

# Discussion

## DISCUSSION

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# Discussion

To further explain the outcomes achieved as a result of program implementation, extensive information pertaining to both strengths and weaknesses of the NEW VISTAS program has been solicited from youths, families, and grant collaborative personnel. Such information has been utilized to formulate specific recommendations that may enhance future program implementation and ultimately improve service delivery in the juvenile justice system.

## **What Worked to Achieve Impacts: Program Components**

Successful completion of program goals was made possible by a number of key program components that fall into the following categories: (1) collaboration, (2) treatment planning, and (3) enhancement of service delivery.

### ***Collaboration***

Given the large number of partner agencies involved in NEW VISTAS, efforts to ensure that these agencies functioned collectively as an integrated network of care was essential for successful program implementation. Monthly meetings and all-day events provided opportunities for agencies in the collaborative to participate in decision making, provide feedback, and contribute to problem resolution. In addition to emphasizing the team approach to program administration, frequent meetings allowed individual agencies to inform partners of their mission, demonstrate expertise, and promote available and appropriate resources. Agencies utilized this information to avoid excessive overlap of services and appropriately compliment and reinforce the efforts of other partner agencies. By allowing partner agencies to interact and communicate within this context, working levels of trust and mutual understanding developed collaboration which better addressed the complex problems posed by clients and families.

Collaboration extended to other institutions that play a significant role in the social context of NEW VISTAS' youths and families. In particular, connections to education systems and law enforcement agencies helped to bolster intervention and supervision efforts and enhanced supportive relationships between these agencies and NEW VISTAS' clients.

In the end, persistent efforts to ensure strong collaboration resulted in a unified network of services that stood ready to provide beneficial interventions that addressed a broad range of areas (e.g., problem behaviors, mental health, family relationships) related to the functioning of NEW VISTAS' youths and families.

### ***Treatment Planning***

Efforts to implement effective assessment and treatment planning during the early stages of program involvement helped to ensure that NEW VISTAS' clients successfully capitalized on the advantages of this integrated network of care. While conducting comprehensive interviews and assessments with NEW VISTAS' clients, clinician Treatment Planners carefully attended to the personalized concerns of youths and families in order to identify service components that would most efficiently and effectively meet their needs. Bi-cultural Treatment Planners assessed language and cultural influences

**Successes of NEW VISTAS were influenced by key program components;**

- 1. collaboration,**
- 2. treatment planning,**
- 3. enhancement of service delivery.**

**Collaboration among NEW VISTAS partner agencies provided the means to address the complex challenges posed by participants.**

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that impacted client involvement in services. Treatment Planners also identified program resources aimed at addressing the unique needs, assets, and risks of girls in the juvenile justice system.

The variety of services available were tailored to fit the needs of each client resulting in a personalized and comprehensive treatment plan, not only to address current concerns but also to prevent potential declines in client functioning.

Given the clinical approach of Treatment Planners during these initial stages of program involvement, the emphasis on support, individualized service plans, and positive regard encouraged NEW VISTAS clients to quickly adopt a favorable perception of program services which helped to facilitate participation and bolster motivation. Moreover, by de-emphasizing the punitive nature of program involvement during these early stages, clients were also more likely to be up front and accurate when describing the extent and severity of their concerns (e.g., alcohol and drug use) that ultimately resulted in more effective treatment planning.

### *Enhancement of Service Delivery*

Supportive relationships with clients continued beyond the early stages of program involvement due in large part to the extensive efforts of bi-lingual and bi-cultural Family Coaches who helped to facilitate ongoing participation by monitoring progress and promoting healthy communication. Given the benefits of maintaining these strong connections, efforts to appropriately limit the case loads of Family Coaches also helped to ensure optimal levels of assistance and supervision.

Concerted efforts to involve family and neighborhood residents in intervention efforts contributed to sustained improvements and motivation in NEW VISTAS youths. Specifically, such efforts helped to address intergenerational issues and environmental factors that are often intricately related to youths' functioning. Moreover, interventions on these fronts helped to enhance social support systems that may benefit youths long after exiting the program. In particular, parent education classes in Spanish and in English were heavily integrated into treatment planning and utilization of these resources was well received. Such efforts may provide additional reinforcement of intervention efforts by soliciting support from family members and providing tools to parents to further facilitate the growth and healthy development of youths.

Evidence supporting a family-centered approach to alcohol and drug treatment may explain improved outcomes in this particular domain. The emphasis on substance abuse treatment was successful in addressing problems directly related to substance abuse and met concerns across a broad range of interrelated domains that contributed to improved outcomes overall.

