

The READY Tool

A Youth Development Outcomes Measure

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Promoting positive youth outcomes is increasingly recognized as an important focus for youth serving organizations in order to both prevent negative outcomes and prepare youth to fully reach their potential. Youth serving programs need ways in which to measure the impact of their programs in order to provide quality services that meet the needs of youth. Measuring youth development outcomes, however, is challenging. By its nature, youth development is a broad concept that includes many different outcome and indicator areas. How these outcomes are defined can also vary depending on the source and the framework used. Existing surveys that measure positive youth outcomes or assets such as the Search Institute's Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors, can provide important information at a community level, but may be too detailed and lengthy for use in program evaluation. The **READY** Tool was developed to be a brief, easy to use program evaluation tool designed to measure four core youth development outcomes.

What is the READY Tool?

The Rochester Evaluation of Asset Development for Youth (**READY**) tool is an instrument designed to help youth serving programs evaluate the impact of their programs on youth development outcomes of participants. The instrument consists of 40 items which measure four core youth development outcomes along with program participation, connectedness to program, and socio-demographics. It is a self-report, pencil and paper survey designed to be completed by program participants ages 10 and older. The survey is written at a fourth grade reading level and takes, on average, about 10 – 15 minutes to complete.

The four core youth development outcomes measured by READY include:

1. Basic Social Skills
2. Caring Adult Relationships
3. Decision Making
4. Constructive Use of Leisure Time

Two of the four core outcomes listed in the box above include additional subcategories. Basic Social Skills includes measures related to communication, self control, and empathy, and Caring Adult Relationships includes staff relationships and program effect on other caring adult relationships.

Tool Administration and Report Details:

The tool is designed in a manner that allows programs to self-manage both administration of the survey and analysis of the data. The survey is included in Microsoft Word[®] format as part of an easy to use CD-ROM toolkit. This allows programs to personalize the survey by entering the program name and program staff titles prior to printing. The toolkit also includes data entry and analysis software created in Microsoft Excel[®]. Program staff can enter collected survey data, and the software program will automatically analyze the data and generate a program score report including frequencies and averages for each survey question, as well as summary scores ranging between 0 and 100 for each of the following youth development constructs:

- Self Control
- Communication
- Empathy
- Staff Relationships
- Decision Making
- Program Effect (Caring Adult Relationships)

The scores are also stratified by participants' self-reported length of involvement in program, intensity of participation, and connectedness to program. Summary data related to participants' leisure time activities are also included.

How and Why was the Tool Developed?

The **READY** Tool was developed in Monroe County, New York as a collaborative effort between the Rochester-Monroe County Youth Bureau, the United Way of Greater Rochester, the University of Rochester, Division of Adolescent Medicine, and a variety of youth serving agencies. Between 1999 and 2002, representatives from these entities participated in the Youth Development Outcomes Measurement Project that resulted in the development of the **READY** Tool. Participating community-based youth serving agencies and organizations included:

- Baden Street Settlement
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Rochester
- Boy Scouts of America, Otetiana Council
- Boys & Girls Club of Rochester
- The Center for Youth
- Charles Settlement
- Community Place of Greater Rochester
- Girl Scouts of Genesee Valley
- Hochstein Music School
- Southwest Area Neighborhood Association
- Urban League of Rochester
- YMCA of Greater Rochester

Early in this project, participants recognized that while positive youth development was a priority at a community level and at a programmatic level, there were no existing tools that allowed programs to easily evaluate their impact on youth development outcomes. The project participants identified a need for a youth development outcomes measurement instrument that would be easy to use, easy to administer, applicable to a variety of youth serving organizations, and useful for assessing program impact on youth development outcomes.

The team began by first identifying youth outcomes and indicators that would be important to measure. Using a consensus building process, the project team agreed upon four priority youth development outcomes that were applicable to a variety of youth serving programs and that were most important for ongoing program improvement. The core outcomes identified were basic social skills,

caring adult relationships, decision making, and constructive use of leisure time.

Survey questions were written and adapted from a variety of sources to measure the four core outcomes. Additional questions to measure socio-demographics, program participation, and program connectedness were also included in the survey. The first draft of the survey was piloted using cognitive interviews with 48 youth who were participating in various programs both in urban and suburban areas. Each young person was asked to complete the survey and was then interviewed by a research staff member to assess how the youth interpreted each question and the response options, to identify any wording that was difficult to understand, and to get feedback and suggestions. Based on the cognitive interviews and youth feedback, some questions were revised and some were eliminated all together. The next iteration of this survey was then field tested with 389 participants between the ages of 10 and 19 to test whether the instrument was feasible for use by youth serving programs, and whether it measured the four core outcomes. The field test demonstrated that the instrument could indeed be feasibly administered by staff at both drop-in and structured programs. Factor analyses of the data revealed that the items on the survey reliably measured the four core outcomes and related constructs.

For additional information on the development and psychometric properties of the tool please visit www.urmc.rochester.edu/gchas/div/adol/leah/resources.HTM.

What Programs Can Use READY, and How Can it be Used?

