

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

JUVENILE DETENTION ALTERNATIVE INITIATIVE

Beyond Detention to Connected at 25

Introduction and Summary

For the past few years, Santa Cruz County has worked along with other JDAI model sites to extend reform efforts “beyond detention” to include strategies that assist youth involved in the juvenile justice system to improve the chances for a healthy adulthood. Planning meetings have been held with probation managers, probation line staff, and community based agencies that provide detention alternatives.

One of the first steps three years ago was to establish a committee, consisting of our key community partners that have been involved in the JDAI effort. They are, Barrios Unidos, Community Action Board, Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance, and Youth Services, Inc. At our first meeting, these CBO’s shared their thoughts on taking detention reform deeper, and building a stronger CBO role in our efforts to meet the needs of youth. This meeting was documented and constitutes the beginning of this work. This *Beyond Detention* group of CBO’s has been meeting regularly as part of our Healthy Returns Initiative grant, which focuses on linkages to health care for youth who reenter the community after detention.

Subsequently, the working group collectively reviewed literature that helped frame this work, such as the AECF Kids count essay, “*Moving Youth From Risk to Opportunity;*” Michael Wald and Tia Martinez article, “*Connected by 25: Improving the Life Chances of the Country’s Most Vulnerable 14-24 Year Olds;*” “*Gratified but Not Satisfied on Foster Care Independence,*” by Doug Nelson. We hosted a day-long presentation and discussion with David Altschuler to which we invited staff from Multnomah County. The purpose of his visit was to glean from his work on reentry any similar concepts or lessons learned that would be helpful as we shaped our initiative. [Henceforth the Santa Cruz Initiative will be referred to as *Beyond Detention to C@25* (Connected at Twenty Five).]

This review, along with discussions with JDAI model sites and AECF staff, helped us to determine that this work should be directed toward the most vulnerable youth in our juvenile justice systems as they are the most in need of stronger connections to caring adults, the workforce, ongoing educational opportunities, and social services that promote emotional and physical health.

We then developed a plan which was submitted to the foundation, titled, “Beyond Detention: Connecting transitional aged youth in Santa Cruz” that describes the goal of the project, the target population, and a conceptual framework for the project that we

envisioned in three phases. This included the collection of baseline data on the target population, a planning process, and implementation process.

In September 2006, we contracted with Andres Regnifo, Ph.D. and Christine Scott-Hayward of the Vera Institute to conduct a study to better understand the needs of the target population in Santa Cruz, both from the client and system perspectives. We approached Andres because he has both the skills to handle large data sets (gleaned from archaic information systems such as ours) and he also has excellent experience as a social researcher, having studied informal social networks with Todd Clear. Andres and Christine's work with us culminated in a document, titled "***Promoting Successful Transitions for Disadvantaged Youth***" [Attached].

The report which was finalized in March, 2007, concludes our initial study phase. It provides us with a literature review and some baseline information, which mostly illustrates the need and importance of this work and reinforces the core assumption that our system presently does not do enough to ensure that the most disadvantaged youth have connections that will carry them forward positively into adulthood. The report also underscores significant challenges to healthy connections, such as the enduring and intractable issues of substance abuse, which continue to plague our youth long after they leave the juvenile system. Finally, the report ends with some recommendations, many of which are included in this memo.

We now move into an implementation and systems change phase. It should be noted that this work has already begun. We established a job developer on the adult side of probation to focus on 18-25 year olds. We presently, are working very closely with the social services agency, known locally as the Human Resource Agency (HRA) on a structured quality improvement effort in which we have established goals based on this initiative, i.e., to monitor the quantity and quality of the Independent Living Program services offered to the target population. We are also participating with HRA on a separate System Improvement Process, in which we have identified strategies for improved collaboration at the policy and line operation levels. The Health Services Agency's Mental Health Division has begun to work on the issue of youth losing mental health support as they age out of Wraparound services. They have identified resources to serve youth up to the age of 21. In addition to mental health treatment, youth would be linked to housing, education, and physical health services including medical coverage. We are engaged in a multi-agency planning process to apply for a Youth Build grant at the next funding cycle that would focus on many of the *Beyond Detention to C@25* goals. At the state level, Probation Chiefs have drafted a budget proposal to serve the 18 to 25-year-old adult probationer which is currently under consideration in Sacramento.

