DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 352 436 UD 029 011

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TITLE Managing Youth Development Programs for At-Risk Youth: Lessons from Research and Practical Experience. Urban Diversity Series No. 103.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY Columbia Univ., New York, N.Y. Teachers College.; John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Chicago, IL.; Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Nov 92
CONTRACT R188062013
NOTE 59p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Box 40, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027 ($8).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *At Risk Persons; *Disadvantaged Youth; Economically Disadvantaged; Educationally Disadvantaged; Evaluation Needs; Financial Support; *Individual Development; Professional Development; *Program Administration; Program Evaluation; Program Implementation; Research Needs; *Research Utilization; Theory Practice Relationship; *Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Second Chance Programs

ABSTRACT

How youth programs, particularly those that try to prepare young people for work and higher education, are organized and implemented in the field is reviewed. In many cases, the needs of program practitioners are overlooked by the research community. The focus here is on "second-chance" programs that promote the self-sufficiency of disadvantaged groups of adolescents. A framework of the major categories of youth program research is followed by an examination of the typical youth program from an implementation perspective. Remaining sections apply an integrative theory to youth programs by adapting the concept of youth programs as service organizations. The elements of a service concept are presented, along with some limitations of the service concept model. Suggestions for realizing youth research and program practice include the following: (1) work to put professional development education high on the national agenda; (2) encourage new research on program implementation and service concepts; (3) emphasize in-program analysis and process/implementation studies; (4) expand support of organizations that attempt to translate research for use by practitioners; (5) connect nationally focused researchers with local change initiatives; (6) support technical assistance and in-service training of program staff; (7) put program managers on review committees that guide funding decisions; and (8) expand the repertoire of skills that managers must possess. Two figures illustrate the discussion. (SLD)

MANAGING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH:
Lessons from Research and Practical Experience

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Urban Diversity Series No. 103
ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education
Institute for Urban and Minority Education
November 1992

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This publication was produced by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, United States Department of Education, under contract number R188062013; Teachers College, Columbia University; and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI, the Department of Education, or the MacArthur Foundation.

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Managing Youth Development Programs for At-Risk Students: Lessons from Research and Practical Experience

OVERVIEW

This paper reviews how youth programs, particularly programs that try to prepare young people for the world of work and higher education, are organized and implemented in the field. We argue that in many cases the needs of program practitioners are overlooked by the research community. The reasons for this phenomenon are complex, ranging from indifference on the part of researchers, a lack of financial incentives for management studies, and, in some cases, outright contempt for those carrying out services. In the paper, we look at the "inside" of youth programs to help researchers, funders and policymakers better understand the vulnerable status of "second-chance" programs and the daunting challenges faced by those who manage them.

The linkage between research and program practice is not a trivial one. The national debates over the best strategies to help "at-risk" youth have an almost ethereal quality to them: commissions and television specials present the virtues of various program designs; experts describe the need for integrated and coordinated services; policymakers cite studies demonstrating the importance of serving the most needy of the dispossessed; and students in the field agonize over incremental approaches versus radical, structural ones. All of these efforts will flounder, of course, whatever their purpose and content, unless the people who are charged with managing and running youth programs are well trained, motivated, and capable. Too few resources, including but not limited to research, have been devoted to addressing the skill levels and needs of practitioners. Partly as a result, the field is largely a para-professional and ad hoc enterprise, given to improvisation rather than stability and maturity.

We begin the paper with more detail on the problem statement. This is followed by a framework of the major categories of youth program research. Next, we ask what the typical youth program looks like from an implementation perspective. The remaining sections apply an integrative theory to youth programs, by adapting the concept of youth programs as service organizations. The various elements of a service concept are presented, along with limitations of this model. We conclude with some suggestions for re-aligning youth research with program practice.

Our interest in this paper is the field of "second-chance" youth programs that promote the self-sufficiency of disadvantaged groups of adolescents. These programs are often run by community groups, business/school partnership organizations, voluntary associations, training and mentor organizations, community service groups, and others working in poor communities in urban schools, as well as in non-school settings. These programs may be distinguished from the mainstream of public education, the "first chance" system, although both share school and community settings, not to mention many of the same problems. Second-chance programs are, however, generally smaller in scale and most are in the not-for-profit sector. Public education, on the other hand, is a one hundred billion dollar enterprise organized around large-scale public bureaucracies.

Despite these differences, there is a growing overlap between the separate social research literatures. For example, in educational research concerning school reform practices, a great deal of attention has been focused on the role of teacher-centered reform, school-based management, and "effective schools." These research traditions spotlight the central importance of grass-roots competence and management. Although the present paper does not concern itself with K through 12 education practices, the theme of getting "inside" youth programs is analogous to the emerging research literature on school-based reform.

LITTLE FROM RESEARCH FOR YOUTH PROGRAM PRACTITIONERS

Federal agencies and foundation grantmakers have invested billions of dollars over the past twenty years to acquire and utilize knowledge about youth development, employment, education, and self-sufficiency practices. This investment is relatively small when compared to the costs of research and development (R&D) outside the children and youth field and minuscule when compared to the actual costs of implementing and maintaining quality programs for children and youth. Nevertheless, the sum is large enough to attract the attention of internal audiences–those in private foundations who support research–as well as external audiences, including those on the outside who care deeply about the powerful and often symbolic role that R&D plays in signaling new directions in social policies.

What has been the impact of this public and private investment? The answer has to be: "Mixed." A number of examples could be cited showing that significant change has taken place and that important lessons have been learned.[1] In one such instance, the significance of basic research in the late 1970s pointing to the slowdown in cognitive growth that occurs in the summer months was quickly recognized by policy research "synthesizers." They took this rather obscure research and used it to recommend that basic skills remedial services be added to summer jobs programs. Today, as a result of legislative changes reflecting this basic research finding, nearly one-third of the 700,000 or so poor youth served in federally funded summer jobs programs receive some sort of assessment and many actually receive academic enrichment services. Another example is the string of research projects on state work/welfare programs undertaken by the New York based intermediary, MDRC. These studies have been widely cited as influencing in a positive way the formulation of the Family Support act of 1988.[2] That Act will have profound implications

for determining how various groups, such as teen parents, will be served in second-chance programs.

Some important exceptions aside, however, the fact remains that few of the lessons learned in the demonstrations and pilots of the past decade seem to have had widespread impact. In part, the problem stems from the sometimes fitful nature of support that research and development receives: Research is often viewed as an expendable item in lean budgetary years. However understandable, this response has severely limited the ability of research findings to affect practice. Researchers must scramble to obtain outside funding for their "next" project; typically, researchers do not have the necessary resources to stick with an issue and to assist in the dissemination and adaptation of policy ideas in the field. As a result—and funding is just one explanation—more often than not, we continue to find that local programs fail to reflect research-based knowledge of effective practices.

Two recent books examine the tendency of nationally focused researchers and policy advocates to overstate and occasionally delude themselves on the degree to which their efforts effect lasting changes in public policy: Robert Haveman's *Poverty Policy and Poverty Research: The Great Society and the Social Sciences* (University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, 1987) and Richard Nathan's *Social Science in Government: Uses and Misuses* (Basic Books: New York, 1988). Both trace the impact of research and demonstrations on actual changes in public policies and both conclude that the effects have been mixed and often marginal. In reviewing these books, Henry Aaron concludes that, "in a world of public policy a research paper initially is no more than a rumor believed by one person—its author."[3]

In a case of major significance, the Youth Employment Demonstrations Project Act (YEDPA) of the late 1970s, one of the largest

programs of social research and demonstration activity aimed at one single group (disadvantaged youth), the Act proved, at best, a qualified success.[4] Though it contributed to our understanding of the issues, its critics have stressed the limited range of definitive research answers it provided. At its conclusion, basic questions remained unresolved: Is work a good or bad thing for young people; how much is too much; should dropouts be given basic skills training to read and write before, after, or coupled with a job; what is the best way to assess reading skills; how do you get collaborative strategies to work when trying to assist poor children, should job training agencies focus on work, socialization skills, basic skills, or family matters? YEDPA is a good case study because its achievements were all too often overshadowed by people's expectations for it, by its complexity, by the limitations of applied social techniques, and by the inadequate efforts made to translate its findings for subsequent use by practitioners.

In summary, most social research on youth programs has not had the kind of dramatic impact on local practice that one would hope to see. The challenge of linking research on youth programs to improved management practice is admittedly a complex one. In some instances, research has not been reviewed with utilization by managers in mind. Here the challenge is to better state or translate the managerial implications of the research. In other situations, we lack the prerequisite knowledge of how to take lessons from one place and transport them into other locations. Lisbeth Schorr writes, "devising strategies for surmounting obstacles to widespread replication is as difficult as devising a successful intervention in the first place (1988)."[5] In still other cases, the research is not disseminated to the right people even though it may be highly relevant to the concerns of local practitioners. The solution here may mean concrete efforts to identify an appropriate audience at the service-provider level, and fresh attempts to forge working relationships between researchers and managers. Finally, in many instances, the right research

questions–from an implementation perspective–have not been asked at all.

Leadership in bringing research and development to bear on local youth service practices will be needed if better outcomes for children and families are to be achieved. One important reason to care about this matter is that research can help shape a field's knowledge base, which in turn may be used in the professionalization of the field. Simply put, no group evolves into a true profession without detailed knowledge of its own practices and standards for success. Whether the problem is failure to translate research findings into language the busy executive can understand, a break-down in the replication process, an inadequate dissemination plan, or the asking of irrelevant questions, the result is the same–an underdeveloped field that lacks knowledge of effective practice.

