

CR-Sent  
11-20-84

A QUARTER MILE OF BASEBOARDS:  
PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE WORK  
AMONG DELINQUENT YOUTH

Prepared for:

Young Volunteers in Action  
Columbus, Ohio

June 17, 1985

Richard G. Wiebush  
756 Jaeger Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43206

102326

A QUARTER MILE OF BASEBOARDS:  
PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE WORK  
AMONG DELINQUENT YOUTH

Prepared for:

Young Volunteers in Action  
Columbus, Ohio

June 17, 1985

Richard G. Wiebush  
756 Jaeger Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43206

"If he had locked me up that wouldna been no help. This way I made friends...it might help me with future jobs...plus I got exposed to new things. The big thing was tho that I got to come home."

"I bet I scrubbed a quarter mile of baseboards in that place...I wouldn't want to go through it again...I thought it was too harsh for what I did...he started the fight with me...the whole time I was thinkin I'm gonna beat the shit outta him next time I see him."

"I had lotsa time to think and me and my supervisor talked a lot...I decided while I was doing it...to make a lot of changes...it was hard, but I gave up all but one of my former friends cause I didn't want any more trouble."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
LIST OF TABLES.....	iii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	1
Philosophy and Goals.....	1
The First Year of Operation.....	2
Central Questions.....	3
Methodology.....	4
Format.....	5
PART I: COMMUNITY SERVICE AS A SENTENCE.....	7
Findings.....	7
Discussion.....	12
PART II: THE COMMUNITY SERVICE WORK EXPERIENCE.....	14
Findings.....	14
A. Nature of the Placements.....	14
B. Community Service Work Outcomes.....	16
C. Correlations.....	18
Discussion.....	22
Recommendations.....	25
APPENDIX: Interview Guide	

**NCJRS**  
**AUG 25 1982**  
**ACQUISITIONS**

LIST OF TABLES

	<u>Page</u>
TABLE 1. Community Service As A Sentence: Summary of Responses.....	11
TABLE 2. Correlations Between Overall Evaluation of Experience and Program Elements and Outcomes.....	20

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the third in a series examining the process and outcomes of a program conducted by the Young Volunteers in Action (YVA) in Columbus, Ohio.

YVA places juvenile court referred youth into various community service agencies and monitors their progress in completing court-ordered community service work. The project provides a sentencing alternative to the juvenile court for minor offenders. It attempts to reduce recidivism by providing youth with 1) exposure to a positive environment and role models, 2) an opportunity to participate in various work experiences, and 3) the chance to keep their offense from becoming part of an official delinquency record.

This report presents information on participants' perspectives of community service as a sentence and on the nature and perceived value of the work experience. The report provides, then, a measure of "user satisfaction." It also provides YVA with several indicators of its success in achieving the program's goals for youth.

All findings in this report are based on semi-structured interviews with 15 program participants who were randomly selected from among the first 60 youth who entered the program in the period from July 1983 to June 1984. Among the major findings on perceptions of community service as a sentence are:

- 11 of the 15 youth believed that the judge's sole intent in making a community service disposition was to "help" them. Only 2 youth believed the judge's sole intent was punishment.
- Two-thirds of the youth believed that they had repaid their "debt to society" to a degree that was "just right."

- 9 of the 15 interviewees believed that their sentence was either "somewhat" or "very" lenient.
- 73% (11) stated that they had been helped either "somewhat" or "a lot" by receiving the community service sentence.
- All the youth believed that the community service sanction is a good idea -- but only for less serious offenders.

The major findings regarding the nature and value of the actual work experience include:

- 7 youth were involved in primarily direct service positions, and these youth constituted the greatest percentage of those reporting 1) extensive staff, supervisor and client interaction, 2) acquisition of new skills; 3) evaluation of the experience as "very positive," and 4) subsequent obtainment of a job.
- Among those youth (12) reporting the acquisition of new skills or refinement of pre-existing skills, a majority indicated that their "people" skills were most affected.
- 4 youth developed strong vocational interests as a result of their experience.
- 10 of the 15 interviewees felt that their chances of obtaining paid employment would be enhanced as a result of their community service.
- 8 of the 12 youth who actually looked for work subsequent to their community service obtained paying jobs; however,
- There is no significant relationship between having had a positive YVA experience and obtaining a job.
- 11 of the 15 rated the value of the experience as either "very valuable" (7) or "somewhat valuable" (4).

These findings indicate that in most areas and with most youth, YVA is achieving its goals. These and other findings also point up some deficiencies in program implementation which, if corrected, could help ensure even greater success for the program.

