

## Communities That Care Returns \$5.30 per Dollar Invested by Preventing Youth Substance Use and Delinquency

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In the current fiscal climate, policymakers need to know which prevention programs are good investments of public dollars. A recent study by researchers at the Social Development Research Group shows that *Communities That Care*, a community-wide prevention system aimed at reducing substance use, delinquency, and violence in youth, is a cost-beneficial investment, returning \$5.30 per dollar invested.

The research was conducted as part of the Community Youth Development Study, a longitudinal randomized controlled trial testing the efficacy of *Communities That Care* being conducted by investigators at SDRG (Principal Investigator: J. David Hawkins). Twenty-four communities from seven states across the United States have participated in the trial since 2003. Half of the communities were randomly assigned to implement CTC and half to serve as controls.

In CTC communities, a broad-based coalition of key stakeholders learned to use youth surveys to identify problematic levels of risk factors, protective factors, and problem behaviors in their own communities, prioritize 2 to 5 risk and protective factors for improvement, and implement scientifically tested and effective prevention programs as a way to address identified needs.

### Key Findings

CTC significantly prevented the initiation of cigarette smoking, alcohol use, and delinquency in Grade 8 youth. CTC youth were:

- 33% less likely to start smoking cigarettes
- 32% less likely to start drinking
- 24% less likely to start engaging in delinquency

These reductions have long-term financial benefits:

- \$812 per youth related to the prevention of cigarette smoking
- \$4,438 per youth related to delinquency prevention
- Alcohol use reductions have not been monetized yet

CTC is estimated to generate \$5.30 per dollar invested.

SDRG's cost-benefit analysis is based on significant CTC effects observed in a panel of youth surveyed annually starting in Grade 5. When panel youth were in Grade 8, youth exposed to CTC were 33% less likely to initiate cigarette smoking and 24% less likely to initiate delinquent behavior compared to Grade 8 youth not exposed.

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#### MISSION of SDRG

To understand and promote healthy behaviors and positive social development among diverse populations, we:

- ◆ conduct research on factors that influence development;
- ◆ develop and test the effectiveness of interventions;
- ◆ study service systems and work to improve them;
- ◆ advocate for science-based solutions to health and behavior problems; and
- ◆ disseminate knowledge, tools, and expertise produced by this research.

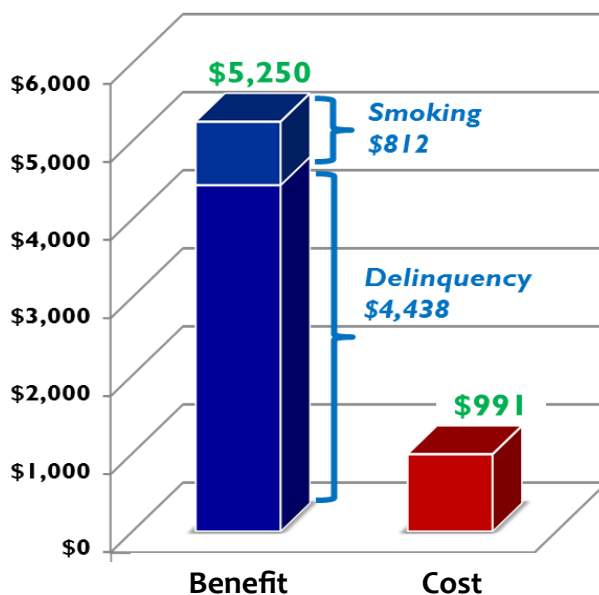
These significant intervention-related outcomes have long-term financial benefit to CTC participants, taxpayers, and the general public.

Models developed by Steve Aos and colleagues at the Washington State Institute for Public Policy were used in the analysis, which is detailed in the article referenced below. In summary, researchers compared the cost of implementing CTC over 5 years to the financial benefits stemming from reductions in cigarette smoking and delinquency initiation. Alcohol use findings will be monetized at a later date. Communities spent an average of \$991 per youth over 5 years. Most communities spent significantly less, roughly \$513 per youth for 5 years. Approximately 37% of total funds spent went towards a CTC coordinator and the coalition; 35% to prevention programming; 23% to CTC training, technical assistance, and monitoring; and 4% to miscellaneous expenses.

These investments were more than offset by CTC's estimated financial benefits over the near and long term. Preventing youth cigarette smoking was expected to generate \$812 per youth through reductions in adult cigarette smoking and related increases in earnings and taxes and decreases in medical expenses. Preventing youth delinquency was expected to lead to a benefit of \$4,438 per youth because of reductions in criminal justice system and crime victim costs. Total benefits were estimated at \$5,250 per youth, with \$671 accruing to participants, \$2,173 to taxpayers, and \$2,405 to the general public.

When benefits and costs were compared, SDRG researchers estimated that CTC generated \$4,259 in net present benefits per youth, or \$5.30 per dollar invested. These results place CTC in the category of preventive interventions that enhance positive youth development *and* are good investments of public dollars.

### Long-Term Benefit Per Youth Versus Cost Per Youth of Investing in Communities That Care for 5 Years



For additional information on this topic, refer to the original article:

Kuklinski, M. R., Briney, J. S., Hawkins, J. D., & Catalano, R. F. (in press) Cost-benefit analysis of Communities That Care outcomes at eighth grade. *Prevention Science*, online first Nov 23, 2011; doi:10.1007/s11121-011-0269-9.