The present paper builds on this critique and, in particular, points to the need for a new kind of youth research that is responsive to implementation issues. It explores some of the limitations of social science to shed light on the implementation of "second-chance" youth programs and then goes on to examine some of the common building blocks of most youth programs. These building blocks include such factors as: outreach/marketing strategies, service delivery decisions, staffing, sequencing of services, attrition and program drop-out prevention, program linkages, and funding. We hope to show the importance of focusing intellectual resources on these factors and the necessity to re-focus R&D strategies to yield reliable information about them.

WHAT IS EXAMINED IN YOUTH PROGRAM RESEARCH?

It has become conventional to discuss research and development in two broad categories: *knowledge production* and *knowledge applications*.

Knowledge production includes: (1) *basic knowledge production* on the nature and causes of human resource-related problems, for example. displacement of young workers from jobs by unemployed adults or the special problems faced by Hispanic youth just entering the labor market, (2) the *collection of social statistics*, (3) the *evaluation of social programs*, and (4) *social experiments* in which knowledge of the experimental impacts and implementation is generated.

Knowledge applications include: (1) *demonstration projects* in which, for example, specific program designs or financial incentives are tried in the field after basic research has identified the nature, importance and feasibility of the trials, (2) *materials development* to aid the implementation of human resources programs, and (3) *efforts to synthesize, disseminate, or use knowledge* of human resource problems. The latter category might also include training initiatives and staff building activities.

We know of no source of information in the youth field that allows us to estimate how current expenditures are distributed among these categories or similar ones. How much is spent for knowledge production vs. application, basic research vs. evaluation, or demonstrations vs. dissemination? How much is spent on specific substantive topics? Who does the R&D and where are they located? How much of the R&D is aimed at federal workers, Congressional staff, practitioners in the field, state policy makers, urban planners, or others? Clearly, the youth R&D community is more reflective about issues in the field than about its own organization and priority setting processes.

We have observed, however, that most R&D in the youth field may be characterized as a "social engineering" approach to youth development. This research strategy entails a search for the best mix of services and optimum program design, as if this architecture alone would guarantee a successful experience for participating youth. Put differently, most youth

R&D has involved tests of formal models of program designs and the search for impacts in the post-program period.

This emphasis on program models reflects major changes in the research community itself. As researchers developed new, sophisticated techniques of social experimentation and impact analyses, it was not unusual to find that they would redefine research questions to match the quantitative techniques at hand.

Consider random assignment social experiments, first popularized in the Negative Income Tax Experiments of the early and late 1970s, and now commonplace.[6] The kind of question asked in these rigorous research designs is, "what mix of services works best and for whom?" "Working best," in this context, is defined in terms of post-program outcomes and this in turn invites use of comparison or control groups.

Questions about how, why, and where something worked have not been entirely overlooked, but are typically subordinated to the primary concern with the "impact"—a determination of overall program effects. In fact, implementation analysis in the youth field has often been reduced to a set of "control" variables in econometric models explaining program effects.

There has been some public management research of interest, mostly qualitative and performed by political scientists. Generally, this research has been associated with the American Association of Public Policy Management and its journal, *Policy Analysis and Management.* This strand of research has great vitality and its growth is at least as significant as the emergence of research based on the social experimentation model. But the new public management literature has rarely been focused on youth self-sufficiency programs and more often than not is focused on

public policy implementation in the field, rather than program management practices in and of themselves.[7]

Another factor in this critique of recent research in second-chance youth programs concerns the erosion of the importance of place or location in national studies. Although multi-site demonstrations are commonplace, the researchers who tally up the outcomes from such studies tend to develop policy implications from the aggregate, combined-site, impacts. Put differently, the separate site effects are presented and analyzed, but what is highlighted is the grand mean of program effects.

Attention tends to be on discovering whether the grand mean is a big number or small number, a good effect or bad one, rather than on explaining why some sites do better than others. In fact, site differences are often quite large in these multi-site demonstrations, but their differences are obscured by using a measure of central tendency to express impacts and effects. In simple terms, researchers have often thrown away good information by not pursuing more vigorously the differences between high performing sites and poor sites.[8]

We believe that the field of youth development needs this kind of site-specific information to develop appropriate theories and models of intervention. With this information in hand, however, there is no guarantee that a cohesive system of programs would automatically develop. Put differently, knowledge that sheds light on inter-site differences still begs the transferability/replication problem. Here a comparison between the second-chance youth development field and mainstream education may be instructive. In the former, we have scanty information about site-specific variation while in the literature on public schooling, there is considerable depth. As a result, we would argue that public education research is now ready to confront the replicability challenge whereas second-chance youth programs are still in the basic knowledge development stage.

What Does a Typical Youth Program Look Like?

When youth programs are described in the general literature, they are labeled in one of several ways. The programs may be described in terms of the target groups served, for example, teen parenting programs, dropout programs, or "at-risk" youth initiatives. Another alternative is to focus on the sponsoring entity, for example, school-based services, community programs or business-school partnerships. A third possibility is to describe youth programs in terms of the primary service delivered. Summer jobs programs, work experience, basic skills—all are terms that aptly describe youth programs.

These descriptions are simple and useful but they do not evoke the inner workings of youth programs, the guts of the programs' implementation. We seldom hear of the XYZ outreach program, or the intensive staffing initiative, or the ABC case management model. These functions are embedded in youth programs; their meaning is implicit rather than a formal part of the program description.

What we call something reflects the value placed on it. In the youth field, we tend to think of target groups, sponsoring agencies, and services as the principal elements that help to explain program success or failure. As noted above, the youth program evaluation literature is replete with studies of the differential impacts of programs, organized around various client groups, service providers, and services. Less has been written about the generic elements of youth programs, their management functions, and organizational factors.

And yet, as we shall see, the differences between programs can quickly be traced to the variable capacity of the programs to deliver high

quality services. If these factors are ignored, evaluators and funders face the danger of ascribing success or failure to the wrong set of factors.

What does a typical youth program look like? The following schema illustrates the general shape of the "typical" second-chance youth program in the United States:

FIGURE 1

TYPICAL YOUTH PROGRAM COMPONENTS

EXTERNAL
FUNCTIONS

MARKETING
****
OUTREACH
****
RECRUITMENT

GENERIC FUNCTIONS

- Staffing
- Management and Operational Controls, e.g., MIS, fiscal
- Linkages and Collaboration with other agencies
- Funding
- Meeting Performance Standards

IN-PROGRAM FUNCTIONS

- Intake
- Orientation
- Assessment
- Service Delivery Decisions
- Services (e.g., work experience, basic skills remediation, occupational skills training
- Sequencing of Services
- Attrition Prevention
- Exit and Placement

****

- Ongoing Case Management

****

- Follow-Up/Post-Program Services

Applying an Integrative Theory to Youth Programs

Second-chance youth programs are, first and foremost, service organizations. In James Heskett's influential 1986 book, *Managing in the Service Economy* (Harvard Business School, Cambridge), he characterizes service organizations as those that are largely occupied by white-collar workers, that are labor-intensive, and that produce something that is intangible. Heskett devises a list of basic service elements that comprise the "strategic service vision" of an organization: targeting a segment of the market; having a well-defined service concept; a focused operating strategy; and, a properly designed and executed service delivery system.

These concepts are helpful, although not without limitations, for understanding youth program management. The next two sections deal with the utility and limitations of the service concept as applied to youth programs.

Targeting. Consider the first element in Heskett's service vision–*targeting*. Most youth programs must decide on the target groups to be served, such as teen parents, dropouts, or particular ethnic groups. They must calculate what they hope to accomplish in terms of "market share" and how they will deal with competition from other, perhaps similar, human service agencies. In the language of management science, segments of "customers" must be identified before the organization designs its product or service. Should the program enroll all eligible teenage parents or a subset of them (for example, those with children in a particular age range, or parents with a certain level of basic skills or work experience)? Should the program focus on Hispanic youth and if so from what neighborhoods or feeder schools? Should a particular mentoring program seek poor young clients in the middle rung of school achievement (with mostly C grades), the top half, or bottom rung?

The Service Concept. The notion of a *service concept* refers to an organization's attempt to fashion a structure, culture, and ideology that help "customers" understand the business of the program. A typical youth program in the business of providing, for example, summer work experience opportunities for poor, minority youth, may adapt a service concept that signals young enrollees, in a variety of ways, that the program is in the summer jobs business, not the comprehensive training business, the counseling business, or the entrepreneurship business. Another organization, by contrast, may have a limited range of services, but its ideology and reputation in the community depend on the creation of a different service concept, one stressing comprehensive services, long-term support and a nurturing, family-style approach to programming. Other examples come to mind: one youth program's service concept may turn on the model of empowerment and self-reliance, while another program may concentrate on service supports or income transfers. Service concepts reflect the programs' philosophical beliefs about the underpinnings of persistent poverty, youth unemployment, and young peoples' involvement in a variety of unpleasant alternatives to the mainstream.

A Focused Operating Strategy. The third element in Heskett's paradigm is the *focused operating strategy.* This is the heart of the service organization's management: operational systems, financing, marketing, human resources, and management control systems are all harnessed to help achieve the goals of the service concept. Here the senior leadership of youth programs must figure out which of the elements in an operating system are most important to achieving the service concept. Which must the organization use as the key or leverage to produce the most impacts? How can systems be modified, invented, and organized to reflect the targeting and service concept decisions?

