


Centre for Applied Social Research
Faculty of Social Work University of Toronto

**EVALUATION OF
THE VOLUNTEER CONNECTIONS PROGRAM**

 ***Rapport Youth & Family Services***

YEAR THREE FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the final report of a three year evaluation conducted by the Centre for Applied Social Research at the University of Toronto for Rapport Youth and Family Services regarding the Volunteer Connections Program (VCP). The Volunteer Connections Program (VCP) of Rapport Youth & Family Services was initiated as a pilot project in 1996 with the financial assistance of the United Way of Peel. The program received new expansion funding in December 1999 through a four-year grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. This innovative program is based on the mentoring concept, drawing upon the strengths of community volunteers supported by clinical staff members for the benefit of troubled adolescents. Volunteers who have an educational and/or employment background in social services and an expressed interest in developing a supportive and caring relationship with an adolescent are recruited to provide mentoring and support services to adolescents. Ultimately, the goals are to 1) increase the mentoring and support services for youth in Peel; 2) provide training and experience in mentoring for a diverse group of volunteers to enhance their own personal and professional growth; and 3) to make more effective use of professional counseling resources at Rapport, ensuring that services are available to youth in higher levels of distress.

The evaluation strategy has incorporated a diverse range of elements including information forms completed by both volunteers and clients of the program; client ratings of satisfaction with the program and the degree to which problems were resolved; interviews determining the volunteers' satisfaction with the program, including those who have left the program; interviews with staff of the program regarding program goals and service delivery; and the acquisition of information from the statistical data base of Rapport. The first year evaluation provided some

initial data that suggested that the VCP was meeting its objectives and recommended both programmatic and evaluative strategies that were used to further refine the program in the second year.

The second year evaluation indicated that the VCP continued to meet its objectives in most areas. During the initial two evaluations three recommendations were made to Rapport to enhance the VCP. The first recommendation was to increase accessibility to the program for both volunteers and youth by offering the program in Mississauga, as well as in Brampton. To this end, Rapport began offering the VCP program at its satellite office in Mississauga. The second recommendation was that in order to enhance the sense of comfort and value of the volunteers, a designated room be established for volunteer use to meet one another and base themselves between interviews. This has been arranged. Finally, it was recommended that a more comprehensive client satisfaction survey be developed to better understand the experiences of clients in the program. This was implemented for all Rapport clients starting in the summer of 2003. The central conclusion of this final year evaluation is that Rapport has developed an important and positive program that is meeting its objectives with regard to clients, volunteers, the agency's resources and the community. Specific findings are itemized below:

- In the three years of the program, the VCP has served a total of 146 youth who presented with a wide range of social, emotional and behavioural problems.
- Outcomes for youth who participated in the program were very positive. The majority (82% over the 3 years) identified that their problem had undergone significant positive or moderate positive change and that they were satisfied with the service (92%). It must be

noted however that less than half of the client group completed these measures and those that did not may have had a different experience.

- The program has recruited and trained a diverse group of volunteers. Of the 74 volunteers, 73% reported that they were from non-European or non-Canadian backgrounds and 59% reported that they were visible minorities. This is a positive outcome both in terms of creating opportunities for individuals of diverse backgrounds to acquire skills and experience in mentoring in a Canadian setting and in terms of providing mentors for youth that reflect the diversity of the community in which they live. While the program did fall short of its original target for gender (a female:male ratio of 70:30 over the three years), this was modified after the first year and it must be remembered that the actual ratio achieved fits well with the composition of the broader social services workforce.
- Volunteers were highly positive about the training and supervision received. Sixty-two percent of volunteers rated the initial training and orientation they received from the VCP as either 'above expectation' (41%) or as 'greatly exceeds expectations' (21%). Also, an overwhelming 94% of the volunteers rated the supervision they received from the VCP as either 'above expectation' (48%) or as 'greatly exceeds expectations' (46%). An exception to this was that some volunteers who continued with the program felt that ongoing training could be modified and enhanced somewhat. Another exception was that volunteers wished that they could have had increased numbers of youth to work with.
- As youth with less severe needs could receive service from volunteers, professional clinical staff had additional space on their caseloads to work with youth who presented with more severe concerns. Prior to instituting the VCP, 10.7% of cases seen by professionals were viewed as severe, compared to 24.0% at the end of the VCP program.

Summary Recommendations

The VCP is an outstanding program that enhances services available to youth in the Peel region and provides training opportunities for community members interested in the social services. We strongly recommend that it receive ongoing funding.

If the VCP is able to continue, increased efforts should go into 3 areas:

- 1) recruitment of volunteers;
- 2) enhancement of ongoing training; and
- 3) advertising the service more broadly in the community so that more youth are able to benefit from the program.

Please forward inquiries regarding the Volunteer Connections Program to any of the following staff members at Rapport:

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