

**Virtual Residential Program[®]
Program Evaluation
Outcome Summary 2002-2004**

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Evaluation Summary

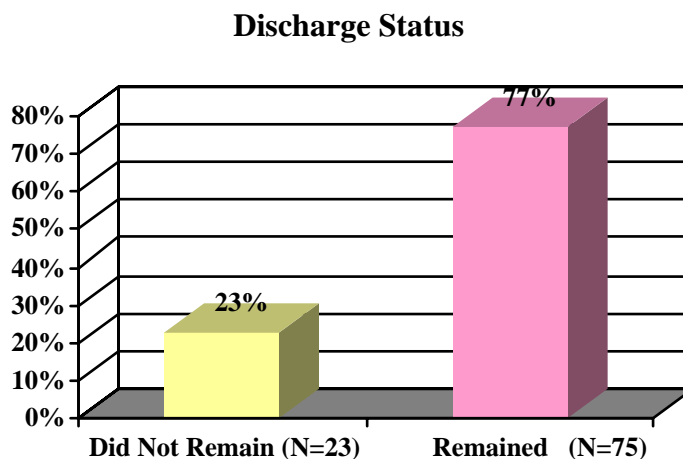
This report summarizes the results of an exploratory program evaluation of the Virtual Residential Program[®].ⁱ Consistent with the call for community-based, least-restrictive alternatives, Providence Service Corporation's Virtual Residential Program[®] was created to meet the needs of an underserved subset of children and adolescents with mental illnesses --those with emotional disturbances so severe that they are at imminent risk of out-of-home placement. VRP[®] is a family-centered and strength-based intervention that combines the structure of residential programs with the benefits of in-home efficacy. Utilizing a mix of theoretical perspectives and therapies, VRP[®] targets multiple-determinates of problems faced by the youth and their families. VRP[®] provides families, schools, and communities with a diversion alternative to unnecessary out-of-home placements and/or to expedite successful step-down of youth following residential or psychiatric placements.ⁱⁱ

Because VRP[®] has a commitment to program evaluation, I was contracted to do an analysis of data they had collected. The data used in this analysis were from an Outcome Summary. The Outcome Summary had 24, forced-choice questions that were completed by the VRP[®] professionals when the VRP[®] clients were discharged from the program. Data from the Outcome Summary for 98 Virtual Residential Program[®] clients were used in the analysis. The discharge status of the clients was used as the measure of program effectiveness throughout this report. At discharge, clients could either remain in the community or not remain in the community.

Two primary research questions were explored in this research.

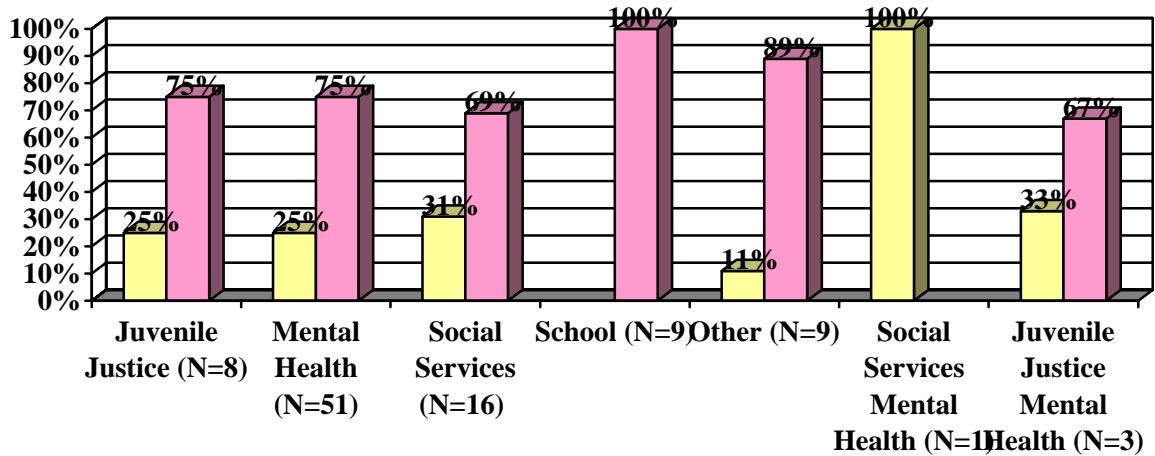
1. What percentage of clients remained in the community at the termination of VRP[®] services?
2. Were the percentages of clients that remained in the community at discharge from the Virtual Residential Program[®] similar for diverse groups?

