

Grant Number: 13-60-01067

Assessment of the VISTAS Program

Prepared By Dr. John H. Davis

February 24, 2004

PROCEDURES

The Project assessment instrument was developed to solicit information from program participants that would reflect the frequency of use of skills and technology embraced by the goals and objectives of the project.

A total of twenty-one (21) individuals were reported to have had some level of interaction with the program and /or project / staffers. An eight (8) item questionnaire was used to survey participants by telephone. The telephone interviews ranged from ten (10) to twenty-one (21) minutes in length. This time frame included introduction and referencing the project and activities associated with the VISTAS program. Two Participants phone numbers resulted in disconnect announcements while one (1) other yielded a recording and one (1) a persistent busy signal that never yielded a successful contact.

The telephone correspondents were assured of confidentiality and asked to feel free to be candid in their assessment of both the program and program staff members. The assessor was careful to be as consistent in phrasing and querying as possible by reading the questions with minimum variation from the printed items. Following the telephone interviews, the responses were analyzed and compiled in an effort to consolidate reported information. These responses were then analyzed for the purpose of identifying strengths and recommendations for potential Program improvement.

STRENGTHS

The survey items which sought to glean participants' reaction in the affective domain queried in three (3) areas. These areas were staff knowledge, program material effectiveness and participants desire to continue or to return to the program if opportunities were offered in the future. The majority of the respondents gave ratings of 4 or 5 on a 5 point Likert type scale for each of three affective areas surveyed. Ratings of staff knowledge resulted in 4 ratings of 4 and 9 ratings of 5 for a total of 13 respondents indicating a rating of either 4 or 5. Helpfulness of program materials resulted in 11 ratings of 4 or 5. Exactly half or 8 of the respondents rated the materials as very helpful for a score of 5. Eight (8) of the sixteen respondents reported that they would continue or return to the program should they have such as opportunity. An additional 3 indicated that a rating of 4 was appropriate for this item.

Additionally respondent ratings reflect that, and objectives of the project relative to enhancing competency in retrieving information, reducing isolation, gaining new knowledge, refining skills, and increasing the capacity for independent living, were very

effectively handled through the Program. The advocacy training was viewed as having significant relevance to enhancing job readiness. Several respondents reported that the closed circuit magnifier was highly useful though many felt they could not afford to purchase one for themselves.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

One questionnaire item inquired about how the program might be changed to make it more useful to respondents. Several respondents indicated that they had a need for financial assistance in acquiring some of the technological equipment and materials. Many respondents cited a need for assistance in securing transportation. A need was cited for increasing the amount of time in training for use of the technologies and equipment with emphasis on teaching Braille, and more attention to job skill training.

SUMMARY

Overall, the project was seen as being very effective even though its services were hampered due to participants' problems with transportation and the availability of funds to aid in purchasing technological components of the Program. Respondents strongly favor the continuation of the project. It is significant that the program focus was appropriate and though interaction was not as extensive as desired, most respondents indicated that they have a great desire to continue working on the identified skills in this program.

VISTAS PROGRAM ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to be read to the respondent with the examiner recording the responses. Participants are to be assured that their answers will not be reported in such a manner that their identity will be revealed.

1. Did you use any of the technology presented by the Vistas Program?

Yes _____ No _____

2. Which of the following phrases describes how you used the technology?

To gather information _____ To transmit information to agency (s) _____

To develop or refine skills _____ To increase your capacity for independent living _____

3. Which of the following describes the type of training you received through the Vistas Program?

Receiving and sending e-mail _____ Using the internet _____ Identifying and visiting websites _____ Using voice-enabled access _____ Using List serve _____ Using the Message Board _____

4. How many times did you use the services offered by the Vistas Program?

Number of sessions attended _____ Number of times the technology was used _____ Number of conferences with trainer _____ Other activities or services (Please specify what these were)

5. How could the program be changed to make this technology more useful to you?

6. How did the training or sessions help you? Did it make you more able to retrieve information for yourself _____ Did it provide a link to agency (ies) _____ Did it reduce your personal isolation _____ Did it give you new knowledge _____ Did it further refine skills _____

These next items require the examiner to respond relative to the end user/participant.

7. What use, if any, of the information technology did you observe by this participant? ___

8. What use, if any, of the technology was reported to you by (Please check the appropriate answer) The end user _____ A program employee _____ A prospective employer of the end user _____ Some other individual _____