



Vista Community Clinic Project REACH Summary of Key Findings and Accomplishments 2008/2009 – 2010/2011

Vista Community Clinic (VCC) contracted with Evalcorp Research & Consulting in Fall 2008 to design and conduct a comprehensive, rigorous evaluation of Project REACH (Recreation, Employment readiness, Academic achievement, Communication skills, Healthy Lifestyles). The evaluation methods included Comprehensive Pre-Post Youth Surveys, Let's Talk Gangs Parent Education Pre-Post Surveys, Parenting Post-Surveys, observations, youth focus groups, staff interviews, and academic and program indicators. This report highlights key findings for the past three years (i.e., 2008/09, 2009/10, 2010/11).

Project Overview

Project REACH is a comprehensive after-school youth development program for at-risk youth ages 12-19. The goal of Project REACH is to promote and support the development of self-assured, future-oriented youth capable of navigating through adolescence to responsible adulthood and able to contribute positively to society. Thus, REACH offers a comprehensive, culturally and linguistically appropriate intervention designed to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors related to high-risk behaviors such as school dropout, teen pregnancy, violence, and drug use.

The after-school program is provided at two sites-- one in the City of Oceanside at the Libby Lake Community Center and the other in the City of Vista which operated in a home-like setting in Pala Vista in 2008/09-2009/10 and moved to Rancho Buena Vista High School in 2010/11. Youth meet at both sites every week day from 2:00 to 6:00 p.m. to engage in a range of program activities such as academic s, service learning projects, and life skills and leadership development around prevention of teenage pregnancy, alcohol and other drug (AOD) use, gang involvement, and violence.

"We provide a safe haven during critical hours to reduce their risk of involvement in things like gangs, drugs and alcohol. They see it every day. Other kids are doing and selling drugs in the streets and in their homes. They can come here to get away from it and be safe. They can do positive things here and have fun."

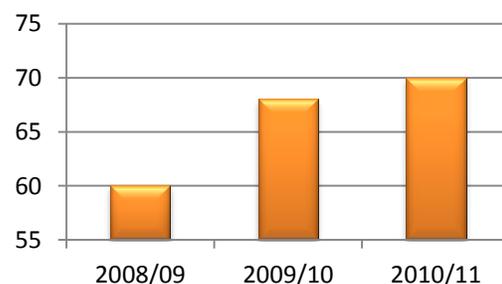
– Project REACH staff



Youth Participation

Project REACH enrolled a total of 118 youth in 2008/09, 191 youth in 2009/10, and 124 youth in 2010/11. Of these youth, a total of 60 youth in 2008/09, 68 youth in 2009/10, and 70 youth in 2010/11 completed at least 180 hours of curricula and program activities, including academic assistance, life skills and service learning activities (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of Youth Participating in 180 Program Hours or More



When asked in focus groups what they learned from program activities, one youth commented, **"REACH teaches us how to stay away from people who want us in gangs, or to try to get us to take drugs—like peer pressure. It teaches us how to deal with stuff in our lives."**

Academic Findings

REACH participants on average improved their GPA in each program year. Paired-samples t-tests were conducted each year to compare participants' year-end GPA and Math and English grades to their previous year-end and/or first semester GPA and subject grades. Statistically significant increases were found in participants' overall GPA and Math grades in 2008/09 (N=44), and in their overall GPA, Math and English grades in 2009/10 (N=45). Small increases were also found in participants' overall GPA, Math and English grades in the 2010/11 program year (N=79) (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Changes in Overall Participant Year-End GPA and Math and English Grades

Grades	2008/09 (N=44)	2009/10 (N=45)	2010/11 (N=79)
GPA	Increased*	Increased*	Increased
Math	Increased*	Increased*	Increased
English	Same	Increased*	Increased

* Statistically significant level of change.

Each year, all but one of the high school seniors participating in REACH graduated (i.e., 5 of 6 in 08/09, 9 of 10 in 09/10, and 5 of 6 in 10/11). Of the 19 graduating seniors, 17 enrolled in college after graduation, one pursued a career in law enforcement, and one moved.

Almost all (87%-100%) of the youth participants reported on surveys each year that it was very important or important to graduate from high school, go to college, and get a job. Most youth also said that because of REACH they:

- ✓ Know more about setting goals (84%-100%);
- ✓ Know more about career options, resume writing and job interviewing (73%-89%);
- ✓ Are more concerned about doing well in school (82%-90%); and,
- ✓ Are more interested in attending college (70%-89%).