Using discharge status as the measure of program effectiveness, the major conclusion of this evaluation is that the Virtual Residential Program[®] provided a highly effective service. An impressive seventy-seven percent (77%) of the 98 clients remained in the community at the termination of VRP[®] services. The percentages were similar for the four states with VRP[®].



Primary Referral Source and Discharge Status

■ Did Not Remain
■ Remained



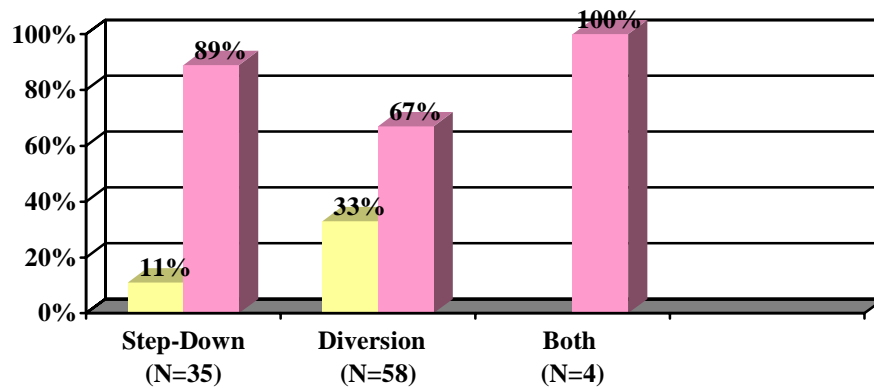
Type of Referral and Discharge Status

Referrals for Virtual Residential come from many, and often multiple sources. There is some variation in rates of remaining in the community by type of primary referral agency.

Differences between the percentages of clients that remained in the community were seen for other client groupings. For example, **a larger percentage of clients referred for the purpose of step-down remained in the community** than the percentage that remained for clients referred for the purpose of diversion.

Purpose of Referral and Discharge Status

■ Did Not Remain
■ Remained

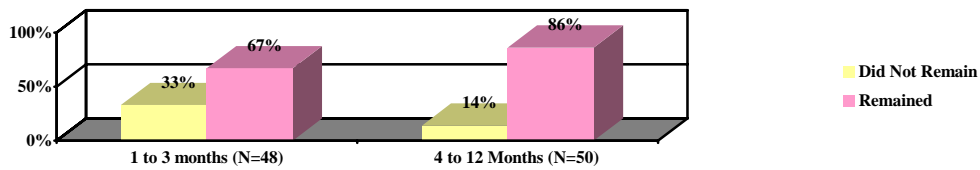


Length of Stay

VRP[®] length of service and discharge status was statistically significantly related.ⁱⁱⁱ Eighty-six percent of clients who received VRP[®] services for four or more months remained in the community, while 67% who received services for less than four months remained.

VRP[®] provided an effective service in a relatively short amount of time for many clients when discharge status is used as the measure of effectiveness.