<p>"It was fun...but also definitely punishment...just getting caught would not be enough to keep me out of trouble..."</p>
---

## INTRODUCTION

This is the third in a series of reports prepared for the management of the Columbus (Ohio) Young Volunteers in Action program. This report focuses on the perceptions and experiences of a random sample of youth who have been involved in the YVA community service diversion program. It attempts to provide not only a sense of "user satisfaction" but also addresses key implementation and program effectiveness issues as experienced and evaluated by the youth themselves.

Other reports in this series addresses several different measures of YVA program performance, including success in meeting level of service goals and effectiveness in reducing delinquent behavior. The purpose of these reports is to provide feedback to YVA and the juvenile court and, by so doing, to serve as a management tool for further program planning and development. The reports are prepared by Richard G. Wiebush under a personal service contract with YVA.

### Background

Philosophy and Goals. Young Volunteers in Action seeks to promote personal and community development through the placement of youthful (14-22) volunteers in non-profit, public service oriented agencies. Initially designed to serve non-delinquent youth from low-income, high crime areas, the program expanded its focus in the summer of 1983 and, through a cooperative agreement with the Franklin County Juvenile Court, began accepting referrals of delinquent youth -- regardless of their economic status or neighborhood.

The objectives of the YVA-Court arrangement are, essentially, to divert selected adjudicated youth from the juvenile justice system and to provide them with a service which will hopefully alter delinquent behavior. Through placement in a community service agency, with a requirement that a youth complete a specified number of hours (an average of 45) of service work, YVA and the court hope to provide youth with:

- a sense of responsibility and accountability;
- exposure to structured work situations and various career options;
- exposure to positive role models;
- an opportunity to pay back their debt to society; and
- an opportunity to have their complaint dismissed upon completion of the community service assignment.

A key element of the program design was to target these services to the minor offender -- one who had no or minimal prior involvement in the juvenile justice system and who currently was charged with a misdemeanor offense. The intent was to identify those youth who were probably not headed for serious trouble but who nonetheless were felt to need the direction and positive influences that a supervised community service experience might provide. The critical assumption (and program goal) of course, was that such an intervention would reduce the likelihood of reinvolvement in delinquent acts.

The First Year of Operations. Because this study focuses on the delinquent youth who were involved in YVA during the first full year of the diversion program, some highlights of the first year's operations are presented.\*

\*For greater detail, see the Final Monitoring Report on the Juvenile Diversion Project of the Young Volunteers in Action Program, October, 1984.

Between mid-July 1983 and July 1984:

- The Juvenile Court referred 60 youth to YVA, all of whom were accepted for participation and 49 (81.7%) of whom completed the program.
- 85% of referrals were for misdemeanor charges, but an unexpectedly high percentage of felony offenders (11%) and repeat offenders (28%) also were referred.
- 88% of referrals were males and about half (47) were black. The average age of referred youth was 16.08, with a range of 14-18 years. Two-thirds of the youth were 15 or 16 years old.
- YVA utilized 27 different community agencies for placing youth, including several community centers, recreation centers, YMCA's, the Red Cross and the Columbus Zoo. YVA relied on 10 of these 27 sites for two-thirds of all placements.
- Once a youth was placed, the likelihood was that he/she would remain with the original placement. Only 4 youth (6.7%) had to be placed in 2 different sites.
- While YVA attempted to match clients' interests with available positions, almost half the youth ended up in maintenance jobs. Other often-used job categories included clerical, program assistant and animal care functions.
- Over 2,200 hours of community service work was actually performed, representing a contribution of over \$7,000 to various agencies.

### Central Questions

The findings presented here are based on youth responses during semi-structured interviews which were of one to one and one-half hours duration. The broad areas of concern reflected in the interviews were:

- What was the nature and value of the community service work experience?
- What is the youth perception of a community service work order as a sentencing option for the juvenile court?

More specifically, with respect to the actual work experience, we sought to determine:

- was the structure and working conditions of the placement such that the outcome sought by YVA for youth could be realized? i.e., if a youth were essentially unsupervised, YVA could not expect any impact of role modeling on the youth.
- were intended outcomes realized, as judged by the youth themselves? i.e., did participants think they got from the program what YVA thought they would/should get?
- were there differences in the conditions of the work -- or in outcomes -- that were related to the category of work (e.g., direct service vs. maintenance)?

Youth perceptions regarding community service as a sentence (as opposed to the actual work experience) were elicited to determine:

- is a community service work order experienced as a "punishment" type of sentence or a "helping" type of sentence?
- does the community service disposition impart a sense of "justice has been done"?
- is community service an appropriate disposition for use by the juvenile court and, if so, with what types of offenders?

The complete set of questions designed to address these issues is attached to this report in Appendix A.