Youth also reported that REACH: **“Helped me do homework,” “Made me focus on school,” and “Taught me different things and changed my grades.”**

Impact of Student's Lives

Along with helping youth academically, Project REACH provides a safe haven for students to learn and develop leadership and life skills. Each year on post-surveys, almost all youth (93%-100%) said that REACH was a good program, should be taught to other kids their age, was a safe place to share information, and they felt comfortable and able to talk to REACH staff. Survey findings showed that the program helped improve participants' peer relationships, healthy behaviors and communication skills. In addition, 92%-100% of youth said they will use the information and skills they learned in Project REACH.

Many youth consistently reported that the program has helped them learn skills to live a safer and healthier life, providing the following comments:

- **“It taught me about healthy decisions;”**
- **“It changed my bad habits and made me a new person;”**
- **“I’ve been able to voice my personal issues more with my parents;”**
- **“It helped me get out of drugs and other dangerous things;”** and,
- **“It kept me out of trouble and taught me new things about living the safe way.”**

For all three years, two-thirds or more of youth also said that as a result of REACH they:

- ✓ Are more likely to get involved in sports, clubs, and other activities (89%-100%);
- ✓ Made new friends (86%-100%);
- ✓ Know more about nutrition and want to stay in good health (81%-100%);
- ✓ Find it easier to talk with parents and peers about sensitive topics (75-96%);
- ✓ Are less likely to engage in risky behaviors (69%-93%);
- ✓ Are less likely to be involved in gangs or think they will benefit from being in a gang (65%-96%);
- ✓ Are less likely to get a sexually transmitted disease (76-93%); and,
- ✓ Are less likely to become pregnant or get someone pregnant (65-85%).

Findings for Parents

In addition to youth programming, Project REACH provides Parent Nights and other activities for parents of participants. Each year, evaluation findings demonstrated that these efforts have improved parent-teen communications and increased parental knowledge about AOD use, teen pregnancy, and gang prevention. Youth agreed that REACH has made an impact on their parents, with one youth stating, **“My Mom knows more about gangs. She used to just let me go out. Now she is more protective about it because they taught her about things happening outdoors.”**

Every year, three-quarters or more of the parents said that as a result of REACH they:

- ✓ Are more involved in their child’s life and school (88%-100%);
- ✓ Know more about preventing violence, gang involvement, and AOD use (94%-100%);
- ✓ Know more about reproductive health (79%-100%); and,
- ✓ Are more confident and likely to engage their child in discussions about sensitive topics (77%-100%).

A majority of parents also reported that it was more likely that they will have discussions with their child about setting goals (85%-100%); values, rules and consequences (78%-100%); dating and health relationships(85%-95%); sexually transmitted diseases (81%-95%); drugs and alcohol(75%-85%); and sexuality and puberty (75%-80%) as a result of REACH.

Parents also consistently indicated that REACH helped them and their children by improving their communications, knowledge, life skills, and experiences. Parents explained, **“It helped me get closer to my children,” “It prepared me and gave me more understanding of what teens deal with on their everyday lives, such as peer pressure, drug usage and gangs,”** and **“It’s a great opportunity for children to learn responsibility and that there is more out there that they can do for their community and helping others.”**

Recommendations

When asked in focus groups what could be improved about Project REACH, youth said they liked the program but it could use more field trips, more computers and books, **“more tutors to help with homework”** and **“more funding because this is a great program.”**

Parents responded similarly when asked for recommendations to improve REACH. Almost all parents felt that **“everything is good”** but some said, **“more staff members”** and **“more opportunities for others to have the program.”**



Summary

During the past three years, findings from a comprehensive evaluation of Project REACH show that the program has achieved its overall goal of developing future-oriented youth by strengthening their protective factors against high risk behaviors. The program also achieved its objectives in delivering program hours, service learning, life skills education, academic assistance, sex education, gang and AOD prevention, and parent educational programs.

Almost all youth and their parents acquired knowledge in reproductive health and gang and AOD prevention, and are more comfortable talking with each other about these topics. Most youth also improved their academic achievement, goal setting, communication skills, and attitudes about risky behaviors and health. Finally, nearly all youth increased their interest in educational/career options, gained resume writing and job interviewing skills, and considered it important to graduate and pursue higher education. As summed up by one youth, **“REACH makes me want to be someone.”**