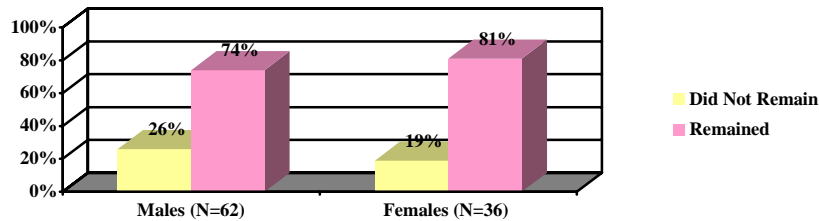
Dichotomized Length of Service and Discharge Status for All Clients



Gender

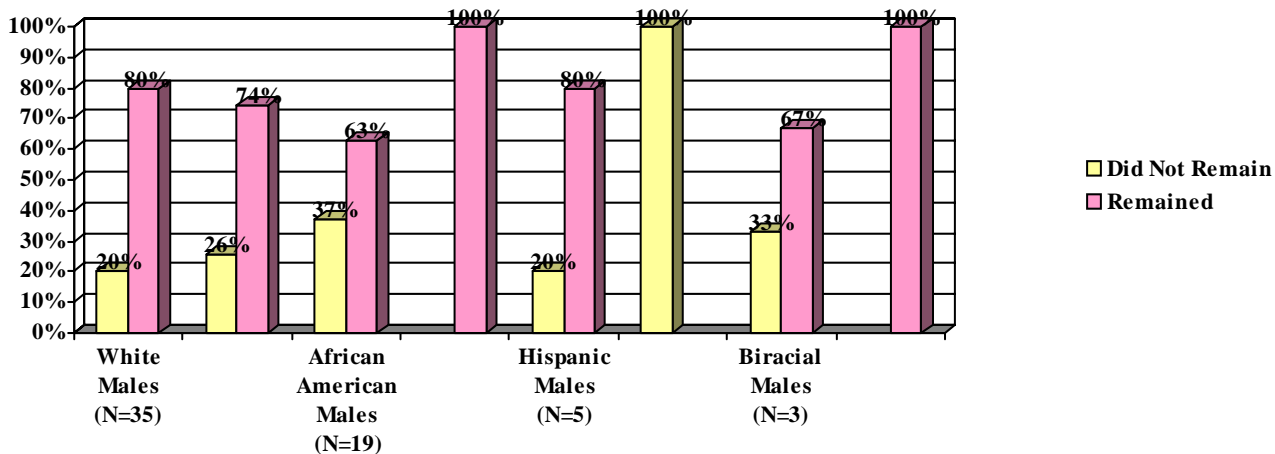
Similar percentages of clients remained in the community for most of the different demographic groups, indicating that the Virtual Residential Program[®] served diverse client groups equally well. For example, **male and female clients remained in the community at approximately the same rate.**

Gender and Discharge Status



The rates of those who remained in the community were similar for race/ethnic groups, for the four states that provided services, and for clients with and without a history of contact with the juvenile justice system

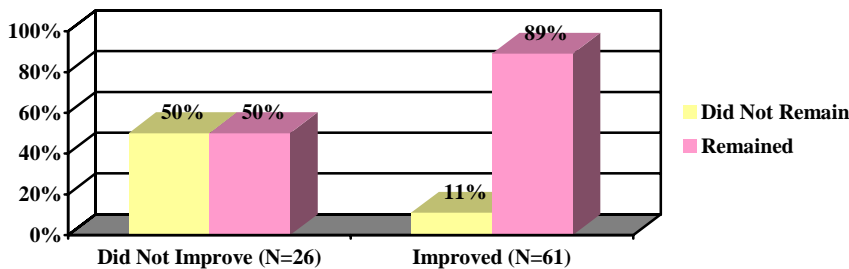
Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Discharge Status



School

Clients that improved their school attendance/grades while receiving VRP services remained in the community at a much higher rate than clients that did not improve their school attendance/grades. **The relationship between improvement in school attendance/grades and discharge status was strong and statistically significant.** Eighty-nine percent of the clients who improved their school attendance/grades remained in the community.