### Methodology

The youth interviewed for this report were randomly selected from a list of the first 60 youth who entered the program during its first year of operation (July 1983-June 1984).<sup>\*</sup> A total of 22 youth were selected and letters were sent to their homes -- addressed to parents -- indicating the nature and purpose of the research, its sponsorship by YVA, and the confidential nature of the interviews. All letters were sent from the YVA Director's office, on YVA stationery, and over the Director's signature.

<sup>\*</sup>This sample frame was chosen to ensure maximum comparability between data collected for the preceding reports in the series -- all based on these 60 first-year youth -- and this one.

Youth were invited to participate in the survey, and were advised that they would be paid \$5.00 if they elected to be interviewed. All were advised that the researcher would be calling them to further explain the interviews and to determine whether participation was desired.

The researcher was able to make telephone contact with 17 of the 22 youth selected. (The missing youth had all moved and either left no forwarding address or did not have a telephone.) In all 17 cases, the researcher discussed the nature of the interviews first with the parents and then with the youth. Only 1 of the 17 declined to participate. One other youth could not participate due to his incarceration in a juvenile institution.

The 15 remaining youth became the final sample. This number constituted 25% of all eligible YVA participants.

All interview times, dates and locations were mutually agreed upon by the individual respondent and the researcher. The interviews took place between December 7, 1984 and January 10, 1985. Each lasted approximately 1 to 1-1/2 hours, and in 90% of the cases were conducted at the respondent's home.

The construction of the interview guide was designed to allow for open ended discussion of most issues, but also included questions which asked the respondent to categorize their experience on a 3 or 5 point scale (e.g., very helpful, somewhat helpful, not very helpful). Where categorization was requested on an item, it was followed by a full discussion of the rationale for the selection. (See Appendix A for the complete interview guide.)

#### Format

The remainder of this report is divided into two sections, corresponding to the two central sets of questions on the perceptions of community service as a sentence and the actual community service work experience.

In each section, the presentation of the findings is followed by a discussion and conclusions. In addition, the section on work experience is followed by a brief set of recommendations designed to address for the YVA program selected implementation issues emerging from the data.

## PART I

### COMMUNITY SERVICE AS A SENTENCE

This portion of the report focuses on youth perceptions of community service as a sentencing option. The intent is to provide YVA and the juvenile court with some notion of the appropriateness of community service as a sanction, from the perspective of participating youth.

"If the judge wanted to punish me, he woulda just kept me in DH...but those 40 hours (of community service) sure seemed like a long time."

### Findings

#### Additional Sanctions

In order to determine the extent to which community service was a sole sanction, or one of several for each youth, interviewees were questioned as to whether they had also spent time in the Detention Home (DH) or had been subject to probation supervision. Six of the 15 youth (40%) had served time in DH (an average of 5 days) in addition to their community service work. Two youth were subject to informal probation supervision during their community service, and 3 others spent time in DH and were subject to probation supervision in addition to their community service requirements. Only 4 youth (29%) had no sanctions other than community service.

#### Judge's Intent in Sentencing

All the participants were asked what they believed was the judge's intent in making them do community work. Eleven felt that the judge's sole purpose was to help them. A consensus of opinion among these youth was that the judge was trying to give them a break and that if the judge was not trying to help, the sentence would have been for time (or more time) in DH. Two of the youth felt that the judge was solely interested in punishing them

for their offenses. Both of these youth saw the sentence in terms of "pay back" and one -- who had spent time in DH -- believed that the community service sentence was more punitive than a sentence to DH might have been. The last two youth believed that the judge was trying to both help and punish them and cited a combination of the reasons given by the other youth.

#### Fairness of Sentence

All youth were asked to rate -- on a five point scale -- the degree to which they believed the community service sentence was a fair one, given their offense. One person felt that the sentence was very harsh, and 2 felt it was somewhat harsh. Five youth felt that the sentence was fair, while 3 felt it was somewhat lenient and 4 felt it was very lenient. It should be noted that 2 of the 3 youth who felt the sentence tended toward harshness had a strong feeling that they should not have been taken to court in the first place.

#### Appropriateness of "Pay Back"

Two thirds of the interviewees felt that they paid back any debt to society to a degree that was "just right," by doing their community service work. Only 1 youth felt that they had paid back "too much" and 2 expressed the feeling that they had not sufficiently paid their debt to society. One of the latter two commented that he "should have been locked up" for what he had done and that the community service was "too much fun," for it to have been a sanction. The other felt that the type of sanction was appropriate, but the number of hours she was given was insufficient.

