Report: Youth assistance program working

BY PAT MURPIN'
STATY WRITE

It probably wasn't needed, but
the Oakland Youth Assistance
program has received a huge
vote of confidence.

A consulting firm — hired
after competitive bidding with
\$616,000 from the Skillman
Foundation — spent three years
evaluating youth assistance and
came to a conclusion:
It's working.
Youth assistance was initiated
by the Oakland County Probate
Court more than 40 years ago.
With the help of school districts,
local municipalities and volunteers, the program is aimed at
"at risk" youngaters.
There's no rigid definition for
the term "at risk." Some might
say helping kids" at risk." is a
way of preventing juvenile delinquency, according to Bill Waggoner, a stock broker who is
chair of the Troy Youth Assistance.
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quency, according to Bill Waggoner, a stock broker who is
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That loose definition, however,
may be part of the program's
success.

Basically, "at risk" generally
means any youngster who con
use some help.

"We don't wait for a referral,"
explained Southfield resident
Grenae Dudley, a psychologist a
tho Childeren'e Center in Detroit,
a provider of mental health services for youngsters. "We can
until the kid is in trouble."

Dudley said she got involved
about five years ago. She wrote a
letter to the Southfield mayor
that lead to her becoming part of
the Southfield Parent-Youth
Guidance Commission.
"I was investing in my kids
(then agos 6 and 8), "she said.

Over the years, youth assistance has helped thousands of
youngsters, mainly through volunteers. Currently, 1,600 youngsters are involved in the program with the assistance of more
than 1,000 volunteers.

"But we always need more volunteer," said Joan Bresett who,
with her husband Clint, has
been involved in youth assistunce in Orion Township for
about 20 years.

Not only does youth assistance

tance in Orion Township for nobut 20 years.
Not only does youth assistance need more volunteors, they should be more diverse, accord-ing to the evaluation conducted by Community Service Systems, Inc., of Ann Arbor.
The company was hired to take a close look at youth ser-



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vices and, as objectively as possi-ble, see if the program was work-ing as designed, according to Pamela S. Howitt, probate court deputy administrator. "It's the fourth such evaluation we've had in the eight years I've been here."

The evaluation told Howitt, other administrators and the probate judges they are on the right track in designing and implementing programs for atriek youngsters. "It's good to know we're reaching the people we want to reach," she said.

Howitt noted one impressive statistic: "Ninety-two percent of the youngsters we reach have no subsequent contact with the court."

About those volunteers.

About those volunteers.

The evaluation found that most volunteers are white females, over 30, who are well-educated and have lived in their respective communities for 20 years or longer. Youth assistance needs more minorities of varying ages, said Howitt, and more males."

Furthermore, the study concluded, there's a high turn-over rate among volunteers, 30 to 50 percent annually, and there's a

danger of burnout, especially when they to get involved in fund raising. Other findings included in the 900-page

when they are required

ings included in the 900-page report:

Poyerty is the single best way to predict that someone will be referred to the court system. Rich or affluent families have problems, and serious ones, flowitt said. But, possibly not as frequently as families beset with financial problems such as inadequate family income due to unemployment. Other factors—such as single-purent families and educational evels—also have a factor of the first of the factor of t

rate.
"The rate is only slightly higher," Howitt said, adding that it's a characteristic of Oakland

a characteristic ...
County.
• More affluent communities are perceived as having fewer problems.
• We don't know if that's an

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times, he said.
"It (the matching) was remarkably positive." VanDyke said.
"And it was fulfilling to be part of it."
Using volunteers, like himself, enables youth assistance to get maximum bang for the dollar in terms of efficiency, VanDyke said.

said.
With that kind of feedback, youth assistance might not have

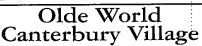
needed any evaluation from an outside consultant. But an objective analysis assures the court and volunteers — that they are on the right track toward helping youngsters and strongthening families, according to Howitt.

Breact cited an example of how the family education program was effective. She and her

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