

January 2005

The Federal Byrne Grant Youth Violence Prevention and Intervention Program  
Cross-Site Evaluation 2003-2004 Program Year

**Executive Summary  
TeamChild**

**Introduction**

TeamChild provides civil legal advocacy for youth who are involved in or at risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system. Many of the youth served by TeamChild are struggling with unmet needs for housing, medical treatment and educational services. Youth are referred to TeamChild because they face barriers to securing the support services they need. TeamChild staff performs a careful, targeted assessment of the needs of these youth and then works one-on-one with each youth to obtain the services they need.

TeamChild started in 1995 in King County and has successfully introduced its services in Pierce, Spokane, and Yakima Counties. In 2001, TeamChild applied for Byrne grant funding to replicate its program in Snohomish County. The Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee commissioned this cross-site evaluation to measure program performance of Byrne grant funded organizations operating in the field. This evaluation looks specifically at TeamChild's operations in Snohomish County and its impact on a youth's future criminal involvement.

TeamChild is effective in reducing a youth's juvenile court involvement. TeamChild has shown positive program impacts in all three years that it has been evaluated. The results for 2003 - 2004 are the most convincing with regard to the social value of the program.

**Program Characteristics**

TeamChild's goals are to address the underlying causes of youth violence and delinquency by using civil legal advocacy to increase a young person's access to medical treatment, education, housing and social service support in the community. The Snohomish County project set out to deliver targeted services to 60 to 100 youth each year. In each of its Byrne Grant funded years, TeamChild exceeded these targets and served more than 380 youth in Snohomish County since it started operations in the fall of 2001. In addition to directly serving youth, TeamChild works closely with the juvenile justice system, public defenders, and educational

**Summary of Findings**

In 2001 TeamChild received federal Byrne Grant funds to provide civil legal advocacy for youth who were involved in or at risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system. The goal of this evaluation was to determine whether TeamChild's work has an impact on a young person's future criminal involvement. We matched TeamChild's clients with a comparison group of youth and found that

- *TeamChild is effective in reducing a young person's juvenile court involvement.*
- *A dollar spent on TeamChild yields \$2.23 in criminal justice system savings. In less than 6 months, TeamChild program costs are paid back by the criminal justice savings produced by the program.*

and social service agencies in the community, county, and state. Good rapport and working relationships with these stakeholders are keys to TeamChild’s success, and the program’s work is complementary to, not competitive with, other agencies and organizations that serve these youth.

Referrals of youth come to TeamChild from the juvenile justice system and community providers. A TeamChild advocate performs a thorough assessment of the needs of a referred youth, and with the youth, determines the level and nature of civil legal advocacy needed. TeamChild then expends considerable effort to assure that the identified, needed services are actually delivered to the target youth. This study focused on cases where the level of advocacy involved active representation or brief services (Type A and B cases), and not those cases which involved advice or referral only (Type C cases).

To achieve the greatest possible measure of program effect, we matched TeamChild clients with a comparison group of youth from Washington State’s database of juvenile court involved youth. In addition to tracking juvenile court involvement, the database collects information gathered through a risk assessment tool developed by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy.<sup>1</sup> The following are characteristics of TeamChild clients and the matched comparison group:

<b>Independent or Control Variable</b>	<b>TeamChild Group</b>	<b>Matched Comparison Group</b>
Gender - male	93.8%	89.8%
Ethnicity - white	88.8%	85.2%
Alcohol contributed to criminal behavior	67.5%	70.4%
Drug use contributes to criminal behavior	76.3%	76.9%
One or more misdemeanors against a person	45.6%	40.7%
Pre screen risk (to re-offend) score (out of 31 points)	18.9 points	17.6 points

**Program Effects**

- *TeamChild is effective in reducing a young person’s juvenile court involvement.*

At six months post-program, the TeamChild participants are almost four times *less likely* to have criminal justice contacts than members of their matched comparison group.<sup>2</sup> At twelve months, they are 1.7 times *less likely* to have criminal justice contact.<sup>3</sup> At 18 months post-program, TeamChild participants were nine percent less likely to have criminal justice contacts than the comparison group<sup>4</sup> The trend of project effect over time is consistent with the observed trend in program effects of other social programs, such as subsidized

<sup>1</sup> The comparison group was matched on gender, ethnicity, age, criminal history score and social history score drawn from the Washington State Risk Assessment tool.

<sup>2</sup> This effect is *highly* statistically significant (probability level of .0008, Wald Chi-square test), meaning that there is an 8 in 10,000 chance that the net program effect is due to chance.

<sup>3</sup> The 12 month effect is statistically significant (probability level of .09, Wald Chi-square test), meaning that the chances are 9 in a 100 that the estimated net effect is due to chance.

<sup>4</sup> These 18 month results should be considered preliminary due to lack of statistical significance at conventional probability levels.

employment and training programs. Such a trend occurs since the further one moves away in time from the point of receipt of program services, the more do new life events overwhelm the program effect. An implication of this phenomenon is that these youth will require continuous services of some type to maintain the improvement in behavior desired by society. It is unlikely that there are *low cost, permanent, quick fixes* to complicated behavioral problems that have had years of time to develop in a child's life.

### Cost-Benefit Analysis

- *A dollar spent on TeamChild yields \$2.23 in criminal justice system savings. In less than 6 months, TeamChild program costs are paid back by the criminal justice savings produced by the program.*

These reduced levels of juvenile court contacts for TeamChild's Snohomish County participants were achieved with a program expenditure of \$753 per youth. The 9% (.09) reduction in juvenile court contact at 18 months<sup>5</sup> is consistent with the Washington State Institute for Public Policy's 1998 findings of TeamChild's impact and cost effectiveness. The Institute found that TeamChild produced a 6% (.06) reduction in felony convictions 18 month post-intervention, which netted a \$1,449 savings in criminal justice costs and a \$2,500 savings in future crime victim costs in 1998 dollars.<sup>6</sup> If these results hold for the 2003-2004 program year, then the savings, adjusted for inflation, are \$1,679 and \$2,897, respectively. In this evaluation, the weighted average cost per participant over the program evaluation period is \$753. In less than 6 months, TeamChild program costs are paid back by the criminal justice savings produced by the program. We calculated this payback period using the Institute's estimate of criminal justice costs avoided adjusted for inflation ( $753 / 1,679 = .448$ ). The cost/benefit ratio is 2.23 ( $1,679 / 753 = 2.229$ ), or a dollar spent on TeamChild yields \$2.23 in criminal justice system savings. This is a very high cost benefit ratio. Note, that even though program impact declines over time, the program pays back its costs during the follow-up period when program effects are statistically significant.

### Conclusion

TeamChild has shown positive program impacts in all three years that it has been evaluated. The results for 2003 - 2004 are the most convincing. First, there is a clear, practical, targeted treatment or service offered to a carefully triaged group of youth. Second, data collection has been of the highest quality, given all the problems on-going organizations have in maintaining program data. Third, the program effect is a measure of *revealed behavior*, how a child in fact actually behaves—not a second party's observation of what a child might or might not be doing, saying, or feeling. Fourth, we have a time-conditioned match of *TeamChild* youth with a comparison group of youth on a tested, pre-program, index of anti-social behavior that has been tested for its stability in predicting the risk to re-offend. Finally, we are working with highly accurate data from court records, using an official measure of recidivism. Sample size is small, but results for six and 12 months are positive and statistically significant.

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<sup>5</sup> As noted above, this effect is preliminary due to the lack of statistical significance at conventional probability levels.

<sup>6</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy, *Watching the Bottom Line: Cost-Effective Interventions for Reducing Crime in Washington*, January 1998.