#### Degree "Helped" by Sentence

When asked if they felt they had been helped by being given the community service sentence, 7 youth responded by saying they had been helped "a lot" and 4 stated they had been helped "somewhat." Three felt that they had

not been helped at all and 1 felt that he was helped by being in DH ("it woke me up"), but not by the community service work. Of the 3 who felt they were not helped, 2 cited the fact that they have continued to get into trouble.

Most of those who felt they were helped by this type of sentence cited as reasons the fact that they were not sentenced to DH and the opportunities afforded by the community service. Among these opportunities were:

- "The chance to learn about myself and to help people;"
- "It gave me the chance to learn something;"
- "Seeing that people were willing to help me;"
- "A chance to learn a new job and get a new attitude."

#### Best and Worst of The Sentence

A question exploring views on the "best and worst things" about being made to do community service as a sentence elicited a wide range of answers. On the "best" side, many youth responded in the way they did to the "judge's intent" question, i.e., it was a lot better than having to do time in DH. Several others spoke from a justice perspective and made comments like "it gave me a chance to make up for what I did," or "the sentence was effective, 'cause I got the message," and "the sentence was appropriate for what I did." The 2 youth who got jobs because of their volunteer work cited that as the "best thing." Most youth (8) felt that there was no worst thing about having to do community service. For the remainder, the restrictions on time or inconvenience caused by having to do community service were cited as the worst things about the sentence.

#### Assessment of Community Service As A Sentencing Option

Finally, the youth were all asked to think about their own situation and that of friends who may have gotten into trouble, and provide an

assessment of community service as a sentencing option. All 15 youth believed that this type of sanction is a good idea, but qualified it by saying that it should be used only in the case of less serious offenders, i.e., first and second offenders who are adjudicated for less serious offenses. One youth commented that "some kids are just too thick-headed and this won't stop them," and another noted that this type sentence is only good for those "trying to go straight."

"The whole experience just slowed me down a lot...it wasn't so much the work...I think just getting caught finally woke me up...they took the fire out of my butt."

TABLE 1

COMMUNITY SERVICE AS A SENTENCE: SUMMARY OF RESPONSES  
(N/R = No Response)

ITEM	RESPONSE RANGE	n	% GROUP
<u>Judge's Intent</u>	help	11	73.3
	punish	2	13.3
	both	2	13.3
<u>Fairness</u>	very/somewhat harsh	3	20.0
	fair	5	33.3
	very/somewhat lenient	7	46.7
<u>Level of "Pay Back"</u>	too much	1	0.6
	just right	10	66.7
	not enough	2	13.3
	N/R	2	13.3
<u>Degree Helped by Sentence</u>	a lot	7	46.7
	somewhat	4	26.7
	very little/not at all	4	26.7
<u>Best thing About Sentence</u>	not sent to DH	5	33.3
	fairness/justice	3	20.0
	Job outcome	2	13.3
	N/R	3	20.0
<u>Worst Thing About Sentence</u>	restrictions/inconvenience	4	26.7
	no worst thing	8	53.3
	N/R	3	20.0
<u>Assessment of Community Service As Sentencing Option</u>	good idea	15*	100.0
	bad idea	0	0.0

\*All responses were: "for less serious offenders only."

## Discussion

These findings point up the efficacy of the YVA/Juvenile court diversion model and speak to the success of the program at the implementation level.

With respect to program design, it is clear that the majority of youth involved believe that the program is designed to help them, that they are being given a break, that the concept is appropriate for less serious offenders, and that community service is a "just" way to exonerate themselves.

It is also clear that, for most youth, the program has been implemented in such a way as to ensure the desired type of impact on them. First, the fact that two-thirds of interviewed participants believed that they had paid their debt "just right," indicates an appropriateness in selection for the program by the court and in the number of service hours required.

Second, the indications by a majority of youth that there was no "worst thing" about the sentence indicates the delivery of a service (and execution of a sentence) that is received in a positive manner and which does not engender bitterness or any perceived need for retaliation.

Third, and most importantly, the congruence between program intent and program impact is most clearly displayed by the finding that 11 of the 15 youth (73%) felt that they were in fact helped by the program. Further, many of these felt helped in exactly the ways the program intended, i.e., by giving them a chance to learn about themselves, learn new skills and to "make up for what I did."

The only potential source of concern emerging from these findings is the perception among almost half (7) of the youth that the sentence they were given was either somewhat or very lenient. On one hand, this kind of perception could lead to an "I can get away with it" or "nothing bad will

happen" notion. On the other hand, however, it may be that this leniency is in fact associated with the "justness" of the court -- and thereby engendering respect -- or is perceived with a sense of thankfulness -- with respect and appreciation being the result.

## PART II

### THE COMMUNITY SERVICE WORK EXPERIENCE

This section of the report focuses on the experiences of the 15 survey participants at their community service work site. The intent of this section is to provide YVA with information on the degree to which the program has been implemented as intended -- at the work site level -- and to provide measures of some of the central program outcomes.