With relatively smaller caseloads, the Probation Officers successfully maintained consistent supervision efforts in order to reinforce motivation and accountability for youths and families. By including Probation Officers as active members of treatment teams, more supportive and trusting relationships developed between clients and Probation

**Treatment Planners were instrumental in identifying the needs of participants and selecting NEW VISTAS services that would benefit participants.**

**Enhancement of service delivery within the juvenile probation system emphasized supportive relationships with participants.**

**Family Coaches helped to monitor progress and promote healthy communication with participants.**

**The family-focused approach to address drug and alcohol problems was a valuable strategy in the NEW VISTAS program.**

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Officers that helped families to more constructively respond to efforts to reinforce accountability.

From a practical perspective, collocation within a neighborhood-based office space in close proximity to NEW VISTAS' families helped provide easy accessibility to services and also enhanced supervision. Moreover, the provision of free services to youths and families as well as the presence of bilingual and bicultural staff at multiple levels of service extended the benefits of NEW VISTAS to those who may not otherwise have access to such services. Efforts to secure culturally appropriate male and female staff at all levels of service contributed to the overall efficacy of interventions and also increased client motivation to engage in these services. Partner agencies remained flexible in accommodating the needs of NEW VISTAS youths and families by scheduling meetings in the evenings and on weekends. Finally, open houses and public relations efforts helped to establish a positive reputation of NEW VISTAS and informed the community of available services. As a result, client willingness to engage in these services increased.

## What did Not Work: Areas of Improvement

The number of participants expected to be serviced by NEW VISTAS was not obtained due to somewhat restrictive exclusion criteria at program onset. Despite efforts to modify these criteria during program implementation to include youths in a more broad age range and geographical area, the target number was not achieved prior to program end. Moreover, referrals from gateway agencies came primarily from the Santa Barbara County Probation Department. Thus, efforts to ensure that all gateway agencies are adequately committed and willing to utilize services would maximize program efficacy and promote utilization of resources by a broader proportion of the community.

A wide range of factors such as arrests of out-of-town visitors and arrests of transient individuals which remain outside the impact of NEW VISTAS contribute to trends in arrest rates. Consequently, despite efforts to decrease the overall number of adult and juvenile criminal offenses in the targeted neighborhoods, arrest data collected by the Santa Barbara Police Department throughout the duration of NEW VISTAS did not establish clear improvement within the City of Santa Barbara.

While data examining improvement from intake to exit indicated the effectiveness of the NEW VISTAS program, data collected six months after program completion suggest small increases in some domains of problem behaviors after exiting NEW VISTAS. Since these trends may suggest a relapse of problem behaviors, efforts to bolster intervention efforts through aftercare treatment may be warranted.

Moreover, some partner agencies expressed concerns providing effective services to multiple youths and families who often differed in regard to the extent and severity of their problem areas. Thus, increased support or attention to these concerns during treatment planning may be necessary in order to alleviate the demands placed on partner agencies who must implement more diverse and flexible interventions.

**Probation Officers were active members of the NEW VISTAS treatment teams.**

**Collocation of NEW VISTAS services provided easy access, enhanced supervision, and facilitated communication among partner agencies.**

**The NEW VISTAS services did not focus on transients or out-of-town visitors, these two populations accounted for a significant portion of the crime in the community.**

**Following improvements accomplished during the NEW VISTAS program, some s exhibited increases in problem behaviors after exiting program services, thus, aftercare treatment seems warranted.**

# Discussion

## Problems Encountered

Given extensive diversity in professional approaches, cultures, and philosophies within the large number of partner agencies and community resources involved in NEW VISTAS as well as significant turnover of staff within these agencies, attempts to initially establish and maintain a coordinated system of communication and cohesive identity presented challenges during the early stages of program implementation. In particular, services of some partner agencies were misunderstood and consequently underutilized (e.g., the Community Mediation Program). Additionally, occasional difficulties in ensuring timely and systematic transfer of relevant client information among partner agencies led to complications during service delivery. Evidence suggests that such challenges had largely improved over the course of this evaluation period, and sustained efforts to facilitate interagency collaboration and information exchange are necessary in ensuring successful and efficient service delivery. As mentioned previously, frequent meetings helped to bolster improvements in this domain. However, at times, some partner agencies failed to regularly attend these meetings. Thus, efforts to enforce attendance and accountability may help strengthen collaboration and promote smooth program implementation.

A number of problems arose that may have hindered consistent program involvement. Some services offered by partner agencies overlapped and may have triggered adverse reactions between agencies and also from NEW VISTAS clients. The assignment of multiple services may run the risk of overwhelming youths and families that may manifest in poor attendance and noncompliance. Differences between time on probation and time required for the successful completion of NEW VISTAS led to the premature exit of some NEW VISTAS youths. Finally, limited options in reinforcing accountability may further exacerbate these concerns. Efforts to encourage NEW VISTAS family members, who were not on probation to comply with program requirements and accurately understand the purpose of assigned treatment interventions presented an ongoing challenge for agency personnel. To facilitate motivation and active participation in NEW VISTAS, renewed efforts to clearly inform youths and families of program procedures and also provide a rationale for treatment led to improvements in this area over time.