School Grades/Attendance and Discharge Status



The overall conclusion is that when discharge status is used as the measure of program effectiveness, the **Virtual Residential Program[®] was highly successful in meeting its primary goal of preventing out-of-home placement.** With some exceptions, the **Virtual Residential Program[®] served diverse groups of clients equally well.**

Summary

This analysis was guided by two research questions. First, what percentage of clients remained in the community at the termination of VRP[®] services? Second, were the percentages of clients that remained in the community at the termination of VRP[®] services similar for diverse groups?

The answer to the first research question is straightforward. Seventy-seven percent of the clients remained in the community at the termination of services. Using discharge status as the measure of effectiveness, I conclude that VRP[®] was extremely successful at meeting its primary goals of diverting out-of-home placement and facilitating step-down from residential programs and psychiatric hospitals.

The answer to the second research question is more complex. The analyses revealed that similar percentages of clients remained in the community for many groups of clients. The rates of remaining in the community were similar for males and females, for race/ethnic groups, for the four states that provided services, and for clients with and without a history of contact with the juvenile justice system.^{iv} Based on this evidence, I conclude that VRP[®] served many diverse groups of clients equally well.

However, differences between the percentages of clients remaining in the community were seen for some client groupings. For example, a larger percentage of clients referred for the purpose of step-down remained in the community than the percentage that remained for clients referred for the purpose of diversion. Not all age groups of clients remained in the community at the same rate. The percentages of clients that remained in the community varied by length of service.

The answer to the second research question is even more complex when the relationship between different factors and discharge status were examined for different subgroups of clients. For example, although length of service and discharge status appeared to be related, a subgroup analysis revealed that length of service and discharge status was statistically significantly related only for African American male clients and clients that were 15 to 18-years old. Thus, it is an overstatement to conclude that length of service was related to discharge status. Using discharge status as the measure of effectiveness and basing conclusions on statistical tests, a more accurate statement is that VRP[®] was as equally effective for clients who received services from one to three months as it was for clients who received services for four or more months, except for African American males and clients who were 15 to 18-years old. Similar qualifiers are needed for other factors related to discharge status.

It is also a mistake to conclude that VRP[®] was not as effective for African American male clients as it was for other subgroups of clients. Under some conditions, African male clients differed little from other clients in their discharge rate. For example, when African American male clients received services from four to 12 months, they remained in the community at similar rates as other groups; they remained at lower rates than other clients when they received services for one to three months.

Although some qualification is needed, the relationship between school attendance/grades and discharge status was robust. In addition, in a series of multivariate analyses not shown in this document, school attendance/grades had the strongest relationship with discharge status. Purpose of referral was also related under some conditions. Other factors used in this report were less important.

A surprising finding was the lack of a consistent pattern across age groups. Clients who were 14-years old remained in the community at lower rates than other groups. Under some conditions, the younger clients fared better than other clients; in other instances, the older clients remained in the community at higher rates.

Four recommendations result from this analysis. First, the relationship between school attendance/grades and discharge status was strong, implying that increased attention to the integration of the school system and the educational needs of the clients may lead to even better outcomes. Second, identification of factors that detract from successful outcomes for clients referred for diversion might help reduce the disparities between this group and clients referred for step-down. Third, gaining insight as to why the ages of the clients were related in such complex ways to other factors might lead to programmatic changes and more consistent outcomes across age groups. Finally, the most important recommendation for the Virtual Residential Program[®] is to deviate little from current practices. Given the high percentage of clients that remained in the community at the termination of services, clearly the Virtual Residential Program[®] provided a much needed and highly effective service for youth with severe mental illnesses and their families.

ⁱ This report is a summary of a much larger evaluation. A copy of the full report is available from the author.

ⁱⁱ Information adapted from VRP[®] promotional materials (2003).

ⁱⁱⁱ Length of service is categorized into two groups in this report to simplify the presentation. In the full report, when length of service is not dichotomized, the conclusions are substantively the same as presented here.

^{iv} Some information provided in this summary is based on analyses presented in the full report.