"...besides working with the animals -- that was fun -- I really got good at customer service...I loved seeing puppies get adopted..My supervisor was an amazing lady. She really helped all of us a lot...she really knew her stuff..."

#### Findings

##### A. Nature of the Placements

###### Nature of Work

Seven of the 15 youth (40%) were involved primarily in providing direct service to clients. Such direct service included assisting teachers and recreation leaders and supervising the recreation activities of younger children. Four of the youth had community service jobs which were a mixture of direct service and maintenance and/or clerical functions. The remaining 4 youth had strictly maintenance jobs, including activities such as mopping floors, stocking food pantries and maintaining agency grounds.

###### Training

Five youth reported that they received fairly intensive training for their jobs, either pre-service or inservice. All felt that the training was very helpful. Three others said they received "some" training (usually 1-3 hours). Seven (47%) received no or minimal training.

### Supervision and Staff Interaction

Most youth (8) received little supervision, other than being given instructions on what tasks were to be accomplished each day. Five youth reported that they received constant supervision, and 4 of these cited that supervision as being very helpful to them.

All but 2 of the volunteers reported that they were kept busy most or all of the time while at work.

One third (5) reported that they had extensive interaction with other agency staff members and 4 of these felt that the interaction was very helpful to them. Seven of the volunteers had no or minimal contact with other staff, while 3 had intermittent contact.

### Quality of Working Relationships

When asked who they felt -- if anyone -- had helped them, 6 youth reported that their supervisor was a source of help, 2 said both the supervisor and other staff helped them and 3 believed that they had been helped by other staff. Four of the youth volunteers believed that no one from their agency had been of any help to them.

With respect to volunteer -- supervisor relationships, 5 youth reported having an "excellent" relationship, while 7 others saw the relationship as "okay." Two reported that they got along "not very well" with their supervisor. One could not judge because of a minimum amount of contact.

Of the 8 youth who had some contact with other agency staff, 6 reported their relationship with them as excellent. One categorized the relationship as okay, while 1 other reported it as not very good.

Of the 11 youth who had at least some contact with clients, 9 stated that they got along very well with them and the other two reported "okay"

relationships. Of the 7 who had primarily direct service jobs, all reported excellent client relationships.

"There was the one older guy who was a volunteer too. He was friendly and helped me with my problems... no one else knew I had got in trouble."

"Lotsa times there wasn't many people (clients) to take care of and it got boring...but it was better than filing."

## B. Community Service Work Outcomes

### Skill Acquisition

When asked if they had "learned to do some things they had never done before," i.e., new skills, 6 youth responded by saying they had learned new skills, in depth. Three indicated they had learned "some" new skills and 6 believed they had acquired no new skills.

When questioned regarding the refinement of skills they had before starting community service, 3 youth stated they had improved pre-existing skills a lot; 4 indicated some improvement, and 8 believed they had not improved their skills.\*

### Developing Vocational Interests

Four youth developed a strong vocational interest as a result of their placements. Four others developed "some" interest in pursuing the line of work in which they were involved as volunteers, and 7 reported having developed no vocational interests as a result of their placement.

\*Responses to the above questions are not mutually exclusive. That is, some youth who felt they did not learn new skills may have improved pre-existing skills and those who reported they did not improve old skills may have learned new ones. Only 3 youth believed that they had neither learned new skills, nor improved old skills.

### Increased Employability

Most youth (10) reported that they believed that their chances of obtaining paid employment would be enhanced as a result of their volunteer experience. They cited the work experience, skill acquisition and development of references as reasons for improved employability. Three of the volunteers were unsure of the impact of their experience on employability and 2 felt it did not improve their chances.

When asked if they had cited their volunteer experience in talking with potential employers, two-thirds (8) of the youth who had actually sought work (12) indicated that they had referenced their volunteer work, either on applications or in interviews.

### Post-Community Service Placements

Of the 12 youth who looked for work after volunteering, 8 successfully found jobs. In at least two instances, there was a direct connection between having done community service and becoming employed. In three cases, there was no apparent connection and in three others, it could not be determined if the community service experience had any impact on actual job attainment.

Two of the 15 youth continued their volunteer work beyond the number of hours mandated by the court.

### Value of the Experience

The interviewees were asked to provide an overall assessment of the perceived value of the community service work to them. Seven believed that it was very valuable, primarily because of the work experience and skill development the volunteer work provided. Others felt that the experience was somewhat valuable, but could not articulate reasons other than general

experience. Four youth felt that community service was of little or no value to them.