Given relatively restrictive enrollment criteria necessary to qualify for services, some youths who may have benefited from NEW VISTAS were denied participation. These youths and families were (1) outside the target age range, (2) resided outside the city limits, and (3) did not report drug or alcohol problems within the family.

Given varying levels of probation involvement and problem severity in NEW VISTAS clientele, some agencies encountered problems when attempting to provide services that were applicable for example, with truant youths. Additionally, providing services in a group format may also run the risk of exposing higher functioning youths to adverse influences.

The level of problem severity experienced by a large proportion of families was higher than initially expected and forced budget reallocation to psychotherapy sources in order to accommodate increased demand.

**The diversity and turnover of the numerous professionals associated with the partner agencies presented challenges in implementing the NEW VISTAS program.**

**Some youths completed the duration of their probation prior to completing their NEW VISTAS treatment plan.**

# Discussion

Efforts to bolster training and expertise of staff at all levels of service delivery may help to maximize the efficacy of interventions and potentially avoid problems associated with poor outcomes. In particular, increased emphasis on alcohol and drug abuse treatment as well as clinical training specific to working with a juvenile justice population for both treatment planners and service delivery components may be warranted.

The annulment of funding in 2002 restricted the involvement of partner agencies in the NEW VISTAS collaborative and forced the reallocation of funds to core services/programs.

Finally, NEW VISTAS staff experienced some minor challenges complying with the evaluation procedures during the early stages of program implementation. However, NEW VISTAS staff became more accustomed to routine procedures over time.

## **Future Plans for the Project**

The Santa Barbara County Probation Department will continue to collaborate with multiple community agencies to address the needs of youths and families. Recognizing the value of the family-focused, neighborhood-based service delivery model, the important relationships established between community agencies during the NEW VISTAS program will also continue to advantage youths and families. Collocated treatment planners will continue to assess probation families for alcohol and drug issues and will make written recommendations for treatment. Moreover, other agencies not involved in the initial program implementation had expressed interest in joining the NEW VISTAS collaborative, thus further enhancing the efficacy and utility of NEW VISTAS. Finally, further analyses of the Santa Barbara Assets and Risks Assessment (SB ARA) tool will determine unique assets and risks among males and females, and may yield an appropriate assessment tool for all youths in the juvenile justice system.

## **Recommendations for Other Counties Considering a Similar Project**

Although grounded in a theoretical approach to service delivery, the implementation of NEW VISTAS during this initial operation period has involved a number of procedural modifications that have helped to enhance NEW VISTAS strengths and decrease its challenges. Given the benefit of having faced and overcome some of the challenges that occurred during the implementation of NEW VISTAS, the following are recommendations that may be of use to other counties considering a similar model:

### ***Interagency Collaboration***

- Prepare all program partners to work in a collaborative environment, how to disagree professionally, how to support one another, how to problem solve together, how to resolve conflict, and how to build positive relationships.

**NEW VISTAS participants presented a higher level of problem severity than was initially anticipated.**

**The Santa Barbara County Probation Department will continue to collaborate with community agencies to address the needs of youths and families.**

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- Plan for activities and meetings that promote teambuilding and open communication, encourage process discussions, solicit feedback, and reinforce collective identity, in order to build trust and enhance working relationships that need to develop within a collaborative.
- Limit the number of partner agencies for more effective, streamlined collaboration and communication in order to reduce the risk of duplicating services and allow for enhanced funding/sustainability of core programs and agencies.

## *Program Implementation/Evaluation*

- Team leader and family coach interactions are critical if a family is to be successful. It is important that these individuals reflect the diversity of the participating minors and families, and communicate frequently with each other.
- Funding permitting, the implementation of aftercare services and more extensive follow-up may bolster positive outcomes
- Efforts to maintain an emphasis on a family-focused approach helps to maximize the impact of intervention efforts and also contribute to sustained improvements over time.
- Language sensitive, culturally and gender appropriate approaches to service delivery were invaluable in sustaining client participation and enhancing the impact of interventions.
- The value of the research and evaluation team is fundamental to understanding the effects of the program. Information obtained through semiannual reports provides an opportunity to address specific issues and also reinforce efficacy while the program is being implemented.
- When examining outcomes, consider both increases in positive behaviors and decreases in problems.

## *Administration*

- Understand the roles, responsibilities, boundaries, and chains of command of each project position and their accountability.
- Frequently review the objectives and goals and compare where the program is against where it needs to be.
- Establish an executive oversight committee to provide better management and more immediate decision-making, which is especially valuable when critical program or fiscal issues arise.

**Recommendations for other counties implementing a program such as NEW VISTAS included several domains;**

**1. Interagency Collaboration**

**2. Program Implementation & Evaluation**

**3. Administration**

**The value of the research and evaluation team is fundamental to understanding the program.**