READY is appropriate for use by most programs that serve adolescents and that have an interest in measuring the four outcomes that the tool addresses. It can be used by both “drop-in” programs such as open recreation programs, and by more structured programs that include regular daily or weekly meetings. Administering the tool at predetermined intervals allows programs to track their scores on youth development constructs over time; **READY** is not intended to be administered as a pre/post survey.

The **READY** Tool and summary scores can be used for a variety of purposes. Tracking scores over time allows organizations to gauge what impact a program is having on participant outcomes. Score reports can be used for internal quality improvement purposes by identifying program strengths, as well as opportunities for improvement. The scores can also be used to identify

“Get READY” in Erie County, New York

Susan Morisson, Director, ACT for Youth of Erie County

The READY Tool Project has clearly become an integral part of the ACT for Youth Initiative in Erie County. It has provided an important vehicle for our Partnership to unify key community stakeholders, including government, education, non-profit and faith-based youth providers and diverse funding sources, around a research-based, data-driven, outcome-focused approach and common performance indicators.

History and Successes: When Erie 1 BOCES, the ACT lead agency, brought the READY Tool to its CDP in 2003, two ACT CORE Partners, Erie County Youth Services and the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, major funders of local youth services, expressed interest in the Tool since they quickly realized that the Tool could provide them with validated data to assess agency programming, something they never had before. Soon, Erie County Youth Services made the READY a requirement of its nearly 50 agencies, and the United Way also strongly encouraged its agencies to use the tool. Another CORE

“The data generated by the READY Tool has enabled us to secure additional funding by being able to demonstrate “need” in certain target areas. We were able to generate nearly \$100,000 of additional funding from private foundations after our County funding was cut.”

- Youth Agency

Partner, the Amherst Youth Board and the Municipal Youth Boards and Youth Bureaus, advocated for local youth bureaus to use the tool as well. Currently, over 75 agencies in Erie County administer the READY Tool regularly and word of the READY Tool has quickly spread throughout our community. Both funders and providers have approached us to learn how they can become part of the project. For example, early this year, the Buffalo Board of Education, another CORE ACT Partner, which is working to establish accountability measures to ensure supportive learning environments for its students, has asked to be included in the Project. By the end of 2006, ACT plans to have an additional 75 in-school and after-school providers in the Buffalo Schools trained in the effective use of the READY Tool, as well as engaged in the positive youth development strategies that will contribute to supportive learning environments.

“Most importantly, the READY Tool helped us, the administration and staff to understand our kids better. I never knew some of these things about them. I think this information and the insight that results from it will help us to connect with our kids better.”

- Youth Agency

“The READY Tool is really a gift to our community. It enables us to make a major stride toward becoming research-based, data-driven and outcome focused in our efforts to serve youth. I feel like we aren’t just scatter-shooting anymore.”

- ACT Core Partner

After, the initial READY Score Reports were generated, it became apparent that participating agencies needed capacity building in several areas targeted by the Tool. As a result, working with the University of Rochester, ACT for Youth at Erie 1 BOCES developed a continuous improvement planning process specific to the READY Tool for participating agencies to utilize. With support from Erie County Youth Services, ACT also began providing ongoing training and technical assistance to support agencies in successfully implementing this continuous improvement

planning process at the program and organizational level. For example, last year BOCES and ACT provided training on “Youth Voice and Adult/Youth Partnership” since READY revealed that this was a common area of weakness among participating agencies. The on-going data generated by the READY Tool continues to inform the training and development agenda of our ACT Partnership, as well as to enhance our collaborative efforts to better serve youth.

training and technical assistance needs. Programs may also choose to use **READY** data to both demonstrate effectiveness to funders and to seek out additional funding sources for youth development focused programming.

How Can Funders Use the READY Tool?

Funders of youth serving programs, particularly community funders, can use the tool to track community wide progress towards positive youth outcomes. Scores on the measured constructs can help funders identify community best practices along with possible training and technical assistance needs. Data can also be aggregated to create community wide benchmarks.

What Does it Take to Use READY?

Implementation training, ongoing technical assistance, and use of the **READY** toolkit are available to interested users through the University of Rochester, Division of Adolescent Medicine and the ACT for Youth Center of Excellence. Fees are based on the number of users and the level of training and technical assistance (TA) required. Options include:

1. Implementation training and TA provided directly to end user organizations.
2. Implementation training provided for end users, and continuous training and TA provided to a lead agency which agrees to provide direct TA to a group of end users.

To learn more about the READY Tool please visit:

www.urmc.rochester.edu/gchas/div/adol/leah/resources.HTM **OR** www.actforyouth.net

Or refer to:

- 1) Klein JD, Sabaratnam P, Matos M, Smith SM, Kodjo C, Lewis C, Ryan S, Dandino C. Development and factor structure of a brief instrument to assess the impact of community programs on positive youth development: The Rochester Evaluation of Asset Development for Youth (READY) tool. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, in press.
- 2) Sabaratnam P, Klein JD. Measuring youth development outcomes for community program evaluation and quality improvement: Findings from dissemination of the Rochester Evaluation of Asset Development for Youth (READY) Tool. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, in press.

The Center of Excellence invites you to visit the ACT for Youth website where additional copies of this newsletter and many other youth development resources are available.

www.actforyouth.net



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