The Service Delivery System. The fourth compon is a well-designed *service delivery system.* Even if an organization has carefully

segmented the market and identified an appropriate target group, even if the service concept is understood by staff, clients, referring agencies, and parents of clients, and even if all basic management systems are in place, if the service delivery system fails, the program, ultimately, is likely to suffer as well. In youth programs, the service delivery system is comprised of the front-line functions that are implemented by counselors, job developers, classroom instructors, and case managers. It is the system that the client understands and interacts with, beginning with an orientation to the program; followed by assessment and testing; service delivery decision-making and choices; counseling and other preventive measures to prevent early attrition from program components (especially if the client is referred to successive waves of services); and, finally, some sort of exit and placement formality when the client completes the training and is ready to leave.

These simple concepts provide a framework for thinking about youth program management and the usefulness of current research. They are not the only concepts we could have drawn on, but they are reasonably straightforward, unlike much of the pseudo-scientific material appearing in the popular management literature. Having said that, the concepts are not without limitations.

Limitations of the Service Organization Model For Youth Programs

Second-chance youth programs are, of course, quite different in size, scope, and purpose from most of the organizations that Heskett and others include in the service sector. The most notable difference between private-sector firms and second-chance youth programs is the manner in which the youth programs are funded. In contrast to the free market of profit and loss enjoyed by private-sector service organizations, youth

programs (whether government-funded or funded by private sources) generally do not receive revenues directly from their customers, the youthful trainees. Rather, the programs rely directly on outside grants and contracts. As a requirement of attracting and keeping these grants and contracts, youth programs must satisfy fiscal requirements and meet targeting and performance standards established by government agencies and external funders.

The eternal quest for outside funding and the complexity of the tasks involved in meeting these standards can be significant inhibiting factors in effective youth program management. This is a theme that surveys of youth program managers have consistently revealed.[9] Managers complain of being undercapitalized; having too little money in administrative accounts; having inadequate or no discretionary funds for contingencies; having unworkable demands placed on their fiscal and human resource systems (e.g., the resources that most youth programs must devote to prevent audits and to avoid disallowable costs are considerable, if not unbearable in their view); and, of course, of being forced to serve people whom they may not choose to serve. The customers in this sense are not the young clients but, rather, the external funders.

In the case of Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs, the nation's largest funder of second-chance youth programs, the external funding of local programs is translated into requirements at both ends of program participation. At the front end–client selection–there are a number of special problems for youth service organizations. Some clients, for example, while meeting particular formal eligibility standards set by funders (usually, family income), may not be suitable for the programs on the basis of skills or motivation. Alternatively, the programs may not be able to serve people who want to join the programs but cannot because they do not meet official guidelines. At the other end, program completion, programs are rewarded financially only if they meet particular

standards, for example, having certain percentages of young people placed in jobs or attaining agreed-upon youth employment competencies (for example, reading at a certain level or acquiring knowledge of how to write a resume). These arrangements can lead to a number of perverse incentives, such as serving only the most able of the poor ("creaming") or arranging short-term services with more certain positive outcomes rather than long-term services with unknown outcomes.

Much has been written in a general sense about these constraints on youth program service organizations. There are a number of reports by the Government Accounting Office, the Congressional Budget Office, special commissions, and others about the unanticipated effects these targeting and performance regulations have on youth programs.[10] But even in these reports, one does not find a fine-grained analysis tracing how these rules actually affect management practices—the targeting decisions, the development of a service concept, an operating strategy, and appropriate service delivery systems. The conventional wisdom is that these rules and regulations do have an impact, but there are surprisingly few studies that disassemble youth programs to document the relationship between the mandates of funders and the program management of youth service organizations.

In the following sections, we shall present some illustrative information drawn from several youth program evaluations and studies that are part of the present generation of initiatives. One goal is to highlight some interesting research-driven lessons that shed light on the service functions of second-chance youth programs. But another goal is to point out the limitations of current research and to suggest some themes related to the service concept that may be useful to those wishing to improve our understanding of youth program implementation.

The material is organized around the four elements in the service vision framework: a well-designed service delivery system, the targeting challenge, the development of a service concept, and a focused operating system.

Service Delivery Systems

Unlike the other elements in the service vision framework, service delivery systems have received enormous attention in published research. In fact, most research on youth programs tries to answer "what works best" by comparing the efficacy of various service delivery systems, such as basic skills instruction, work experience, job placement, support services, and occupational training.

An explosion of manpower research that began in the 1960s has continued unabated since that time. Beginning in the 1970s, the manpower field became dominated by economists anxious to try out the latest econometric models to assess post-program impacts. To carry out these studies, programs had to be placed into logical categories, sometimes arbitrarily so, such as work experience, classroom training or educational programs. These global categories often obscured the real purposes and meaning of the programs but did lead to comparative statements about the effectiveness of broad service delivery systems.

If over-simplification was the price to pay for this era of programs, the movement did serve the field well by helping to send a message to practitioners that some things *do* work. The gospel throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s was that "you got what you paid for" and "some things did work." This message was meant to counter the image created by Charles Murray (1984) and other writers that social programs were a failure, and that participation in such programs actually made life worse for clients by creating dependency and a false feeling of security.[11] The

manpower research community's response was an important message to send to a field that was undergoing professional development and needed its own knowledge base to ground practice, theory and change.

For example, the synthesis of research on service delivery showed that short-term, inexpensive job search programs led to short-term gains that eroded over time. Longer term, more expensive programs, such as Job Corps, led to more enduring results, up to four years post-program. Occupational training programs seemed to lead to the largest post-program gains, but the impacts were chiefly clustered in the clerical trades for women. Moreover, not many trainees overall were offered vocational training. Most recipients received job search assistance or placement help lasting only a few weeks. Work experience programs, such as the summer jobs program, didn't work as well as work experience combined with basic skills instruction. Subsidized jobs programs improved youth earnings and employment during the period of program participation, but were politically unattractive.[12]

Practitioners learned from such findings, and the results helped stimulate a new generation of programs: academically enriched summer programs, long-term comprehensive youth programs, community service, mentoring, apprenticeship, competency-based programs, and the basic skills movement.

Some issues that had been overlooked by the "service delivery" school of research have only recently begun to receive attention. A good example is investigation into the links between services and the sequencing or ordering of program offerings. Once there was recognition that single-service programs were often not up to the task of meeting the multiple needs of at-risk groups, a few, but not enough, researchers began trying to understand the linkages among services and the ordering of services. Like

all new research initiatives, this interest is not without controversy and much new work remains to be done.

An illustration of the new research is the Minority Single Female Parent (MSFP) demonstration funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and administered through community-based organizations in four cities. This study has been concerned with the population of women who often become dependent on public assistance. Researchers found after talking with women entering the MSFP programs that the enrollees were looking for tangible job skills, work experience, and money to support their young children. Many, however, had an aversion to classrooms, associating remedial education with negative school experiences in their past.[13]

Although the conventional wisdom in job training today is that trainees need first to acquire the basic skills of reading and math before moving on to occupationally specific job training, the early results from the MSFP demonstration argues the opposite–that welfare reform and job training are undermined if single mothers are placed in a service in which they have no interest or motivation. In fact, in three of the MSFP demonstration sites women were placed primarily in basic skills programs and did not experience positive post-program outcomes. In one program–San Jose's Center for Employment Training (CET)–the model called for vocational training. The women in that program did quite well in terms of post-program employment and earnings relative to a comparison group.

In interpreting the results, some have argued that the data do not support the policy implications cited in press releases and research summaries, that basic skills programs don't work or do not matter. In fact, these critics argue that the MSFP demonstration may be revealing simply that the CET program had more able staff, a better service concept and a better run organization. Still another explanation goes to the sequencing

issue. It may be that vocational, hands-on training in a worksite setting is indeed the best entry-level strategy for women. But the MSFP experiment is silent on whether after the women are hooked on skills training, education can be introduced to bring their academic proficiency up to an acceptable level.[14]

In summary, researchers' interest in service designs has of late become more sophisticated. No longer content to simply compare one "silver bullet" to another, the new emerging research is digging deeper into how service delivery is organized. But this is just the beginning of a much needed greater research effort, a tradition which would truly be useful to help the process of program implementation. More studies are needed and special efforts will have to be devoted to translating such research findings into usable formats for busy program managers.

Targeting and Recruitment

Even under the best of circumstances, recruitment of young people into youth programs is no easy task. Typically, youth programs seek youngsters who are motivated and/or who have been screened or referred by other agencies. But, sadly, many social programs compete with one another for funds, as well as for clients, and as a result they may not cooperate on recruitment. In other instances, the agencies simply do not know whom to call in other agencies for referrals and information about particular clients. This is especially true when community groups try to get information about potential clients from the schools. Moreover, agencies have few resources to devote to the administrative functions of outreach and recruitment. These tasks are frequently carried out by the least experienced of program staff (who start their careers placed in the "front-line") and by those who may be poorly paid. The result of all this can be detrimental in the long-run. Once a program "blows" its reputation in the

community, it might take years to regain the confidence of potential young clients.

