Prevention scientists have demonstrated that efficacious interventions can reduce risk and promote positive development in youth (Spoth, Kavanagh, & Dishion, 2002). Building the knowledge and expertise of local stakeholders is considered an important benchmark for implementing and sustaining evidence-based programs (Wandersman et al., 2008; Livet & Wandersman, 2005). Projects that aid communities in the adoption and implementation of prevention systems have demonstrated the value of building capacity as a means to support program dissemination (Hawkins, et al., 2009).

There is a paucity of evidence that technical assistance leads local stakeholders to improved knowledge regarding the selection, implementation, and evaluation of evidence-based programs (e.g., Brown, Hawkins, Arthur, Briney & Abbott, 2007).

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Methods

This study utilized open-ended questions to evaluate programming knowledge of community leaders (n=422) participating in a randomized control trial of a prevention system known as the PROSPER project. The PROSPER project cultivates sustainable partnerships between communities, schools and universities to promote implementation of evidence-based programs. PROSPER community leaders (n=271) received coaching, training, and technical assistance (Spoth, et al, 2004), activities expected to improve innovation-specific capacity (Wandersman et al., 2008). Control community leaders (n=151) received no additional support.

Community leaders were interviewed annually to determine their knowledge regarding the selection, implementation and evaluation of prevention programs. A dichotomous coding procedure identified responses that demonstrated the highest levels of programming expertise within different prevention programming knowledge domains (Table 1).

Knowledge of program sources, standards of evidence and program evaluation were assessed from pretest to year five and fidelity assurance from pretest to year seven.

Analysis & Results

Logistic multilevel models were used to examine differences in programming expertise between PROSPER and control communities (i.e., Condition) (Figures 1-4).

Analyses were conducted using PROC GUMMIX procedures in SAS (SAS Institute, 2004). These procedures were used to analyze a three-level nested model with individuals nested within communities and time points nested within individuals. Community leaders in PROSPER were significantly more knowledgeable about the standards of evidence, fidelity assurance and program evaluation for effective prevention programming. PROSPER and control communities did not differ in expertise of prevention program authorities (Table 2).

Discussion

Knowledge of selection, implementation and evaluation of evidence-based prevention programs increased among PROSPER community leaders across time.

Specifically, a greater proportion of PROSPER community leaders demonstrated expert knowledge of programming standards of evidence (17.6%), fidelity assurance (35.9%) and evaluation (23.6%) than did community leaders in the control condition during the final wave of measurement.

PROSPER team members did not significantly differ in their knowledge of prevention program sources (e.g., CSAP, SAMHSA, Blueprints) compared to controls.

PROSPER community leaders were provided a menu of evidence-based prevention programs to select from. Consequently, community leaders were not required to search for quality sources of prevention programming.

These results indicate that the PROSPER project is effective in cultivating prevention programming expertise.

Additionally, these findings support growing evidence that demonstrates the value of robust technical assistance for successful program dissemination.

It would be valuable to further explore the differential gains in knowledge of various subgroups (e.g., extension educators, school officials, parents), which take part in the PROSPER project.

References

