



Look Up and Hope

Fourth annual progress report

Over the past four years, Volunteers of America, with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, has implemented a strategic initiative to improve the lives of families impacted by maternal incarceration.

This multi-site initiative, called Look Up and Hope, takes a comprehensive approach to working with families in which the mother is involved with the criminal justice system.

To evaluate the impact that Look Up and Hope has on participating families, Volunteers of America contracted with Wilder Research, which has been providing research and evaluation support since the program began in 2009. Below are highlighted outcomes from Wilder Research's fourth year of data collection; this includes information on the initiative's status from January to December 2013.

New reporting and data limitations

It should be noted that this year's outcomes report is briefer and focuses on fewer metrics than the outcomes reports in previous years. There are two reasons for this. First and foremost, in early 2014, staff from Volunteers of America and Wilder Research agreed that it would be useful to have a shorter, more targeted, and less repetitive evaluation report in the final years of the Look Up and Hope project. In an effort to respond to changing needs, Wilder Research has moved to this briefer annual reporting format and introduced a new, more user-friendly, "infographic," which highlights data from this year. A copy of the infographic is appended to this progress report.

Secondly, Wilder Research was also provided with a slightly smaller data set for analysis in 2014 than in previous years. This may, in part, be attributable to staffing changes that occurred at all three of the Look Up and Hope pilot sites in 2014 and to the temporary disruption and relocation of the Texas pilot program in 2014—all of which made it difficult for staff to actively recruit new Look Up and Hope clients this year. Some of the demographic data collection and outcomes reporting on Indiana's clients were also significantly delayed this year, because the site became involved in pilot testing a complex, new online client data system, which is still undergoing development and refinement.

These emerging issues and challenges related to data collection and reporting were extensively discussed by Look Up and Hope staff during a two-day long strategic planning session held in Indiana in December 2014. Plans are now underway to ensure that a more complete and robust data set is available in the final year of the pilot project.

It is critical to note that none of the changes or analytical challenges cited above appear to have significantly affected the Look Up and Hope program's overall evaluation findings. As in previous years, the program served a diverse set of high-needs families, and its clients reported improved outcomes in several areas.

Who are Look Up and Hope families?

Incarcerated mothers

- Since 2009, 159 incarcerated mothers have enrolled in the Look Up and Hope program.
- 90% were under 40 years old when they enrolled and 57% were women of color; although, race and ethnicity data were missing for 7% of women.

Children

- Since the beginning of the program, 238 children have participated in Look Up and Hope.
- Half (50%) are female and most are African American (63%); however, gender and race data were missing for 10% of children each, and age data were missing for 57% of children.

Caregivers

- 128 caregivers have enrolled in Look Up and Hope since its beginning.
- Caregivers are mostly female (73%). Age data were missing for 46% of caregivers and race/ethnicity data were missing for 18% of caregivers.

How are Look Up and Hope families doing?

Based on the data analyzed for the fourth annual evaluation, the Look Up and Hope program continues to make progress in achieving many of its key outcomes, but also has some challenges that need to be addressed.

Successes

- **Program status:** 57% of mothers received services from Look Up and Hope in 2013 (an increase from 43% in 2012), while 21% had completed the program. Only 12% had dropped

out of the program, which is a decrease from 20% in 2012. (Program status was categorized as “other” for 7% of mothers.)

- **Parent education:** 88% of mothers received formal parenting education or training (an increase from 76% in 2012). For those who had received this training, 95% improved their parenting knowledge (as reported by family coaches), and 41% demonstrated increased knowledge on a post-training survey (an increase from 32% in 2012).
- **Criminal activity:** Three-quarters of mothers had not engaged in a new criminal activity, and, of those who did (24%), none were arrested or convicted.
- **School attendance:** 70% of school-age children were reported to have “good” attendance; 24% had “fair” attendance and 6% had “poor” attendance.
- **School performance:** 48% of school-age children were reported to have improved their grades since the last assessment; 45% maintained their grades, and 7% were reported to have worse grades.

Challenges

In addition to the outcomes listed above, there are a few areas that saw slightly less positive outcomes or decreases from last year’s report. While many clients are doing well in these areas, it is important for both Wilder Research and Volunteers of America staff to take note; some of these decreases may be due to incomplete or inaccurate data.

- **Relationships:** 67% of children were reported to have an improved relationship with their mother; however this is down from 83% in 2012. 76% of mothers reported changes in contact with their children; for those who have experienced a change, 50% *increased* contact with their children and 25% are now living with or have been reunified with their children. (However, reunification is down from 32% in 2012.) One in five (21%) reported less or no contact with their children.
- **Employment:** Of the mothers who experienced a change to their employment status (69%), 35% reported being employed, but then losing their job (compared to 6% in 2012). On the other hand, of those who experienced a change in status, 41% were unemployed but secured a job, and 21% secured an additional job or changed their job, but remained employed.
- **Extracurricular activities:** 33% of children were reported to have increased their level of involvement in structured or extracurricular activities (a decrease from 45% in 2012).
- **Reentry planning:** The analysis of 2013 data showed that only 38% of women released, or about to be released, had a formal reentry plan, although data were missing for 17% of clients. This is a drop from 71% in 2012, which was already considered low given that it is a

requirement of the program that each family prepare a family-centered reentry plan. In a recent meeting with Look Up and Hope staff, it was discovered that there has been some confusion around question wording on the follow-up assessment, which is most likely contributing to the low numbers of plans being reported.