If recruitment is not an easy process normally, consider the special case of programs funded primarily by federal dollars. In the previous section, we described one dimension of this issue, the "creaming" phenomenon. We noted the pressures placed on youth programs by external funders, especially programs funded under the Jobs Training Partnership Act. The results often lead to client selection processes that run contrary to the good intentions of Congressional planners. For example, in JTPA, Congress may have had in mind a program that serves the economically disadvantaged but because of the way that fixed-unit-price contracting works, along with performance standards that encourage quick turnaround job placements, the programs tend to serve the most able of the poor rather than the poorest and least able segments.

Although this phenomenon has been described in general terms in the policy research literature, there is surprisingly little research on how creaming actually manifests itself through the generic functions of outreach, eligibility selection, other selection processes, assessment, intake, contracting, and service delivery.[15]

A closely related theme about targeting that has received little attention in the research community concerns a guarded, inside secret that advocates, in particular, do not like to talk about: underfunded American youth programs rarely have long waiting lines. In most parts of the country, administrators can not get enough young people to fill the programs. Advocates speak of the fact that JTPA is funded at a level only large enough to serve but five percent of the eligible population. This is certainly true but it leaves the impression that the process of targeting is so developed that long lists of eligible, willing program participants are available. This is not the case, yet little research has been conducted on

why youth programs have difficulty recruiting young people. Is it the reputation of the programs, the availability of alternative opportunities in the community, the requirements of the programs, or perhaps the inadequacy of outreach techniques?

Without better research on these phenomena, policymakers, quite understandably, are faced with a limited number of choices: cut programs until there is more demand for program services, force people into programs through Learnfare and Workfare schemes, or force unwilling program participants to stay in the programs when retention isn't doing anyone any good.

These themes are developed in a fascinating little paper by Max Elsman, "Frankie and His Friends: An Adventure in Social Marketing," (1989) prepared for MDRC, the well-respected think tank in New York. Elsman attacks youth program planners for virtually ignoring the targeting and marketing challenge. He argues that

> at its simplest, marketing is concerned with only a single question, "What does this person want and what is he or she willing to do in exchange for it?" Only the "customer," not the "seller," can answer this question. Consciously or not, the customer will base the answer on two considerations:
> (1) Price: The time, trouble and expense of acquiring a product or service; and
> (2) Value: The customer's perception of whether it is worth the price.

Repeating some of the themes of this paper, Elsman says these concepts are commonplace in the private sector but in social services they are as foreign as "Sanskrit." He then goes on to describe how youth programs concentrate on the "needs" of clients rather than to their "desires" when shaping program designs. He suggests that program managers should spend more time doing market research, that is, talking

with potential customers to discover what they want and are willing to do to get it.

After interviewing Frankie and some of his friends, Elsman concludes with some customer-centered implications for reaching young people, including:

- Sequencing services so clients get what they want when they want it. Educational services, for example, are a hard sell for newly enrolled older youth, so Elsman calls for work experience and income-generating activities in the early stages of program participation. This recommendation is echoed in the previously cited Rockefeller Foundation report, the "Minority Single Female Parent Demonstration."

- Focusing not so much on jobs or income but on what these assets can buy, such as an apartment or the ability to "get Mom out of the projects." Some programs have responded to this challenge by offering a variety of financial incentives for participants, but again, little is known from careful studies about the efficacy of these initiatives.[16]

Most research on targeting has asked what services work best for various target groups. This research is not so much concerned with targeting as it is with program designs for various groups. A good example of this latter tradition is the ongoing evaluation by MDRC of the multi-site Jobstart demonstration for young high school dropouts reading below the eighth grade level. The Jobstart model tests various "service mix" combinations including basic skills instruction, occupational skills training, job placement assistance, and individually tailored support services within a non-residential JTPA framework. When the final impact study is produced,

the field will have a better sense than ever before on the right mix of services for the most disadvantaged group of youth, school dropouts.

Meanwhile, the MDRC researchers have been busy monitoring the implementation of the Jobstart demonstration. The early reports from MDRC show that many sites faced substantial challenges in successfully recruiting and enrolling dropouts.[17] The sites that had carefully crafted recruitment strategies in place in advance were generally able to meet the challenge. Similarly, sites that tailored their services to the special needs and interests of customers appeared to do better with respect to recruitment. These results certainly confirm the premise of the present paper that management factors often overlooked by researchers, policymakers and funders, are central to youth program successes.

Among some of the other findings of interest on recruitment from the Jobstart evaluation are these:

- Programs cannot rely on walk-ins but must aggressively recruit youths. This supports Elsman's point on the importance of making recruitment a full-time "service" function.

- Some groups, such as young men, are harder to recruit than others. This finding is symptomatic of the general "feminization" of youth programs that has occurred over the last decade. Many people are working on solutions to this problem, but most of the attention is concentrated on changing program designs (e.g., devising mentoring efforts with community role models, locating programs where young males live, such as housing projects, or establishing "all male minority" high schools) rather than on changing recruitment and outreach practices.

This leads to another aspect of recruitment and targeting that has been incompletely studied by the research community–the take-up question. How many youth will step forward and take advantage of a youth program opportunity? This simple question is not so easily answered by conventional means and yet it is central to the social marketing and targeting challenge.

Nearly every youth program is able to report enrollments, and many (but not all) can report from their management information systems (MIS) how many youth persist through the programs. This information is, of course, limited since it does not involve a comparison to what would have happened with enrollments in the absence of the programs.

In social experiments with random assignment, or quasi-experiments with contrived comparison groups, we are able to go further. Through the use of comparison or randomly assigned control groups, the researchers can look at enrollments in comparative terms. For example, an evaluator might be able to report that, on average, a demonstration enrolled, say, 72 youth of the 100 originally assigned to the treatment group but ten percent of the 72 were no-shows, compared to a 55 percent participation rate in alternative ("life as usual") programs among control or comparison group members.

Does this mean that the program raised the share of participants from 55 to 65 percent (the experimental rate minus the no-shows)? Unfortunately, even random assignment is no guarantee that the "take-up" issue can be answered satisfactorily. Consider how such studies are conducted. Typically, evaluators ask programs to over-recruit and then they randomly assign from this pool of equally motivated program seekers. But if everyone in the pool is a volunteer program seeker, then the take-up issue has not been properly addressed. The procedure leaves out

unmotivated people–just the kinds of people whom programs should want to target under the proper circumstances.

To study "take-up" in and of itself, a different kind of experiment has to be conducted, an experiment in which the evaluators identify through random means a list of individuals and then give the list to program operators and say, "here is your list of eligibles . . . some may be interested in your product, others, like Frankie above, may have no interest. Some may be perfectly suitable for the program and others may have overwhelming barriers . . . Try to recruit as many as possible into your program . . ."

In fact, this kind of experiment is underway at Brandeis University's Heller Graduate School with support from the Ford Foundation. The five-city Quantum Opportunities Project (QOP) tests a comprehensive youth initiative for very poor eighth graders. Each project is run by the community-based organization, OIC, and each involves a mix of services delivered after-school and in the summer starting in ninth grade and continuing through high school graduation. Students are given special financial incentives for participating, including small stipends and an accrual system of payments. For every 100 hours of education, development, or service activities completed, funds are earmarked by formula for college or post-secondary training.

Each of the five QOP sites was given 25 names, chosen at random, of in-school neighborhood eighth graders from families receiving AFDC. The research results, to date, have confirmed what the public management and program implementation literature predicts: *the varying success of the programs in recruiting youngsters has more to do with the quality of the staff, the availability of an effective service concept, and mundane management considerations than the nature of poverty in the community, the characteristics of the children, the service design or other "external" variables.*

The QOP sites—Philadelphia, Oklahoma City, San Antonio, Saginaw and Milwaukee—used various recruitment techniques to interest young people from lists of 25 "potentials" in each site. They tried the "personal touch," for example, going to potential clients' homes, taking walks with them or visiting churches. They used former participants to recruit new ones, and they used "street work" by visiting the "potentials" where they played in parks and school yards. They sent notices home, pulled kids out of classes, read names over loudspeakers (this didn't work well . . . the young teens felt they were in trouble and ignored the announcement) and the staff held special orientation meetings. One staffer nearly caught pneumonia knocking on doors of a housing project to reach homes that did not have phones.[18] The varying results of all this frantic activity are shown in the following figure:

FIGURE 2

TAKE-UP AMONG POOR EIGHTH GRADERS IN THE QUANTUM OPPORTUNITIES PROJECT

SITE	Number Active, out of 25 Potential per Site	
	In First Two Months	**In First Six Months**
Oklahoma City	17	10
Milwaukee	8	1
San Antonio	23	23
Saginaw	22	21
Philadelphia	24	17
Total	94 (or 75%) of 125 potential	72 (or 58%) of potential

It would be helpful if we could say with certainty which recruitment (and retention) strategies worked better than others in each of the sites. More research is needed to answer this question with certainty.[19] Our implementation analysis of QOP, however, indicates that the "glue" that holds the entire strategy together is the skill, motivation and capacity of program staff. Our findings show that the level of agency commitment to QOP, the experience of front-line staff, the freedom of the staff, and the agency's "service" culture are often more important in explaining the results in Figure 2 than the characteristics of the cities or the qualifications of the youth.

Surprisingly little attention has been devoted to the role of staff in human resource programs. Although an occasional reference is made to this element in the service framework, the personnel function has not received the kind of attention it deserves.[20] We take this factor up in a separate section. But first we consider the importance of a "service concept" in youth programs.