### Nature of the Total Experience

Using direct interviewees' responses to specific questions and our interpretation of various interviewees' remarks, we rated the degree to which we believe the community service experience was a positive one for those involved. This admittedly "soft" assessment is a combined measure of the actual experience in the agency and the perceived value of that experience (i.e., it incorporates the responses to all the questions in this Part II). Our categorization results in

- 7 youth (47%) being very positive about the experience.
- 3 youth (20%) being somewhat positive.
- 3 youth (20%) being somewhat negative.
- 2 youth (13%) being very negative.

"I always liked working with kids, but this helped me learn more about them -- like I can tell better now if a kid doesn't have much confidence and I know better what to do about it."

"That's the only thing I ever did that was like a real job...so it'll be good experience."

"...we did all the work the janitors were supposed to be doin...and they just sat around. They came by once in a while to check and tell us what we were supposed to do next."

### C. Correlations

In order to determine what elements of the youth placements may have contributed to their overall assessment of the community service experience, we examined the relationship between the existence of certain program conditions and the assessment of the experience, as well as the relationship

between selected outcomes and the nature of youths' experience. Table 2 (page 20) presents these relationships. To summarize the findings:

- Of the 7 youth who had a "very positive" experience, 6 were involved in primarily direct service positions. Five of the 7 reported that staff and/or supervisory relationships were helpful, that they had extensive client interaction and that they learned new skills. Four of the 7 subsequently found jobs.
- The 3 youth who had a "somewhat positive" experience were evenly divided among the 3 work categories. Two of the 3 reported helpful staff/supervisor relationships. All three felt they learned new skills. Only 1 had extensive client contact and 1 obtained a job.
- Of the 3 youth who had "somewhat negative" experience, 2 were in jobs which were "mixed" and 1 had all maintenance responsibilities. While 2 of these youth subsequently got jobs, none of them felt that they had learned new skills or had helpful supervisor/staff relationships. Also none of the 3 had extensive client interaction.
- The 2 youth who were very negative were both in maintenance positions. Neither had any client contact, neither had helpful supervisory/staff relationships, and neither felt they learned any new skills. One subsequently got a job.

Several clear patterns emerge from this data. First, having a positive experience in a community service placement is strongly associated with:

- a) being in a direct service job;
- b) having extensive client contact;
- c) having helpful supervisor/staff relationships;
- d) learning new skills.

TABLE 2

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN OVERALL EVALUATION OF EXPERIENCE  
AND PROGRAM ELEMENTS AND OUTCOMES

OVERALL EVALUATION	NUMBER YOUTH	TYPE PLACEMENT			NUMBER OF YOUTH REPORTING FOLLOWING EXPERIENCE:			
		DIRECT	MIXED	MAINTENANCE	HELPFUL SUPERVISOR/STAFF RELATIONSHIPS	EXTENSIVE CLIENT CONTACT	LEARNED NEW SKILLS	OBTAINED JOB
Very positive	7	6	1	0	5	5	5	4
Somewhat positive	3	1	1	1	2	1	3	1
Somewhat negative	3	0	2	1	0	0	0	2
Very negative	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	15	7	4	4	7	6	8	8

Second, having a negative experience (either "somewhat" or "very") in community service work is associated with the absence of the same conditions that made the experience positive for some youth. That is, a negative experience is associated with:

- a) having non-direct service functions. Of the 5 youth reporting a negative experience, 3 had solely maintenance responsibilities, while 2 had mixed responsibilities.
- b) not having helpful staff or supervisory relationships -- none of those reporting a negative experience had helpful supervisor or staff relationships.
- c) not having client contact -- all 5 "negative" youth had no or minimal client contact.
- d) not having learned new skills -- all 5 "negative" youth also reported they had learned no new skills.

Third, there is a slight association between the type of job a youth had in community service and eventually obtaining paid employment. Of the 7 youth with primarily direct service jobs, 5 (71%) subsequently obtained a paying job. This compares to 2 of 4 (50%) of those in the "maintenance" category who later got jobs and 1 of 4 (25%) of those with mixed community service responsibilities who later got jobs. Fourth, there is, however, no significant relationship between type of experience (positive or negative) in community service and subsequently getting work. Of the 10 youth who had a positive YVA experience, 5 (50%) subsequently became employed. At the same time, however, of the 5 youth who had a negative experience, 3 (60%) later obtained a paying position.

## Discussion

The findings relative to YVA youths' perceptions of their community service work provide some valuable insights into both the functioning of the program and its effects on youth.