Program recommendations

Based on the outcome data available, as well as a process evaluation conducted in late 2014, Wilder recommends the following specific program improvements, which will help maintain the work Volunteers of America is doing and strengthen areas that need further attention.

- **Streamline data collection procedures and review question wording to avoid confusion.** Formalizing data collection methods, including giving staff clear guidelines (that are enforced) for collecting, entering, and sharing the data, is important. This will help use staff time more efficiently and ensure that the most complete and accurate data possible are being given to Wilder Research for analysis. Volunteers of America is already working on this by forming a Data Committee. Committee members, including Volunteers of America and Wilder Research staff, will standardize data collection procedures and clarify any questions that staff identify as confusing, such as the question on reentry planning.
- **Continue work on the Look Up and Hope Implementation Toolkit.** Given that the Look Up and Hope program has reached the end of the pilot phase, it is important to introduce and maintain a solid program structure, complete with documentation, especially for new staff. This may help to decrease some of the frustration that new staff members feel and ultimately decrease turnover.
- **Hire support staff who can take some of the burden off of family coaches.** Family coaches have mentioned that it would be helpful to have some extra support for activities that are not directly related to serving their families, such as help with data entry. Supporting staff with strong leadership and the resources necessary to do the work is integral to the future existence of Look Up and Hope.

In addition, the following recommendations were reported in 2013, but are still applicable:

- **Provide more emotional supports for caregivers, many of whom suffer from exhaustion or stress-related issues.** Sites should continue to link caregivers to faith-based and community-based organizations (which may help to combat isolation) and provide them with respite care, caregiver support groups, and caregiver appreciation events. It is especially important for sites to focus efforts on caregivers who do not report any informal assistance at intake, as they are less likely to find new sources of support at follow-up. Volunteers of America may want to begin looking at measures of social isolation and target services towards the most isolated of caregivers.

- **Focus specifically on rebuilding the relationship between parents and caregivers, which is often a great source of stress among families.** Volunteers of America staff may be able to develop co-parenting strategies that can be sustained after the mother is released.
- **Consider collecting more concrete substance abuse data, such as drug test results and reports of usage within the last 30 days.** At the moment, substance-abuse related outcomes are tracked largely through the self-reported progress of mothers at follow-up.
- **Provide more targeted, age-appropriate services to participating children.** Since the beginning of the program, the data have shown that older children lag behind elementary school students in increasing their connections to adults and peers outside the family and involvement in educational and extracurricular activities. Having school performance data available will be helpful in determining how children are progressing and in identifying possible steps to improve academic performance.
- **Point caregivers towards Head Start services, since they are free to families.** Very few caregivers are currently taking advantage of Head Start.
- **Begin thinking about interventions for children who exhibit extreme behavioral issues.** Even though children with serious behavioral problems are in the minority, they tend to show very little improvement throughout the program. This suggests that more or different services are needed for these children.

Considerations for future reporting:

- **Conduct a Return on Investment study** to provide a cost-benefit analysis of the program.
- **Analyze and report** on program and outcome data from all five years of the program.

With these recommended program improvements and expansions, the Look Up and Hope program will continue to build upon the impressive short-term results it has already achieved with many clients, making it possible for incarcerated women, their children, and their families to flourish and succeed not just for a few months or years, but for generations to come.

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JANUARY 2015



Look Up and Hope program

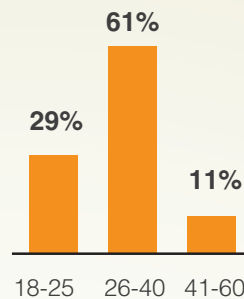
2013: Highlights from the 4th year of data collection

Look Up and Hope (LUH) is Volunteers of America's strategic, multi-site initiative to improve the lives of families impacted by maternal incarceration. Since the program began in 2009, LUH has been piloted in five states and has served 525 people, including 159 mothers, 238 children, and 128 Caregivers.

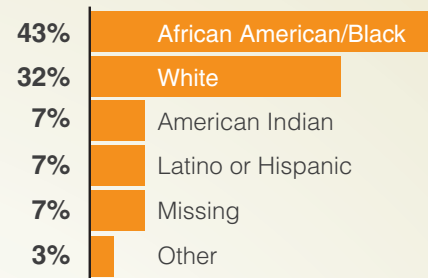
This document highlights available outcome data for the families who were actively participating in Look Up and Hope in 2013.