The Service Concept

The private sector is consumed by the notion of a service concept. Organizations voluntarily undergo rigorous self-examination to determine their appropriate niche in the marketplace, to gauge and fine-tune their philosophy, and to establish their unique approach to their product and customer base. If they cannot readily discover and differentiate their own service concept from that of their competitors, they hire consultants to help them. The popular management literature is swamped with instructions and examples to help private sector managers make these choices.

Social programs also develop reputations, shaped by their philosophical principles and the way they approach the training enterprise of which they are part. Sometimes the service concept of a local youth program takes hold in the community, and potential customers are able to articulate the philosophy of the program. More often, though, the service concept is a closely held secret known only to clients who move quickly through the program.

Programs use many techniques to reinforce their service concepts. The service delivery system itself is the starting place: a heavy dose of self-paced individualized instruction says one thing about a program's service concept whereas a series of experiential group and empowerment activities sends another message.[21] Often the "little things" reinforce the concept, such as the style of counseling used, or the wearing of special uniforms, the paying of stipends, or even the physical layout of the programs.

The program evaluation literature mentions these elements in footnotes, brief paragraphs or passing references. We hear of the importance of the voluntary marching cadet corps within Job Corps, but it doesn't attract much attention. Evaluations of the Jobs for America's Graduates and 70001 LTD youth programs mention the "bonding" exercises (such as recognition dinners and alumni meetings), which help instill the service concept within those organizations, but these elements are not studied in and of themselves.

Occasionally, the service concept itself becomes indistinguishable from the service delivery system. Consider, for example, the California Conservation Corps' approach to training. The CCC style of training has been described as "tough love" or boot camp with a heart. Indeed, the entire American community service movement may be characterized in service concept terms. These programs are defined by their service concept: returning something to the community, learning the skills of

democratic decision-making, citizenship. In the constellation of youth programs, however, this is the exception rather than the rule. Generally, the service concept is not well articulated and only incidentally integrated into the service delivery system.

The national youth program, Career Beginnings, illustrates some of the complexities faced by youth programs that set out to develop thoughtful service concepts. Begun in 1986 with support from a group of prestigious national foundations, the program operates in more than 20 cities with a national office at Brandeis University. The program in the field was initially labeled a "mentoring" program and soon gained prominence and a leadership role in the burgeoning field of mentoring programs for disadvantaged youth. The "hook" of mentoring was a useful one, at first, since it was easier to understand, and express, than more complicated labels, such as "comprehensive education and employability" program. Quietly, however, the staff of the program have grappled with the pros and cons of this service concept construct.

The Career Beginnings service design was simple enough. Local colleges would be recruited to operate the program in their communities. Staff would select one or more high schools to identify a group of approximately 100 "tenacious" high school juniors–those with average grades, who were not at risk of dropping out but who were not college bound. The students would receive a set of services, including the mentoring services (an adult mentor recruited from the community, college, or business community would be matched to a young person and be expected to meet at least monthly), academic skill improvement, higher education awareness programming (such as SAT preparation courses), and career planning. Summer jobs, support services and case management were other elements of the service design.

From the beginning, staff attention was focused on managing the development of a consistent, stable service concept for Career Beginnings. Some of the elements in this story are reviewed below:

The principal funder, the Commonwealth Fund, helped stimulate the growth of Career Beginnings based partially on the exciting potential of mentoring and similar voluntary efforts across the United States. The foundation was attracted to the idea of the extensive use of voluntary mentors to assist and guide disadvantaged youth. While respectful of professionally run local youth programs, the national funder sought a laboratory to gain a better understanding of the many complex ideas associated with running a mentoring program of volunteers.

The national program office staff, however, was doubtful from the start whether *mentoring*, in and of itself, was a sufficient program element. Familiar with youth program research that argued that comprehensive programs were more likely to work than single service efforts, the national staff helped to design a model that included many elements, from summer jobs to college planning. Moreover, the staff was fearful of the penchant in America for "silver bullet" approaches to social programming. Largely for public relations and development purposes, however, in the early days of the program, staff embraced the mentoring service concept. Over time, staff learned that mentoring was indeed a powerful and often effective force in the arsenal of tools available to help poor youngsters. But the "tag" of mentoring proved, as expected, to be a mixed blessing. It certainly brought much needed national attention and external financial support, but at the same time, the original fears of the staff were reinforced when hundreds of new mentoring programs developed across the United States without the professional infrastructures in place to sustain them. Not wishing to be painted with the same broad strokes, the national staff of Career Beginnings carefully tried to distance themselves from these vulnerable, "here-today-gone-tomorrow" mentoring programs.[22]

Other complexities further confused service concept development: Career Beginnings was run by colleges and, naturally, put a heavy emphasis on attendance in post-secondary educational institutions after high school. But the program staff could not fully embrace the *school-to-school* service concept because a minority of the youth enrolled in Career Beginnings were not interested in or ready for college and were instead interested in a *school-to-work program.* Moreover, staff and the program's board were sensitive to charges that a program that designated itself "school-to-school," was somehow engaged in "social engineering," telling young people what to do rather than allowing them to make their own informed choices. Was Career Beginnings a college-bound or work-bound program? Staff argued that both purposes applied but for every pronouncement of that fact, more confusion among funders, advisors and friends of the program reigned.

Career Beginnings set out as a *partnership* effort, involving business people as mentors, community groups, public school educators, and college staff. The staff toyed on and off with the idea of marketing the program as a business-school partnership but that designation never seemed to take hold because the real partnership in Career Beginnings was broader than the bilateral one typical of most partnerships.

Another piece in the service concept story concerned how local colleges and universities–the entities charged with running Career Beginnings–perceived the programs and positioned them within their institutions of higher education and the local communities. For some of these players, Career Beginnings was merely one member of a family of externally funded programs, such as the federal TRIO programs including Upward Bound. The program staff was told, by some of the project directors, "look, all of these programs are efforts that provide help to kids who have unrealized college potential. If the funders, Brandeis and others, want to call them mentoring programs, or 'school-to-school' initiatives or

business-school partnerships or whatever, that is ok with us." After the national meetings, retreats, conferences, and technical assistance sessions, the sites that wanted to could go back and position the programs in any way they wanted.[23]

Other questions surfaced in the first few years of implementation: Was Career Beginnings an ongoing national program with local chapters or a foundation-sponsored multi-site, time-limited research effort? If the latter, then a "knowledge development" agenda should be attached to the service concept, but if the former, a pure action-oriented service concept would be most appropriate. Was Career Beginnings primarily about helping young people through direct service or was it an institutional change initiative involving reform of the schools? Was the program established to reform school counseling practices and to bring new players, such as college staff and mentor volunteers into the high schools, or was the program simply to get as many kids to graduate and go on to college as possible? And if the project was defined as a school reform initiative was it a partnership with the schools, or was the proper service concept what the physician chair of the Career Beginnings board of advisors called, "a school bypass" operation? Finally, perhaps Career Beginnings wasn't about reforming secondary education at all. Maybe the appropriate service concept was to reform the colleges that ran the programs.

Career Beginnings has resolved many of the issues about its basic identity or, to use Heskett's term, service vision. The journey of self-examination has taken four years and although every question has not been settled, progress in developing a coherent service concept is evident. One conclusion from this case study is that if the process has been a challenging one for Career Beginnings, a national initiative with talented financial supporters, a skillful advisory board, and professional staff with years of experience in research and practice, then the process of developing a service concept in a local initiative, without the benefit of

national resources, must be considerable and time consuming. We know of little research on this aspect of youth program implementation and believe that the field would benefit if more case studies and analyses were developed.[24]

Operating Strategy: Focus on Leadership and Staffing

If the newspapers and certain politicians are right, people in the United States believe government and non-profit organizations are poorly run and ineffective. What sets American taxpayers off on a tirade is how they perceive their tax dollars are spent on programs for the underprivileged. Unfortunately, the old saying about smoke and fire is true–some public programs for the disadvantaged are not efficient or effective. Whether the ratio of effective to ineffective programs is the same, smaller or larger than in the private sector matters little. The perception is that second-chance programs don't work very well and the perception is what matters.

A recent expose in *Readers Digest* of the Job Training Partnership Act programs is the latest example of the American public's fascination with incompetence.[25] The large national system of second-chance youth programs is comprised of programs, *Digest* readers are told, which are funded for 75 youth but enroll only 12. Summer jobs programs are said to fail to teach skills or provide real work opportunities. Service delivery areas are cited which, because of inexperience or incompetence, can't even spend the 40 percent of federal dollars required for youth. The Department of Labor's Inspector General charges New Orleans with mismanagement. The result, according to the IG, is "wasteful spending and program abuse" totaling $6.4 million in 1986 and 1987. An administrative SWAT team appointed by the Governor invades, without advance notice, a

Texas community's job training office to stop fraud and waste. The public questions what is happening.

There are many facets to an operating strategy: the components correspond to the major functions of operations, management and strategic planning controls. Rather than discussing all these functions, we focus instead on one central element in the management of youth programs–staff. Our interest in staffing rests on the rather commonplace observation that effective staff development leads to better program performance. It is also the factor that the public thinks about first when faced with *Readers Digest* stories.