The remainder of this memo will answer Bart's questions, which also serves to illustrate the future of this work.

I. TARGET POPULATION:

Who are the kids who will be the target of the “strengthened connections” strategy?

A key feature of our System of Care, is to provide interventions in the least restrictive environment, whenever possible in a child’s home environment. We have built a continuum of services and structured assessments and interagency and family decision-making (health services, probation and families together) so that assurances are made that post disposition institutional commitments, residential treatment, and placements/foster care are not prematurely or excessively utilized. We have created Wraparound and family preservation programs that have been successful in reducing the use of institutional commitments and placements by 65 percent over the past decade.

It is these youth at higher levels of care -- in institutions, in placements, and on family preservation/Wraparound programs -- that are the most vulnerable and in most need of ongoing services. They are disproportionately Latino, likely to be older and are more chronically involved in crime than youth who are served by less intensive interventions. They are more likely to suffer from co-occurring mental health and substance abuse issues, are educationally behind, and are in need of assistance in acquiring life skills and vocational assistance.

We have therefore decided that this work focus upon the following target group:

Youth sixteen years and older in or exiting family preservation and Wraparound programs, institutional commitment facilities or placements.

Attached is a description of the number, gender and ethnicity of this group. Furthermore, the attached research paper describes the characteristics of the group in greater detail.

II. INTERVENTIONS:

What are the interventions that will be used to strengthen connections?

We have envisioned this work to be less about a new particular program and more about realigning resources and broadening our mission to include the philosophy and values of a System of Care that thinks beyond detention to long term success into adulthood for youth who have left the justice system. For us, this means:

- A. Policy Change:** establish a formal imperative to adopt this initiative at the county level, not only within probation but among social and education agencies; create structures and processes for vigorous policy changes to take place among agencies that would support system level changes; and, to the extent possible, the Chief Probation Officer will work with state officials to promote policies that support the goals of this initiative.

- B. System Change:** redesign, reallocate and procure resources at the systems levels (justice, human resource and education) to intervene more successfully in the lives of disadvantaged youth aging out of the justice system with a focus on sustainable connections of assistance; and
- C. Individual Change:** develop and track measurable indicators to determine efficacy of this initiative based on individual achievements for clients into adulthood, with intermediate objectives along the way.

A. Policy Level

- The Chief Probation Officer will convene a meeting with local policy makers, department heads, and executive directors to establish a formal mission statement in support of *Beyond Detention to C@25* and goals.
- Compatible initiatives and improvement efforts within education systems, community based agencies, and social service systems will be identified to advance the goals of this initiative.
- Compatible goals will be determined between *Beyond Detention to C@25* and federal entitlement programs, such as Title IV-E, Workforce Investment, TANF to synergize efforts and identify the pool of funds and resources available to support the effort.
- The System of Care policy level meetings will add a standing agenda item and report for *Beyond Detention to C@25*.
- Opportunities will be discovered and documented at the state level in order to shape the dialogue, and promote policies and resources to advance the work of *Beyond Detention to C@25*.
- A standing policy level meeting will be established with the social services agency (known locally as the Human Resource Agency) to ensure that *Beyond Detention to C@25* youth are fully served by the Independent Living Program, which is administrated by the Human Resource Agency.

B. System Level

→ Probation processes and interventions

- A departmental mission statement for *Beyond Detention to C@25* will be developed.
- Current protocols will be revised to articulate a role for juvenile probation staff and interagency service providers to continue a supportive relationship that extends beyond 18 and beyond the probation term.
- A data system will be developed for collecting client level indicators for the purpose of ongoing evaluation of the initiative's effectiveness. Included will be a system for tracking discharges from placement and improve data collection on family relationships, living arrangements, and delivery of social support (current data formats are not useful to managers or researchers).

