the ACT program is not unlike findings from other peer based programs (refs). In addition, the high school leaders applied the lessons they taught to their own lives, gained confidence as leaders, and learned the personal value of serving others.

The obvious shortcoming of the ACT program is the need for a context in which students can apply and generalize the skills learned with the support of trained staff. They also need opportunities within their after-school environment to develop their competencies in all aspects of their lives. Middle school age youth, as the high school students, could benefit enormously by having the opportunities to serve as leaders to younger students and to provide community service.

The staff and parents at GFCMF recognize the need for programs for middle school age youth in their community. The ability to retain youth in the tutorial program after grade 5 has been difficult. According to the needs assessment for this proposal, parents in the community express concern for the safety of their children after-school and fear of their potential involvement in risk-taking activities.

Therefore, Project GOLD builds upon these observations to provide a context for middle school age youth to grow and develop through opportunities that will challenge and nurture their dreams and goals.

#### Staff Development

The first phase of Project GOLD will be the selection and training of a staff responsible for all components of the programs. The staff will be charged with developing a curriculum that is developmentally appropriate for urban disadvantaged middle school age youth. The foundation of the curriculum will be taken from the conceptual framework of the "Going for the Goal" curriculum described earlier. A key element of the program will be to help youths and their parents to set goals for themselves and to develop the skills necessary to actualize those goals. Goals will be addressed in each of the domains of health as described by Perry and Jessor (1985).

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Department of Psychology

Athletes Coaching Teens for Substance Abuse Prevention

PROGRAM NARRATIVE

This narrative describes the progress of the past year (Year 02) and the plans for the upcoming year (Year 03) for the project, Athletes Coaching Teens (ACT) to Prevent Substance Abuse (grant number 1H84AD00489-01). The primary goal of the project is to develop and evaluate an effective school-based drug prevention program for high risk youth. This narrative will be organized around the objectives and activities of the project presented in the GOAMS format. Objectives 1 and 2 were completed during Year 01 and were described in the previous continuation grant application.

Project Report for the 02 Year

Objective 3: Evaluate the impact of the programs

Extensive analyses were conducted on the pre- and post-intervention data collected from the first cohort of subjects (i.e., those who participated in the program during the 1987-1988 school year). These analyses were conducted in order to: (a) provide descriptive data on our target population; (b) provide estimates on the prevalence of alcohol and other drug use within this population; (c) evaluate the appropriateness of the ACT intervention for use with this population; and (d) evaluate the psychometric properties of the instruments included in the evaluation battery. These findings indicated that there is a high rate of alcohol and marijuana use and other problem behavior within this population. Many of these students face considerable pressure from peers to try alcohol and other drugs. Additional analyses of the goals and future aspirations of these students provided strong support for the basic assumptions of the ACT intervention. The results of these analyses were reported in a manuscript we prepared for the book Experiences in Prevention with High Risk Youth being edited by John Swisher and Carol Marcus. A copy of this manuscript is included in the Appendix. These findings were also presented to OSAP staff at a meeting on January 27, 1989.

A follow-up battery was constructed to provide a basis for evaluating the impact of the intervention programs conducted with the first cohort. This battery was as similar as possible to the original pre-intervention battery in order to facilitate evaluation of longitudinal changes. Several scales that were not psychometrically strong were eliminated and a few additions were made to supplement the battery. The follow-up battery was administered to approximately 1200 eighth grade students in seven middle schools. These data are currently being entered into the computer. Data will be ready for analysis in July. A list of measures and a copy of the follow-up battery are included in the Appendix.

Objective 4: Evaluate different program formats

A major focus of the second year was on revising the ACT curriculum and leader training program. Extensive revisions in the curriculum were made based on our experience running the sessions during the first year of the project. Further, a one-day workshop was conducted with selected middle school health teachers, school administrators and selected prevention specialists. The



purpose of this workshop was to solicit feedback from school personnel about the program and to facilitate school and community involvement for the project. As a result of these two activities, a new manual for leaders was created. The manual contains sections covering methods for leading sessions as well as detailed outlines for conducting seven specific sessions. The sessions cover dreaming; turning dreams into goals; making a goal ladder; identifying roadblocks to one's goals; overcoming roadblocks with problem-solving skills; rewarding oneself for accomplishments; and rebounding from setbacks. A copy of the Leader's manual is included in the Appendix.

Approximately 50 high school students from four city high schools participated in the ACT leader training. In addition, five VCU basketball players and one University of Richmond football and baseball player were trained in the ACT program and served as trainers for the high school students.