Our primary theme is that the staffing function in service organizations accounts for program performance far more than has been acknowledged by evaluators, policymakers, planners and funders. Staffing is the kind of variable given "lip service" in youth program literature, but human resource upgrading, or training the nation's trainers, rarely appears high on anyone's list of policy implications and program improvements. Attention in reform efforts continues to be riveted on program design issues, largely ignoring the people who make the designs work or fail. All the while, the challenges faced by practitioners are growing, not only in terms of the multiple problems of "at-risk" youth but also in dealing with the funding environment, meeting rules and regulations, coping with deteriorating physical infrastructures and so on.[26]

The challenges facing youth program staffers are greater than ever before. In surveys with hundreds of youth program staffers since 1977, the staffers report more problems and more stress related to their inability to find workable solutions now than ever before.[27] Good personnel are also getting harder to find and retain, especially those who are interested in and committed to working with at-risk youth.

None of this is surprising when one considers the lack of professional standards for most frontline "counselor/trainer" jobs in youth agencies. Except for a generic college degree (not even always required), staff are typically not required to have significant professional counseling or teaching experience with at-risk youth prior to being hired. Many staff, in fact, are former clients of the same agencies. This is not necessarily a bad thing; youth programs, like other neighborhood initiatives, have provided an important route out of poverty for many clients and staff. The problem is that the field has never engaged in a serious discussion of what the prerequisite qualifications of youth workers should be. To what extent, for example, should "community qualifications" (same background, ethnicity, neighborhood as clients) serve as a substitute for formal, credentialed backgrounds? How often are these in conflict, where, why, when? What qualifications, in fact, do youth workers need?[28]

Nor are staff given the specialized training they need prior to or during their employment. According to the 1990 Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) review of youth programs, "finding and keeping appropriate staff and, to a lesser degree, providing them with the training to do their jobs, are problems facing most of the programs we reviewed."[29]

A closely related problem relates to the "project" mentality in most youth programs. Youth programs typically are funded on the basis of short-term project grants. This is not only the case in national demonstrations but also in the field at large, since the funding stream for second-chance programs almost never allows for "forward" long-term, stable funding.

Funders rarely allow enough time for preparation before a project begins. Program directors complain that funders expect services to begin as soon as a grant is made. Sponsors "forget" that staff needs to be hired, oriented, and trained in the service concept, targeting provisions, operating

system and so on. Program managers feel pressure to "hit the ground running" at the expense of staff preparation and, ultimately, quality service to clients. Chronic underfunding and cash flow problems exacerbate this cycle; senior staff must pursue more projects and "soft money" opportunities, leading further to the deterioration of staff functioning and morale.

The results of this self-defeating process spill over into some of the other functions of service organizations described in this paper. Consider the development of a service concept. It takes time, teamwork, and consensus to develop a vision that can shape and guide youth programs. With little teamwork among staff, functions fragmented, everyone too busy to take the time to assess client progress and program "culture," a service concept is difficult to take hold.

Compared to the private sector, human resource issues in the second-chance system are woefully ignored. The private sector publishes numerous journals, books, tapes; thousands of managers participate in executive seminars, graduate training programs and other upgrading forums. Consider, for example, Burger King: this corporation—one of the largest employers of disadvantaged youth—requires prospective franchise managers to attend an 80-hour program before they are even offered a franchise, and then the owners are required to attend a ten-day intensive course on the technical aspects of the business. In addition, training, technical assistance, and strong quality control are regularly provided by Burger King. According to a New Jersey franchise owner, employee retention is a major problem, and because "these are the teenagers' first jobs and you have to really relate to them . . . I recently took a course on counseling teenagers so I could do this better."[30] This Burger King manager might have had more training in counseling teens than the average not-for-profit youth worker.

In contrast, the second-chance system—a loose constellation of programs funded at the federal level at approximately two billion dollars a year—has only a handful of organizations that are concerned with human resource issues in the second-chance system.[31] For example, there are perhaps three national organizations that "train" service managers involved with JTPA programs, a few dozen or so consultants who make their living helping managers, and less than a dozen nationally focused attorneys who have devoted their practice to assisting JTPA personnel with legal issues.[32]

We are not arguing that staff training alone would or could automatically repair all of the problems mentioned in this section. We recognize that public policy creates many of the conditions that local staff must confront. But professional development *is* a factor that in this field has not received the kind of attention it deserves.

What skills do youth workers need? In some respects, youth workers need the skills that all professionals in the service sector must possess. As far back as 1956, Robert Katz, writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, described the skill requirements of modern managers as (1) technical skills, (2) human skills, and (3) conceptual skills. In his schema, each of these skills is interrelated, yet each needs to be fully developed in order to integrate them into an effective pattern of supervision.[33]

In the case of youth programs, technical skills encompass education and training techniques, curriculum development, organizing group activities, counseling, job development, and the like. Technical skills may be taught in formal education programs but they must be reinforced and learned on the job as well. Many people working in youth agencies are hired without having their technical skills assessed or screened before they begin working. In the Career Beginnings program, the national office discovered that one of the colleges operating the program hired a project

coordinator who had never managed anything before, had not worked with youth in an educational setting, and was not comfortable with working with senior level college administrators–all major requirements of the job. Unfortunately, this kind of ad-hoc hiring may be fairly common in second-chance programs.

Human skills, or having an understanding of human nature and good communications abilities, are critical when working with young people. Youth programs typically attract people who want to be part of the helping professions, but this is no guarantee that these individuals will make effective youth workers. In fact, the self-selection of workers to jobs is often used as an excuse not to engage in systematic enhancement of human skills. Today's youth programs are terribly complicated. A program that is serving, for example, new arrivals from Asia or Central America, needs staff who possesses special cross-cultural sensitivities in addition to "hard" technical skills. Some of these skills are in the realm of common sense, but experience has revealed that these skills should not be "winged" and can, indeed, be taught in formal training sessions.[34]

Conceptual skills round out the critical requirements for managers of successful youth programs. In running under-capitalized and under-staffed youth programs, practitioners must juggle a number of tasks at the same time. They must have the ability to see the overall program–the forest–while working among the trees. Another classic concept, this time from Renis Likert, involves the idea of a "linking-pin" and the kind of high-performance thinking youth program managers must engage in to be successful.[35] In Likert's theory, the manager is the link, or channel of communications between the people he/she supervises and the people he/she reports to. What makes it a key concept for youth program management is that the manager and staff must be seen as valued members of *each* constituency they work with (clients and colleagues) in order to have any real impact on the behavior, attitudes and decisions

within each group. The "linking pin" is symbolic of the higher-order skills that all youth workers and supervisors should possess. In youth programs, the development of these higher-order skills will occur only to the extent that the field takes the training enterprise seriously for itself as well as for its clients.

In pursuit of this agenda, youth work professionals would benefit from exposure to the new research literature on public management, a school of research that reinforces the absolute centrality of effective leadership. Forsaking studies of public management disasters, the new literature offers case studies of successful, innovative practice in the public and not-for-profit sectors. In "Move Over, Policy Analysis; It's Management That Counts," Levin and Sanger (1991), for example, review their research on 25 diverse and successful innovations:[36]

> innovation rarely springs from analysis of all the options, although that is the approach of the policy analysis whose thinking dominates so many of our schools of government and public administration . . . To the contrary, we found that management matters most. Innovative success most often results from a sequence of steps that Robert D. Behn of Duke University has described as "Ready, Fire, Aim." First, what appears to be a good idea is implemented. Then it is evaluated by observation in the field. Then, corrected and refined. This is the messy and imperfect process, repeated over and over, that produces effective management and successful program development . . .
>
> Furthermore, we found that innovation is not the sole domain of charismatic leaders. The message is that the skills and approaches necessary to launch innovative initiatives can be taught and learned. Some innovators may be born that way, but others can be trained . . .[37]

Conclusion

William James' often cited remark that "success is calculated by dividing one's achievements by one's expectations" seems appropriate here. We began with a modest goal and a straightforward thesis. Looking at some of the applied contemporary research on youth programs, we conclude with disappointment that more research has not focused on issues of importance to youth program managers. The field has meager data of a kind useful to smooth out the messy process of program implementation. After laying out a framework to describe the modern youth program, we described what is known and, more often, unknown about the elements of youth-serving organizations.

Why care about the knowledge development agenda for youth programs? Simply put, we believe that knowledge development is a prerequisite stage in the professionalization of youth services. While some would deride this phase of development, lamenting the passing of "youth work," when services were not balkanized and empathetic street workers served the "whole" child, we believe that the field cannot turn back, any more than school teachers in the "first chance" system can return to the little red schoolhouse or nurses can turn back to the days of Florence Nightingale. We believe that knowledge is indispensable to the development of a professional cadre of competent youth workers committed to helping vulnerable youth.

Unless the youth development field matures and organizes itself, much as public education and health care have done (some would say "half-done"), youth programs in the American context will remain marginal enterprises run by people eking out a modest living on the periphery of social policy. Second-chance youth managers will habitually be forced to improvise management practices in an unstable funding and policy

environment. A little knowledge will not solve these problems but it can serve as the basis for empowering workers, for setting standards, and for stabilizing the field. We have no illusions about the power of rational information but this is how it has generally worked in allied fields and there is no reason to be more cynical about the uses of research in youth development than in health care or public education.

The message of this paper has largely eluded the youth development field: although there is room for optimism, many of the mistakes of the past have been re-invented in new forms. In 1988, community service was the fashion, in 1989 it was mentoring, in 1990 it was apprenticeship, and soon another fad in youth programs will likely emerge. When will we learn that running these "silver bullet" innovations is just plain *hard*? When will we develop research sensitive to their local implementation? When we learn that the field cannot absorb new ideas until it is staffed and managed in a professional, competent manner–only then will the training enterprise in the United States be taken seriously by both the public and the clients who need to benefit from it.