Role modeling is one of the vehicles YVA believes to be effective in influencing a youth's behavior. It is assumed that the interaction between a youth and his/her supervisor or other staff will produce an opportunity for youth to learn appropriate workplace and social behaviors. The results of the interviews are mixed and somewhat inconclusive on whether this impact occurred or not. With respect to the structure within which role modeling might take place, it would appear that there is not a great deal of opportunity -- most youth received little supervision or training and did not have a lot of interaction with other staff or supervisors. Among those that did receive constant supervision or had extensive interaction with other staff, the benefits were clear -- 4 of 5 youth believed that their interaction/supervision was very helpful to them. Some of these youth indicated that through their discussions with supervisors and staff, they 1) began to think more seriously about what "getting into trouble" meant for them, and 2) improved their ability to get along in a work situation.

In spite of the small number of youth extensively involved with potential role models, it appears that even those with less frequent contact with adults benefited nonetheless. Eleven of the 15 youth believed that supervisors and/or other staff had been helpful to them -- either in personal terms or with the work situation. (This general "helpfulness" item on the questionnaire, however, does not necessarily translate into effective

role modeling by adults -- someone can be perceived as "helpful" without influencing behavior.)

"Yeah, he was a real good supervisor and we got along okay...I saw him maybe once a day..."

Several interview items sought to ascertain the degree to which YVA work experience goals were attained by youth. Specifically, these include skill development, the development of vocational interests and the acquisition of actual work experience. Here again the results are slightly mixed, but there are strong indicators that YVA is achieving its goals.

Community service work does not appear to have much impact on developing vocational interests -- only 4 youth indicated that they would try to pursue the line of work in which they were involved as volunteers, and 2 of these had been interested in the work before volunteering.

However, with respect to skill development, 12 youth believed that they had learned new skills and/or improved old skills, while only 3 believed that they had done neither. It is interesting to note that the most frequently mentioned skill which was believed to be improved was that of "dealing with people." Given the frequency with which most youth change vocational interests, it may be that the real value of the YVA experience is not in the acquisition of "technical" skills, but in the development of these critical "people" skills.

One additional YVA work experience goal is to simply give youth the experience of having been in a job related environment and to thereby improve their ability to obtain (and retain) paid employment. It is clear from the interviews that a large majority of youth believe they have

considerably enhanced their employability because of their community service experience. Two-thirds cited their belief that either the actual work experience, skill acquisition or the development of references would help them get a job. This belief was also translated into behavior inasmuch as 8 of the 12 youth who actually looked for jobs cited their community service work as a qualification. Whether or not the community service work has any impact on the hiring decision cannot be ascertained at this point, but it is nonetheless clear that YVA does provide not only an actual work background, but also a measure of self-confidence to job seeking youth.

"...Not so much new skills, but just doing regular work things better -- like being on time, getting along with the boss and how to do basic things."

"They taught me how to use the buffing machine... That's important for a lot of jobs."

It cannot be said that the YVA experience has a direct impact on a youth's ability to get a paying job. While an apparently high percentage (66%) of those who looked for work were hired, we have no way of knowing how this compares to the percentage of the general teenage population who successfully find jobs. Further, three of the 8 who were hired had a negative YVA experience (i.e., they don't believe it helped them), and did not cite the YVA work on their application. An additional hire did have a positive YVA experience, but also did not cite it to the employer.

On the positive side, there were two instances where there was a direct verifiable impact of YVA on a youth's subsequent employment. In one case, a volunteer was hired by the same agency which had provided the

community service position. In the other, the prospective employer was so impressed that this teenage youth had "volunteered" to help others, that the youth was hired immediately.

The final significant issue emerging from the interviews concerns the relationship between "successful" community service work experience and the nature of the work performed by youth. From the data on correlations between positive experiences and nature of work performed (see Table 2), it is clear that most of YVA goals for youth are better achieved through placement in a "direct service" position. First, these youth all had a positive experience and believed that YVA was very helpful to them. Second, most of the youth who reported learning new skills learned them in direct service positions. Third, it was in the direct service jobs that the most extensive interaction occurred between youth and adult staff. Fourth -- and this is not available through the data -- it was clear to this interviewer that the youth who were most excited about their YVA work, and who spoke most highly of the program, came from the ranks of those providing direct client services. Conversely, the data shows that three-fourths of those in maintenance positions had little interaction with adult staff, learned no new skills and felt that the program was of little value to them.

#### Recommendations

- 1) While community agency positions consisting solely of maintenance work should be retained for those youth who want that type of work, YVA should do as much as possible to create a greater number of direct service slots and to encourage more youth to enter those positions.
- 2) Because of the apparent link between skill acquisition and a positive community service experience, YVA should emphasize the development of

positions -- direct service, mixed or maintenance -- that will provide sufficient skill development opportunities. In conjunction with this, YVA should re-emphasize the need for agencies to provide youth with the training necessary to orient them to the tasks and to ensure the development of skills.