Instruments for evaluating the revised intervention programs were selected. Selection of instruments was guided by the evaluation of instruments employed to evaluate the original intervention (see Objective 3). The revised battery included instruments from the original battery with acceptable properties and additional instruments which were selected because they were directly relevant to the intervention and had acceptable psychometric properties. A problem in selecting instruments for the evaluation has been their applicability to an inner city minority population. Before printing the final evaluation battery, focus groups were conducted with youth in various housing communities. An ACT staff person conducted group interviews to assess the terms and concepts used in the evaluation batteries as well as in the ACT curriculum. The feedback from these discussions was used to further refine the battery and the curriculum. The final battery consisted of measures that assessed history of use for alcohol and other drugs; current use of alcohol and other drugs; personal coping styles; expectations for the future; emotional restraint and distress; self-esteem; problem behaviors and positive activities; sexual behavior; and spheres of control. In addition, questions were included to assess the knowledge gained from participation in the intervention programs. A list of measures and copy of the survey are included in the Appendix.

The revised evaluation battery was administered to approximately 1400 seventh grade students in eight middle schools. The pretest was given in November and the posttest occurred in May. The batteries were condensed so that a student could complete the entire booklet within one class period. Due to the volume of data collected this Spring, data will not be ready for preliminary analyses until August 1989.

A new objective for this year was to assess the impact of participation in the ACT program on the high school students who serve as group leaders. A modification of the evaluation battery was used as a pretest and posttest for the high school leaders. The battery consisted of measures of self-esteem, emotional restraint and distress, consideration of others, and spheres of control. Preliminary analyses will be conducted during the summer.

In addition to the ACT program, we conducted two comparison intervention programs (INFORM and a "NO" oriented program). The INFORM program consists of well known professional or amateur athletes presenting information related to

substance abuse prevention during school assemblies. The "NO" oriented program selected was the SMART program which was developed for the Boys Club of America. A local non-profit educational agency was contracted to conduct the SMART program in four middle schools. The SMART and ACT programs were conducted in health classes over the same time period.

The ACT program was implemented in four middle schools during the months of February, March, and April. In one middle school every seventh grade student participated in the ACT program. At three other schools, approximately one-third of the students participated in ACT while the remainder participated in the comparison intervention programs. Two middle schools received the INFORM program only and two schools served as control schools. This design will allow assessment of the effect of the ACT program when all students in the school participate versus a portion of the students. A total of 345 students participated in the ACT program and 181 students participated in the SMART program.

As part of the INFORM program, Gerald Henderson, an NBA player with the Philadelphia 76'ers and native of Richmond, presented assemblies at three high schools (n=1350). His talks in September served as a kick-off for recruiting high school leaders. In February, two Olympic athletes (Harvey Gance and Judy Brown King) spoke to assemblies at 5 middle schools. A total of 1500 students attended these assemblies. These Olympic athletes discussed their experiences with setting goals to win an Olympic medal and the work involved to reach these goals. They also discussed the harms associated with substance use, including steroids.

In addition to the evaluation batteries, two other evaluation methods were implemented to assess the intervention. During the implementation of the ACT program within the middle school classrooms, an observer was present to complete a checklist of tasks that ACT leaders were to do within each session. The second evaluation strategy was a brief questionnaire completed by students who participated in the ACT and SMART programs. The questionnaire asked about various aspects of the program and about the leaders who conducted the program. These evaluation strategies will provide information to use in refining the ACT curriculum and the high school training program for the final year of the grant.

One planned activity that was not implemented during the second year was the comparison of peer-led and adult-led ACT programs. This component was not completed due to the inability to arrange a training schedule with appropriate teachers once the revised curriculum was completed. Separate funding has been obtained to conduct this comparison during the 1989-1990 academic year.

Another activity that will continue into the third year is the development of videotapes to be used for training purposes. Various activities were taped over the course of the second year such as, leader's training sessions and assemblies given by professional athletes. Additional activities will be taped during the summer months. During the third year these tapes will be edited for dissemination.

In addition to the objectives noted in the 1988-89 continuation report, the ACT staff has been involved in additional activities. One focus has been on providing exposure for the ACT program. Locally, a newsletter was created and distributed to approximately 3000 individuals within the Richmond City school system and government (see copy in Appendix). ACT has been featured in several newspaper articles, the television evening news, and on a local radio morning show.

Outside of Richmond, Cathy Howard presented information from the ACT project at the convention of the Society of Research in Child Development in Kansas City. Steve Danish will moderate a panel of OSAP grantees at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association in New Orleans this August. Two papers pertaining to the ACT program will be presented as well as a poster during the APA convention. ACT staff members have been invited to conduct workshops on the ACT program at the Youth Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Conference sponsored by the Virginia Department of Education this July. Steve Danish and Albert Farrell prepared two chapters for the volume edited by John Swisher and Carol Marcus.