Demographics of new participants: Mothers (N=28)

Mother's Age

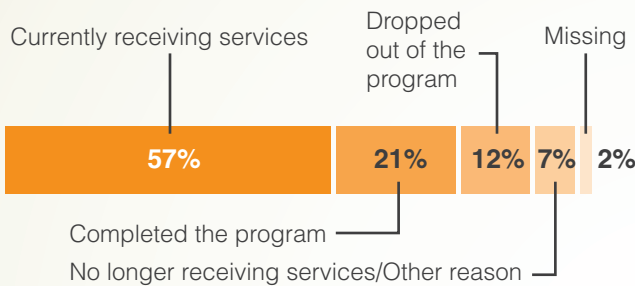


Mother's Race/Ethnicity



Outcomes of mothers who were active in the program in year 4 (N=46)

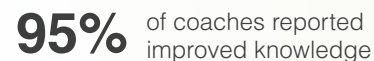
Program status



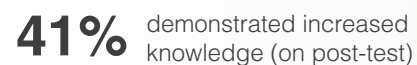
Parent education at follow up



of those who received training . . .



and



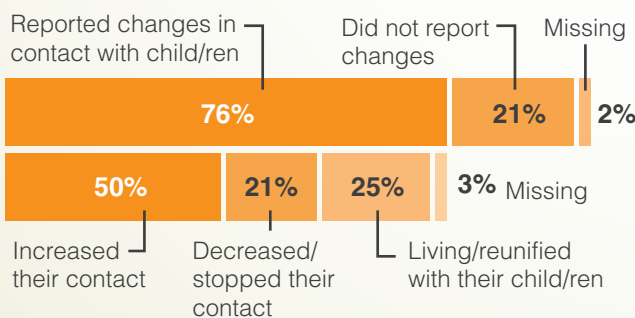
New criminal activity

Nearly **3 in 4**

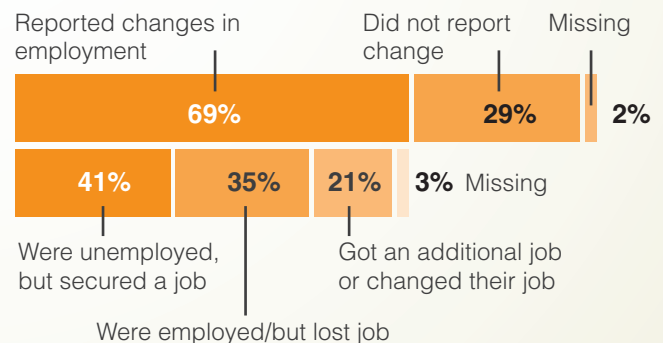


did not report engaging in new criminal activity. None of the participants were arrested or convicted of a new crime during the reporting period.

Mother's contact with child/ren



Employment



Due to rounding, all charts do not equal 100%



Look Up and Hope program

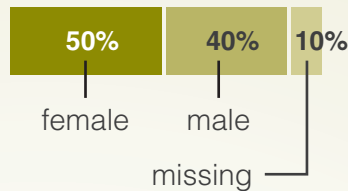
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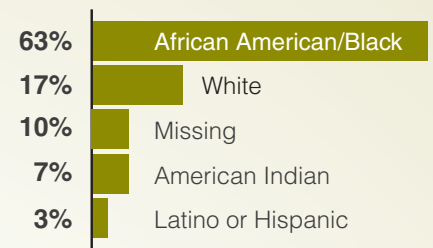
This document highlights available outcome data for the families who were actively participating in Look Up and Hope in 2013.

Demographics of new participants: Child/ren (N=30)

Children's Gender



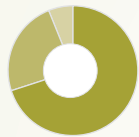
Children's Race/Ethnicity



Outcomes of child/ren who were active in the program in year 4 (N=46)

School and behavior

Attendance



Of school-aged child/ren, **70%** reported good attendance; 24% fair attendance and only 6% reported poor attendance or that they dropped out.

Grades



Of school-aged child/ren, **48%** reported improved grades, 45% reported maintained grades and only 7% reported grades were getting worse.

Involvement



67% reported their extracurricular activities stayed the same.

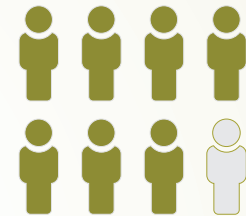
Behavior



74% did not report developing a new behavioral problem; 9% reported a new behavioral problem; 7% were missing.

Child/ren's health

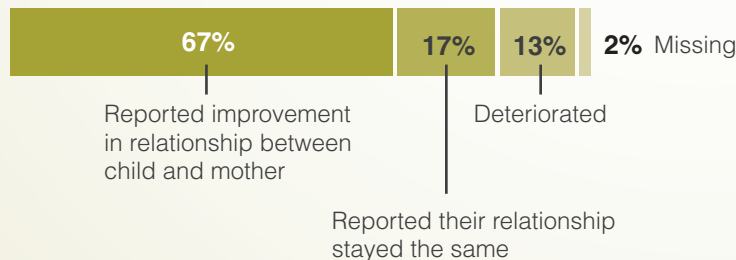
Just under **7 in 8**



reported no changes in child's physical or emotional health.

Of those who reported examples, half noted that reunification with mom seemed to have improved emotional health.

Child/ren's contact and relationship with parent and other adults



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Additional outcomes may be analyzed in future reports.