- A resource audit of services and financial benefits available to the target population will be conducted.
- A directory of resources to promote connectedness to caring adults, education, and social services will be developed.
- Transitioning youth who leave the juvenile justice system will be provided an individualized passport of services and potential helpers that could be referred to, based on particular needs.
- A process will be developed within Family Preservation / Wraparound and the Placement unit that helps to identify familial or caring individuals who could play a significant role in the long term outcomes along the pathway to adulthood. Education and support will be provided to these helpers so that they are sufficiently equipped to remain in supportive roles over time.
- Probation will work with the Beyond Detention Committee consisting of CBO partners to develop a network of helpers and a systematic approach of connecting youth to caring adults as they leave the juvenile justice system.
- Activities of the restitution caseload will be reviewed to ensure that linkages to vocational assistance and work are maximized.
- Continuous audits of juvenile justice interventions, particularly within the placement unit and in the Wraparound and Family Preservation Programs will be made to identify additional areas for ongoing improvement.

→*Broader System processes*

- The possibility of providing some level of case management support, advocacy, and assistance beyond 18 to both reduce criminal justice involvement and to provide continuity for those who do end up on adult probation. This support may involve probation, the health services agency and possibly a non-profit agency to coordinate adult advocates and mentors for the target group.
- The Beyond Detention Committee consisting of CBO partners will develop a network of helpers and a systematic approach to create and track sustained connections to caring adults for the target population over time and into adulthood.
- Continue to build upon the work already done within the HSA department to make Wraparound mental health services and linkages to social services, food stamps, adult Medi-Cal, housing, and employment services, available to target population youth up to the age of 21.
- Enhance county-based services in the form of drug treatment programs for young clients who are no longer part of the justice system.
- Survey current resources for transitional housing and other housing support for target population with system partners, HRA and Redevelopment Agency.
- Provide ongoing tracking and evaluation of Beyond Detention in order to highlight success and promote policy at the local, state, and national levels to advance and broaden this initiative.

See Individual Interventions discussed below.

III. PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

What are the performance measures we will use to track the strength of connections?

Individual Change Indicators

A process and output evaluation will help us evaluate our success in implementing the system strategies above. The indicators below will help us evaluate whether our interventions above are producing the desired results. Much of this data is retrievable from the system now. Most other data will not be difficult to obtain. Not included below, are the methods for collecting this data. We will need to determine different points during and for a period of time after interventions where we measure the following indicators. We also will need to determine, if possible, some way to compare data pre and post *Beyond Detention to C@25*.

Connection to Caring Adults

- Percentage of youth who say parents are involved and helpful
- Percentage of Parents who believe they are equipped to support their child in the areas of education, health care, job placement and retention, and housing
- Percentage of youth who can list caring individuals who have helped them in key areas, e.g., education, housing, labor, emotional and physical health
- Number of Caring Adults connected to youth by system strategies (may be tracked at system level).

Education

- Percent of youth at or above grade level
- Percent of youth taking college prep courses
- Percent of youth graduating from high school
- Percent of youth completing a GED
- Percent of youth entering and completing a two-year/or four year post secondary education

Jobs

- Percent of youth completing job search or skills training programs
- Percent of youth in job support or apprentice programs
- Percent of youth with part-time jobs
- Percent of youth retaining jobs for six months
- Percent of youth moving into higher skilled, higher-paid jobs

Housing

- Percent of youth living with parents at program referral
- Percent of youth remaining with parents during program

- Percent of youth in residential care during probation program
- Percent of youth who successfully transition to home of parents at program completion
- Percent of youth offered transitional housing and services by type of service
- Percent of youth with other housing after program services.
- Percent of youth with bank accounts

Life Skills and Justice Outcomes

- Percent of youth completing financial education programs
- Percent of youth with bank accounts
- Percent of youth managing personal finances
- Percent of youth paying restitution
- Percent of youth successfully completing probation