After our December Community Advisory Board meeting, a board member who is the Richmond IBM Branch Manager asked that ACT entertain the idea of a joint IBM/ACT program for seventh grade students in Richmond to be modeled after programs IBM has conducted in larger cities. The result was a celebration on May 23 entitled "Going For The Goal". Approximately 550 seventh grade students and their adult guests were invited to a dinner and program at Virginia Commonwealth University and then taken to a Richmond Braves baseball game. The program featured dignitaries such as the First Lady of Virginia, a state senator, the mayor of Richmond, the newly elected school superintendent, VCU Provost, and IBM corporate managers. As a part of the program, VCU announced a special scholarship program for Richmond City middle school students whereby three students who meet certain criteria during their eighth grade year will be eligible for scholarships to VCU. IBM sought and coordinated the funding for this activity from a number of local corporations. IBM has expressed a desire to continue this program in upcoming years in conjunction with the ACT project.

The ACT staff has also been successful in obtaining additional funding from the Governor's Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Problems to conduct the ACT program within community-based summer youth programs. Funding has also been acquired from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education for Drug Free Schools. With this grant the ACT staff will conduct special training of the ACT program to teachers and youth workers in the city and to expand the ACT program into the eighth grade with a booster curriculum.

#### Workplan for the 03 year.

The focus of the third year of the grant will be on completing the evaluation of the ACT intervention, standardizing the procedures for operating the various aspects of the ACT program, and disseminating information about the program. The increase in activities from the original grant proposal for Year

03 has made it necessary to seek one additional staff person on a part-time basis (see attached budget detail).

Objective 3: Evaluate the impact of the programs

During Year 03 we plan to analyze the first year follow-up data collected on the first cohort of students (i.e., those who completed the original ACT program in the 1987-1988 school year). We will also be collecting second year follow-up data on these students during the spring of 1990. These data will be used to evaluate the original ACT program and to provide data on the frequency of problem behaviors including alcohol and other drug use for 9th grade students in the target population. We plan to employ the basic evaluation battery used for the first year follow-up of this cohort.

Objective 4: Evaluate Revised and Expanded Programs

During Year 03 we also plan to analyze the pre- and post-intervention data for the second Cohort of students (i.e., those who completed the ACT, INFORM, and Smart Programs in the 1988-1989 school year). These data will be used to evaluate the impact of our interventions compared to no-treatment controls, the relative efficacy of each of the three different programs, and the potential gain achieved by conducting the intervention on a school-wide basis. We will also be collecting and analyzing first year follow-up data for this cohort. These data will enable us to determine the extent to which initial gains are maintained over time. We plan to use the basic evaluation battery developed for the post-intervention assessment of this cohort.

Objective 5: Disseminate the findings

Standardizing materials for dissemination purposes will be a high priority for Year 03. Final revisions in the ACT leaders manual will be made using evaluation data (including observer checklists) as a reference for improving components of the program. An operations manual will also be developed to provide detailed guidelines for establishing ACT programs in other communities. This manual will include: (a) detailed procedures for implementing the ACT program; (b) instructions for selecting and training workshop leaders; (c) materials for implementing the intervention; and (d) procedures and forms for evaluating the intervention. Other materials will be developed to supplement the manual. For example, a set of videotapes to facilitate training workshop leaders and for use in the actual intervention will be developed. These materials will be assembled into a free-standing resource package which can be used to implement the ACT program in other communities.

We also plan to actively disseminate information about the ACT intervention. A manuscript describing the findings of our evaluation research will be prepared and submitted for publication in an appropriate professional journal. Manuscripts focusing on other aspects of the project will also be prepared and submitted for publication; presentations are planned for appropriate national and regional conferences. Program materials and resource packages will be made available to interested parties.

Finally, the ACT program will be administered in the schools during Year 03 to obtain two years of evaluation information on the effectiveness of the program. High school students will be recruited and selected at the end of the 1988-89 school year. They will participate in an intensive weekend training program planned for the beginning of the 1989-90 school year. The ACT program will then be administered within the middle schools during the first semester of the school year. This arrangement will allow for more time between program participation and evaluation of the program's impact at the end of the school year. The evaluation battery will be administered to all 7th grade students during the fall and the posttest will be given in May.

Steps will be taken to ensure that the ACT program continues in the Richmond City Schools after the funding period has ended. For example, the Community Advisory Board will identify resources to continue this program. Staff members will also work with the City to submit proposals for funding through appropriate sources (e.g., State funding, foundation support, etc.).

It does not appear that we can begin actual implementation of the ACT program in other cities during Year 03. We will need to devote considerable time to the other objectives listed for Year 03. All of these activities (e.g., completion of the evaluation, development of resource packages) must be completed before actual dissemination of the program can take place. It also seems appropriate to begin planning several smaller scale trial implementations and replications prior to attempting wider scale implementation.