- 3) To enhance the potential impact of role modeling, YVA should emphasize to community agencies the need for ongoing youth supervision and/or extensive staff/volunteer interaction. This emphasis might take the form of brief, informal training sessions by YVA for selected agency representatives.
- 4) All youth completing their community service work should be formally reminded and encouraged to cite their work experiences on resumes, job applications and in interviews.

YVA PARTICIPANT SURVEY

WORK

Please describe in detail what your job was for community service. Where did you do it? Was it the same all the time?

How many hours were you ordered to complete? \_\_\_\_\_  
How did you structure it?

While you were at work, did you keep busy \_\_\_\_\_ all \_\_\_\_\_ most \_\_\_\_\_ some of the time.  
Why?

Did you have someone train you in what you were supposed to do? \_\_\_\_\_  
How much time did they spend training you? \_\_\_\_\_  
Was it helpful? \_\_\_\_\_ a lot \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat \_\_\_\_\_ not at all.

Did you have a supervisor? \_\_\_\_\_ How often did you have contact with the super? \_\_\_\_\_  
What was he/she like?

Would you say your super was \_\_\_\_\_ very \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat \_\_\_\_\_ little help?

In doing your job, did you have contact with other staff people? \_\_\_\_\_ a lot  
\_\_\_\_\_ somewhat \_\_\_\_\_ very little/not at all.

Did you actually work in teams with other staff? \_\_\_\_\_ Doing what?

Were any of these people particularly helpful to you? \_\_\_\_\_ In what way?

Did you work directly with people who used agency services? \_\_\_\_\_ What was that like? Did you enjoy it? Why?

How well did you get along with:	Very Well	Okay	Not Very well
Supervisor	_____	_____	_____
Co-workers	_____	_____	_____
Clients	_____	_____	_____

Did you learn how to do some things that you had never done before? \_\_\_\_\_  
What were they?

Were there some skills you already had which you improved? \_\_\_\_\_ What were they?

By doing your job -- or by seeing the work that other people did -- did you become interested in anything you think you might like to do for full-time work?

Do you think this experience might be helpful to you in getting a paying job? \_\_\_\_\_.  
Why? Why not?

If yes, was experience: \_\_\_\_\_ very helpful \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat \_\_\_\_\_ not much.

Have you got a paying job since then? \_\_\_\_\_ Doing what?

In looking for work, did you tell potential employers about your volunteer work? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, what was their reaction? If no, why not?

Have you continued to volunteer after your time was up? \_\_\_\_\_. Doing what? For how long?

Overall, what was the best thing about the work you did?

What was the worst thing about it?

Overall, do you think the experience of community service work helped you in any way? What and Why?

Overall, \_\_\_\_\_ very helpful \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat helpful \_\_\_\_\_ not very helpful

COURT

When you were in court and the judge was deciding what to do with you, did you understand what he said? \_\_\_\_\_

Who explained to you what you had to do?

\_\_\_\_\_ parent \_\_\_\_\_ judge \_\_\_\_\_ PO \_\_\_\_\_ lawyer \_\_\_\_\_ YVA \_\_\_\_\_ other

Did you spend any time in detention on this charge? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what had a bigger impact on you? \_\_\_\_\_ detention \_\_\_\_\_ the work

Did you have to see a PO at all while you were doing community service? \_\_\_\_\_  
How often? What happened?

In making you do community service, do you think the judge was trying to:  
\_\_\_\_\_ help you? \_\_\_\_\_ punish you? \_\_\_\_\_ both? Mostly which? \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think that?

Do you think the sentence -- doing community service -- was: \_\_\_\_\_ very harsh  
\_\_\_\_\_ somewhat harsh \_\_\_\_\_ fair \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat lenient \_\_\_\_\_ very lenient?

Do you feel that you were punished: \_\_\_\_\_ a little \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat \_\_\_\_\_ very little.  
Explain.

Do you feel that you were helped: \_\_\_\_\_ a lot \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat \_\_\_\_\_ very little.  
Explain.

What were you told would happen to you if you didn't finish the program and if you did finish? What did happen?

Do you feel that by doing community service, your freedom was taken away?  
\_\_\_\_\_ a lot \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat \_\_\_\_\_ a little/not at all

Do you think that by doing community service, you paid your debt to society?  
\_\_\_\_\_ too much \_\_\_\_\_ just right \_\_\_\_\_ not enough

Do you think this is a good idea for kids who get into trouble? \_\_\_\_\_  
Why?

What was the best thing about being made to do community service as your  
"sentence?"

What was the worst thing?

Do you have any other comments about the court, the agency you worked at, the  
kind of work you did, or YVA?