Funders of research from the independent sector as well as government might consider the following suggestions for bringing research closer to field practice:

- Work at the national level to put professional development and the "train the trainers" issue high on the national agenda.

- Encourage new research on program implementation–service concepts, targeting issues, operating strategies, service delivery, and staffing–through dissertation support, small grant programs, and focused research competitions. Support research on the role of leadership and management skills in youth program implementation; support new research on program functions, such as outreach and

recruitment techniques, methods to reduce excessive attrition in youth programs, the assignment process used to match people to available services, and the case management function.

- When funding program evaluations, place an emphasis on in-program analyses and process/implementation studies to enrich "impact" models of evaluation.

- Expand support of clearinghouses and others that attempt to translate basic and applied research into the parlance of practitioners. Although nationally focused intermediaries are needed for this translation work, regional and local organizations may prove more successful in helping to bridge research and practice. They are generally closer to the "action."

- Connect nationally focused researchers with the many urban social change initiatives emerging in local jurisdictions. All around the country, there are statewide task-forces and advocacy groups concerned with children's issues and youth development. Many of these are reviewed in the publication, *States and Communities on the Move* (1991) available from the W. T. Grant Foundation (Washington, D.C.). Much less attention has focused on local versions of these statewide campaigns although many are in progress: Memphis' Free the Children campaign; New Orleans' Children Campaign; Pinellas County's Juvenile Welfare Board projects; Kansas City's stakeholder task force on comprehensive school reform; the cities in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's New Futures projects; the Ford Foundation-supported Neighborhood and Family Initiatives; and the six cities represented by the Rockefeller Foundation's Community Planning and Action initiative, to name just a few. By connecting national researchers with ongoing projects associated with children and family

campaigns in urban areas, we help bridge the gap between research and practice, theory and management.

- Support technical assistance and in-service training of program staff. Take this issue seriously by doing needs-assessment surveys, supporting graduate education programs, and exploring new certification initiatives for both program staff and exemplary program models. Explore quality appraisal systems for programs and competency-based accreditation procedures for staff. Think about mandatory apprenticeships for youth workers and required field work for managers in training. Conduct research on youth work credentials. Help in all ways possible to smooth out wage, benefit, diversity and turnover challenges in youth programs.

- Put program managers on review committees to guide funding decisions for new research, and put managers on advisory committees associated with the research once it is underway. Encourage all researchers to undertake a "scan" of their own work to identify implications for the field.

- Our final recommendation is to expand the repertoire of skills that managers must possess. A good example is competence in using the media. Recently, a number of foundations have taken a fresh interest in the social marketing field, looking for analogies between anti-smoking campaigns or condom distribution schemes and strategies that could be used to increase positive attention to youth issues in America. The Ford and Benton Foundations, the Rockefeller Foundation's Community Planning/Action Projects, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's four-city New Futures initiative, and the MacArthur Foundation's work in Chicago, for example, have each made efforts to expose their domestic, community-based anti-poverty grantees to modern techniques of social campaigning.

These funders and others skilled in mounting information campaigns at the national level could share their expertise with the many unaffiliated youth development initiatives around the country. Well-developed and creative assistance is needed to overcome the quite formidable local opposition to funding appeals for children and youth issues, not to mention for support of programs and their staff. Urban youth workers must learn new ways to frame policy discourse, manage the flow of symbols, broker knowledge, and inform and mobilize stakeholders. This means entering the media marketplace and mastering the tools and techniques through which exchange in this marketplace is conducted.

ENDNOTES AND SOURCES

1. Many examples of these lessons are cited in my two co-authored books, *What Works in Youth Employment* with R. Lerman (National Planning Association, Washington, D.C., 1985) and *Dropouts in America: Enough is Known for Action* with J. Danzberger, (Institute for Educational Leadership, Washington, D.C., 1987).

2. An entire issue of the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (Volume 10, No. 4, 1991) is devoted to the relationship between research and family support/welfare policy. Most of the writers in the issue are bullish on the connection.

3. Henry Aaron, *Journal of Human Resources,* Volume 25, No. 3, Spring 1990.

4. For a discussion of the payoffs and limitations of this knowledge development effort see: Charles L. Betsey, Robinson G. Hollister, Jr., and Mary R. Papageorgiou, (eds.), *Youth Employment and Training Programs: The YEDPA Years,* Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1985. See also a paper for the U.S. Department of Labor, "Core Youth Employment Strategies" by Tom Smith et al., Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia, 1991.

5. Lisbeth Schorr, *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage,* Anchor Books, New York, 1988.

6. See Haveman (1987) and Nathan (1988) cited in the text. See also, Joseph Peckman and P. Michael Timpane, (eds.), *Work Incentives and Income Guarantees,* Brookings, Washington, D.C., 1975.

7. Notable writers in this tradition include Bardack (*The Implementation Game,* MIT Press, 1977); Pressman and Wildavsky (*Implementation,* University of California Press, Berkeley 1973); Lipsky (*Street Level Bureaucracy,* Russell Sage Foundation, NYC, 1978); Ellmore ("Backward Mapping: Implementation, Research and Policy Decisions", *Political Science Quarterly,* Volume 94, 1980, pp 601-616.); and, more recently, (Robert Behn, The Management of ET CHOICES in Massachusetts. Duke University Institute of Policy Sciences and Public Affairs, 1989, Durham, N.C.), writing about the Massachusetts ET welfare program.

Martin Levin and Barbara Ferman's 1985 book, *The Political Hand: Policy Implementation and Youth Employment Programs,* (Pergamon, New York) is a good example of the public management research tradition. Their book is also a rare example of the public management tradition

applied to second-chance youth programs. The authors examine nine case studies from the YEDPA era of youth programs by applying a political science perspective to understand the programs' unfolding. They introduce two concepts relating to the role of leadership: "fixers" are individuals who "repair" and help make adjustments in the normally messy implementation game while "double agents" are persons who are capable of securing joint action and collaborative arrangements to help a program succeed. Both forms of leadership are necessary, the authors argue, to compensate for the lack of a market mechanism in the public arena, something akin to the "invisible hand" in the economy. In other words, policy implementation requires special leadership to adjust for the public sector's missing "political hand" of adjustment and regulation.

8. There are many examples of this occurring. The Follow-Through and Head Start Planned Variations studies, for example, were attempts to study a family of related "models." When the results of these studies became available, the researchers discovered large variations in the way the models were implemented, so much so that it was difficult to remember what the planned variation was supposed to resemble in the first place (see A. Rivlin and M. Timpane, *Planned Variation in Education,* The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1975). Another source on this theme is E. Farrar et al., "The Lawn Party: The Evolution of Federal Programs in Local Settings," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Volume 62, 1980.

Consider the special case of evaluations of mentoring programs. In MDRC's evaluation of the national Career Beginnings program, the researchers focused on net differences between experimental and control group members on post-program outcomes such as college attendance. Site differences among the seven programs represented in the sample were large, ranging from excellent results in some sites to marginal and even negative results in others.

Although MDRC did examine and write-up the separate site differences with available survey data, their evaluation project was limited to an "impact analysis" and was not designed to include enough "process" information to explore site differences as systematically as they may have liked. (*Career Beginnings Impact Evaluation,* George Cave and Janet Quint, MDRC, NYC, October 1990.)

Another example is the unpublished evaluation of Baltimore's RAISE mentoring program, by James McPartland and Saundra Nettles. In a forthcoming article, "Evaluation of Baltimore's RAISE Mentoring Program," *American Journal of Education,* the authors describe how only three out of seven sites account for the overall positive results.

9. Our group at Brandeis has surveyed practitioners involved in federally funded JTPA youth programs (and CETA before it) for over a decade. The litany of complaints voiced by youth program managers has remained remarkably stable.

10. See *Working Capital*, a national commission report for the U.S. Department of Labor on reforms within JTPA for a good review of the issues (Washington, D.C., 1990).

11. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy,* Basic Books, New York, 1984.

12. Hahn and Lerman, *What Works in Youth Employment,* National Planning Association, Washington, D.C., 1985.

13. *Minority Female Single Parent Demonstration: Short Term Economic Impacts,* Ann Gordon and John Burghardt, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., Princeton, NJ, March 1990.

14. Another demonstration–Jobstart–looks at this issue in a different manner by comparing concurrent versus sequential programs for young dropouts. Final comparative results for the post-program period are not yet available, although early results point to some of the same motivational issues (as in MSFP) for dropouts enrolled in sequential programs. The MDRC researchers write in their first implementation report of Jobstart that "the greatest challenge for sequential programs are to motivate youths during the education phase (when a job may seem quite distant) . . ." *Implementing Jobstart,* MDRC, NY, June, 1989, p. xxvii.

15. The principal author is familiar with only one *large scale national* study of JTPA "creaming"–the National Commission for Employment Policy's 1988 study, "Who is Served by JTPA Programs? Patterns of Participation and Intergroup Equity" (Washington, D.C). That study, which looked at all titles of JTPA, suggested that before charges of creaming are leveled at the program, the interests and motivations of potential participants must be examined. Approximately 39 million people are eligible for JTPA including 31 million persons between the ages of 16 and 64. However, all but ten percent of this group are either already employed or are not actively seeking jobs. The authors, Kalman Rupp and Steven Sandell, argue that these people are unlikely to be interested in training and thus not serving them (presumably through "creaming") may not be inequitable. The study does not look at the kinds of administrative factors that surround the creaming phenomenon.