Social Services

- Percent of youth who have individualized service passports
- Percent of youth who are connected to substance abuse, mental health, treatment after probation completion
- Percent of youth with health care insurance after probation completion
- Percent of youth with a primary physician and dentist after probation completion

We envision capturing this information at different points: at program entrance; 2 months prior to program exit; at the time of program exit; at the time of probation completion; one year after program completion. We will also develop methods to obtain this information on representative sub-samples at various points up to the age of 25. We will separate our assessments of connectivity for those youth who remain out of the adult criminal justice system from those who do become involved in order to test the hypothesis that those strength of connections impact criminal involvement into adulthood. In addition to the individual indicators we will document our change efforts and evaluate the implementation of activities associated with policy and system change.

IV. EVALUATION:

What are the long term evaluation plans for assessing the impact of strengthened connections on the life outcomes of these youth?

The research report provides us with an excellent foundation and methodology that we can build upon to evaluate whether strengthened connections enable youth to avoid sustained delinquency and future criminology. In fact, there is rich data in the report that helps us establish baselines prior to full *Beyond Detention to C@25* implementation. *This includes rates of percentage of involvement in the adult criminal justice system and ongoing substance abuse.*

The personal interview is very informative, and we would refine the interview process with a more structured set of questions pertaining to all areas of connectedness and achievement related to a healthy adulthood. We offered stipends, made personal calls and sent letters but still found it difficult to track down individuals who had left the system and are now adults, for interviews. Possibly, with a better articulated network of connections in place, it will be easier to contact *Beyond Detention to C@25* into adulthood. For example we intend to document social networks with contacts and phone numbers of individuals who could later be called upon if we have difficulty contacting youth. We anticipate success in building helping systems of connectivity that run throughout the time trajectory to adulthood. As this develops our ability to track data over time will be enhanced. We will also inform clients of our interest in following up with them prior to their leaving programs, informed consents will be obtained and some incentives offered for their participation at the conclusion of each follow up assessment. Finally, we will be contracting with Kevin Bacon as our key consultant, given his high level of connectedness to everybody.

V. DISCUSSION

The conversation and thinking about *Beyond Detention to C@25* in Santa Cruz has been a difficult one for a number of reasons. The goal of this work is to strengthen connections for disadvantaged youth who exit high level care in order for them to have the help they need as they move down the developmental path to adulthood. We know that a developmental path can be a bumpy road and that the need for assistance, the type of assistance needed, and the receptivity for assistance, will change over time. A component of the juvenile justice system has always been to end the relationship between probation officer and probationer at the conclusion of probation. We are not currently positioned to be the coordinator or case managers as youth age out. We do not have the answers, resources or model in place presently to address the needs of youth from 18-25. Nor do we really know what level of intervention should come from the formal justice system, from community based agencies, separate from or in addition to the familial and informal helping supports.

A key desired outcome is that youth who age out of the juvenile justice system do not enter the criminal justice system. The research report shows that 69 percent of our target group currently end up with at least one adult probation grant. We hypothesize that strong connections of assistance will reduce the percentage of targeted youth who enter the adult criminal justice system.

For those who end up on adult probation, however, how will our *Beyond Detention to C@25* work be shaped to address their needs. There are some steps we can take to make improvements in this area and to bring a developmental perspective and incorporate stronger models of assistance in the adult probations system. However, beyond activities that help adult probation staff re-conceptualize their current interventions, there is no immediate resource available to provide an intensive level

of support. For example, 57% of the target youth studied entered the Proposition 36 caseload and the probation caseload consists of two probation officers for 450 individuals.

We also have not developed specific strategies to address the issues of race, culture and gender. This will be important given that our target population is two thirds Latino and 21% are girls. Culturally responsive and gender specific models of assistance will need to be developed and evaluated. We know our community based partners are committed to working with us, and would like to develop better and culturally responsive networks of support for the target youth, but we do not have all of the funding structures in place.

For now, we have decided that this work should unfold by focusing first within our existing programs and at the initial transition points as our target youth move out of the justice system. As with all that we do, we start with a concept, align existing resources, implement incrementally, and creatively fund initiatives as they are developed over time.