



Pima YOUTH Partnership/ Our Elders' Truth

Strengthening Families in the Rural Southwest (1999-2001)

Pima YOUTH Partnership, in collaboration with youth, families, and residents of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, conducted a community driven planning process to select and implement a culturally-appropriate best practices family strengthening program. The *Strengthening Families in the Rural Southwest* project **targeted youth who have been suspended** from school and their parents living on the New Pascua Yaqui Reservation, which is a semi-rural area located in the Sonoran Desert, 15 miles southwest of Tucson, Arizona.

The **purpose** of the *Strengthening Families* project was to: ❶ increase the capacity of community members by forming a community coalition to deliver best practices in effective parenting and family programs in order to reduce or prevent substance abuse; ❷ to document the decision-making processes of the CORE community coalition to select and test an effective, best practices, family strengthening model in a large rural community; and ❸ to determine the impact of the selected strengthening families program on families whose children have been suspended from school.



The **goals** of the *Strengthening Families* project were to: ❶ increase family strengths, ❷ decrease the use and abuse of substances, and ❸ delay the onset of substance use and abuse.

Evaluation Outcomes: A non-experimental, pre/post/follow-up test design was used to measure program outcomes.

Parents in the program showed a *statistically significant* ($p < .05$) increase in *fifteen of the 20 behaviors* from before to completion of the seven sessions. These significant increases in frequency of a behavior were:

Wait to deal with problems with my child until I have cooled down;
Say, "I love you" to my child;
Give compliments and special rewards when my youth follows the rules;
Follow through with consequences each time he or she breaks the rules;
Spend special time one-on-one with my youth;
Let my youth know the reason for the rules we have;
Listen to my youth when he or she is upset;
Have a regular time for homework;

Work together with my youth to solve problems that come up at home;
Try to see things from my youth's point of view;
Help my youth figure out how to solve problems at school and with friends;
Let my child know specifically what I expect regarding alcohol and drug use;
Take time to do something fun together as a family;
Give points and rewards when my child learns to follow a rule or do a chore at home;
I show my child love and respect.

Youth in the program showed statistically significant ($p < .05$) increases in *nine of 14 behaviors*. These increases were:

I know one step to take to reach my goals;
I do things to help me feel better when I am under stress;
I appreciate the things my parent(s)/ care giver(s) do for me;
I use the Peer Pressure Steps when I'm pressured to get into trouble;
We have family meetings to discuss plans, schedules, and rules;

I know how to tell when I am under stress;
I understand the values and beliefs my family has;
My parent(s)/care giver(s) and I can sit down together to work on a problem without yelling or getting mad;
I know the things needed in a good friend.

Lessons Learned: We learned several lessons throughout the project. These include:

- Community conditions change from proposal time to award time. It is always important to have a plan and one must be willing to change it — sometimes quickly.
- Staff who work directly with the families must have persistence because recruiting is very difficult.
- Staff must be very flexible. We had to have smaller cohorts to accommodate the schedules of families, and even though staff began offering multiple sessions at various times throughout the week, a few families could not consistently attend.
- Knowledge of the community and culture is critical for success. It's very important to have an understanding of the local politics.
- Frequent information sharing with key stakeholders (e.g., Tribal Council, schools) is critical.
- Working with existing coalitions helps move things along more quickly, but it is sometimes harder to recruit new families.
- On-going training of staff and the coalition is important.