In a study by SRI International, *Improving the Quality of Training Under JTPA* (K. Dickinson et al., SRI, January 1990), the authors report that Service Delivery Areas (SDAs) often do not target at all, except in broad terms, such as earmarking services for "at-risk" youth. In terms of outreach and recruiting, most agencies rely on networking with other agencies rather than self-directed outreach.

16. Financial incentives are addressed in a small number of studies. A P/PV report, *Practitioner's View* (Philadelphia, Spring 1990) addresses the issue of financial incentives but doesn't report rigorous findings on the

subject. The Government Accounting Office recently completed a review of high school-based financial assistance programs, such as the Boston ACCESS program and Eugene Lang's "I've Got a Dream" project. The GAO reports that pledging tuition assistance is a promising practice but, again, the evidence provided is qualitative and has not been subjected to formal evaluation techniques (cited in the *Employment and Training Reporter,* 1991).

17. See *Implementing Jobstart,* MDRC, NY, June 1989. Additional evidence on this theme is found in a P/PV report based on program managers' viewpoints. The latter study revealed that, "most of the program staff interviewed for this study told us that recruiting and enrolling seriously disadvantaged youth is one of their biggest challenges. All agreed that the key attraction for poor youth is immediate income, either a job or some type of stipend or allowance during training" (*Practitioner's View,* 1990).

18. "The Quantum Opportunities Project–Interim Research Report," prepared for Ford Foundation, 1991, Andrew Hahn, Brandeis University.

19. P/PV's report, *Youth Motivation: At-Risk Youth Talk To Program Planners* (Philadelphia, 1988) mentions seven recruitment (and retention) strategies commonly used by youth programs: monetary incentives, support services, job guarantees, group support, recognition opportunities, trips, and case management efforts. Each of these strategies was employed in QOP, along with others. A few studies are beginning to look systematically at recruitment strategies. Brandeis' QOP study and MDRC's Jobstart examine the issue. Another study by 70001 of its "Disconnected Youth Project" for dropouts compares "direct contact" to other techniques and finds that for Black males in particular, direct outreach was highly effective, generating "40 percent of all inquiries about the programs." Streamlined assessment and enrollment procedures were also found to be helpful. (cited in "Model Youth Programs in the 1980s: Four National Projects" by Deborah Feldman in *Forum: Evaluation,* Issue Four, Hansville, Washington, 1988).

20. P/PV's *Youth Motivation: At-Risk Youth Talk to Program Planners* (Philadelphia, 1988) supports our contention that staff is a key variable in thinking about recruitment and retention. The results of 16 focus group sessions found that program persisters and attriters alike placed a lot of weight on a supportive relationship with a teacher or supervisor and a sense of team spirit within a classroom setting. These are the "intangibles" that are generally overlooked by formal scientific research designs.

21. An interesting comparison in this regard is the US BASICS network of computer-assisted learning labs, with their stress on individualization and self-paced learning, and comprehensive programs such as the DOOR in New York City which espouses that, "only a comprehensive, integrative

approach, involving the whole of young person's needs and circumstances, can be effective in working with inner-city youth . . . At the DOOR, we start with the premise that these kids need a sense of belonging very bit as much as they need adequate nutrition . . ." (quoted in Ford Foundation, *Letter,* Volume 21, No. 3, Fall/Winter 1990). Both approaches are right; both are distinct service concepts.

22. The Career Beginnings evaluation by MDRC (1990) found that "having a mentor other than a relative or friend" was a predictor of post-program college-going but other variables were better predictors, such as "taking mostly college preparatory courses," workshops to prepare for college entrance exams, and attending college fairs.

23. Although Career Beginnings had little financial leverage over the demonstration sites in the first years and none in the later years, the program did have standards that sites were expected to meet if they wanted to stay in the Career Beginnings network. The national office, however, works largely on a consensus and good-will model.

24. To the extent that national policymakers and funders seek to replicate successful practices, knowledge of how service concepts develop and take hold in local communities is essential. In other words, making the replication process work requires knowledge of service concepts. This is a point developed in P/PV's report, *Replication: A Strategy to Improve the Delivery of Education and Job Training Programs,* Philadelphia, PA, Summer 1990.

Along similar lines, we know of very few examples of program evaluations which track in sufficient detail the services received by control or comparison group members. In the Career Beginnings evaluation, the impact analysis revealed that Career Beginnings youth were attending, in the post-high school period, post-secondary educational institutions and holding down jobs in very encouraging proportions. The catch was that in some of the sites, the control group members also participated in alternative programs to a high degree and were doing quite well in the post-program experience. What role the competing service concepts played, how the high school students perceived program opportunities, the varying program philosophies—these interesting questions were not (and were not intended to be) covered in the impact analysis of Career Beginnings.

25. James Bovard, *Readers Digest* (cited in *National Journal,* April 14, 1990).

26. William Treanor, an experienced youth program manager, addresses the leadership issue in strong words in "Barriers to Developing Comprehensive and Effective Youth Services" (*W. T. Grant Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship,* Paper, September 1988, Washington, D.C.). He suggests that the youth programs that survived from the 1960s into the

present era were those that "were lead by a strong director. This person is often the founder or at least the survivor of the internecine strife that characterized the transition from a counter-cultural, anti-professional, staff-oriented agency to one focused on service standards and bureaucratic and organizational stability." (p. 5) Later on he adds (p. 23), "With distressing frequency, youth service agencies are not well-served by competent, experienced, trained staff members. Staff problems afflict both the agencies and organizations that provide funds and that provide services. The programs are often staffed by mediocre people with virtually no training or serious interest in further in-service training . . . the youth job is too often the Postmaster General slot of 1980s . . . a director who concentrates on upgrading the quality of counseling and care, in-service training and staff competence, wages and working conditions, but whose budget and staff is stable, is considered a lesser figure." (p. 28).

Later, he writes that youth workers . . . "are the underclass of the human service field." (p. 32).

27. Public/Private Ventures, *Practitioners Guide,* (Philadelphia, Spring 1990, page 38) See also a 1987 survey of human service workers in NYC, by Interface, in which it was reported that 40 percent of non-profit managers stated that recruitment and retention issues were the single most serious problem faced by their agencies (see D. Gallagher, "Short-staffed: The Personnel Crisis in NYC's Voluntary Human Service Agencies," NY, Interface, December 1987).

28. Only one national study of the second chance system has directly addressed these issues: a national assessment of personnel practices in JTPA programs, by Berkeley Planning Associates, *JTPA Staffing and Staff Training At the State and SDA Levels* (Berkeley, California, August 1990). This survey was mostly limited to state workers who manage the state JTPA programs and staff of SDA's who make local funding decisions but are not necessarily direct service providers themselves. In other words, most direct service providers were not covered in the BPA study except in some supplemental case studies. In fact, one of BPA's recommendations is to have the Department of Labor contract for a second systematic survey but this time of providers' personnel and training needs.

The case studies reveal salaries of around $22,000 and strong evidence that workers perceive a lack of advancement in the field. This is said to contribute to turnover. On the other hand, the program managers and SDA staff report that they prefer hiring more staff than in investing in training for existing staff. Chronic under-staffing looms as a larger problem for them than upgrading. In other results, the BPA authors report that managers prefer generalists to specialists but at the same time the managers admit to wanting assistance in motivating participants; choosing assessment systems; conducting fiscal reviews and meeting reporting requirements; and, conducting outreach and recruitment. These are the same issues addressed in the present paper.

29. P/PV, 1990, p. 38.

30. Richard H. DeLone, "Replication", Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia, Summer 1990.

31. This imbalance has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor. In a recent announcement in the *Federal Register* (March 1991) comments were invited for three possible initiatives: (a) certifying second-chance managers, (2) establishing some sort of national or local training entity, (3) certifying exemplary programs. The human resource issue in human resource programs may at last find a place on the national agenda.

32. Since there are few histories of the youth field, we are left to speculate about the reasons for this deficit in training opportunities for youth workers. Treanor (1988) writes that youth work, in the 1970s, failed to establish a "beachhead in higher education and was unable to develop a recognized pre-service and in-service training capacity." He believes that colleges and graduate programs did not respond because these were "low prestige" careers and offered "poor prospects for alumni giving."

33. Robert Katz, "Human Relations Skills Can Be Sharpened," *Harvard Business Review,* July-August 1956.

34. Ron Ferguson of Harvard's Kennedy School recently studied more than 25 neighborhood-based programs that addressed the developmental needs of African-American males aged 5 through 25. He wrote in "Improving the Lives of At-Risk Black Male Youth: Insights from Theory and Program Experience" (Paper, October 1990) that "one theme permeated the interviews. It was the widely and firmly shared conviction that caring relationships are the most critical requirement for program success. One person suggested that children are implicitly saying: "I don't care what you know until I know that you care."

35. Renis Likert, *New Patterns of Management,* McGraw-Hill, New York, 1971.

36. "Commentary," in *Governing,* a newsletter of Congressional Quarterly Inc., February 1991.

37. Wehlage and his colleagues in *Reducing the Risk: Schools as Communities of Support* (The Falmer Press, Philadelphia, 1989) examined 14 schools or programs for at-risk youngsters. The authors sought to discover reasons why some educational innovations were successfully able to engage at-risk youth. They described successful programs as those that centered on a "community of support," that is, that generated effort and motivation in students by fostering a belief in individual as well as group responsibility. *The authors describe how staffing and leadership are central to the development of communities of support.*

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