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Best Training Practices for Probation Officers and Staff Toward Building a More Sophisticated, Fair, and Effective System of Juvenile Justice in San Diego County

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**Best Training Practices for Probation Officers and Staff Toward
Building a More Sophisticated, Fair, and Effective System of
Juvenile Justice in San Diego County**

**Carissa Carrasquillo
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Abstract

This report illustrates how probation leadership, officers, and staff in San Diego County can adopt best training practices to address and alleviate incidents in juvenile detention facilities and build a sophisticated, fair, and effective system of juvenile justice. The goal of implementing best training practices for probation officers and staff is to build a knowledgeable workforce to better serve youth and families and reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system. This report analyzes how innovations in management and the introduction of new programs has proven effective through research- and evidence-based practices and direct community involvement. In particular, this report closely examines the Santa Cruz County Probation Department which has reduced its dependence on detention and focused on improving youth experiences of justice. For example, Santa Cruz County probation officers abandoned the tough-on-crime approach with regards to arrests and prosecution of youth and now spend as much time working with community organizations outside the formal justice system as they do with reform efforts from within their departments. The application of evidence-based research in probation training requires managers and staff to study academic research and reports related to youth development, disproportionate minority contact, and community-based approaches toward youth rehabilitation. Replicating and applying these complex statistical research methods will not just provide the best training practices, but ultimately improve experiences with the juvenile justice system.

Introduction

From 2009-2019, probation officer training in San Diego County has focused on traditional supervision practices, compliance with court orders and conditions of release, and law enforcement training with an emphasis on de-escalation, firearms, officer survival, and tactical

operations.¹ As the San Diego County Probation Department moves to a more therapeutic system with a focus on positive youth development, a new training model is essential.² The evidence-based approaches and training techniques used by Santa Cruz County provide alternative and successful ways to reframe some of these current practices.

This report describes the transformation in juvenile justice in Santa Cruz County focusing on the role of probation and best training practices for probation officers and staff.³ It outlines how Santa Cruz County justice system drastically decreased the crisis of overcrowding and the severe disparities in the arrests and detention of minority youth, creating a foundation for better outcomes for youth. They accomplished this by evaluating how their own systems contributed to youth detention, leading them to reorganize business operations, invest in community-based programs, reassert core values, and build a new management and training structure. In doing so, they have demonstrated that probation departments across the country can make remarkable gains in juvenile justice by placing youth first.

The example of Santa Cruz County Probation Department can facilitate the ongoing re-invention of juvenile justice through best training practices, beginning with the collaborative efforts of

¹ County of San Diego Communications Office, "VIDEO: Probation Receives State-of-the-Art Training," *San Diego County News Center* (2018). A new San Diego training facility opened in 2018, providing state of the art scenario training in de-escalation, fire arms, and officer survival tactics.

² State of California Commission, "Hiring," *Commission on POST* (2019). Peace Officer Standards and requirements are influenced by the statutory designation of probation officers as Category 1 peace officers governed by the Peace Officer Standards Training Commission (POST) (San Diego Penal Code Section 13510(a)). Minimum requirement for employment in San Diego County as a Correctional Deputy Probation Officer I CDPO, also referred to as Peace Officers, is a high school diploma, successful completion of the General Education Development test or other high school equivalency test approved by CDE, or a two-year, four-year, or advanced degree from an accredited or approved institution.

³ Wilson, Demecia, "Probation Department," (Lucas County Annual Report, 2017): 31. As part of the 2017 Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, justice officials from over fifty counties across the the United States visited Santa Cruz to discuss and analyze detention reform and justice development.

probation, the courts, government, and community partners, and providing staff with additional training. San Diego County can benefit in following these examples to lower caseloads, foster better relationships with youth, and create better outcomes for youth after juvenile probation.

Methodology

This report was prepared at the request of The Children’s Initiative through a research internship for an upper-division ethnic studies course at The University of San Diego. The Children’s Initiative is a non-profit organization working to ensure that San Diego’s low-income and underserved children and families reach their full potential by promoting services, programs, and policies that respond to family and community needs in the fields of health, education, safety, and economic security.⁴ This report was prepared to identify best training practices for probation officers and juvenile detention staff.

Evidence-based practices are interventions that utilize scientific evidence that demonstrate improved client outcomes.⁵ This methodology bridges the gaps between science and practice across the fields of medicine, education, substance abuse, behavioral health, criminal justice, and social services. The Institute of Medicine defines evidence-based practices as “the integration of best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values” while the Dartmouth Psychiatric Research Center emphasizes the significance of its “interventions for which there is consistent scientific evidence showing that they improve client outcomes.”⁶ Probation staff training typically employs a problem-centered approach that practices obedience and compliance

⁴ The Children’s Initiative, "Mission Statement," *The Children’s Initiative* (2019). <https://www.thechildrensinitiative.org/>.

⁵ Drake, R. G., *Implementing Evidence-Based Practices in Routine Mental Health Service Settings* (2001).

⁶ Taxman, Faye S., Belenko Steven, *Implementing Evidence-Based Practices in Community Corrections and Addiction Treatment* (2012): 20.

as goals toward rehabilitation.⁷ The aim of this report is to illustrate the ways in which evidence-based practices that focus on strength-based approaches provide higher success rates when objectives center on positive youth development, behavior change, and growth.

The Juvenile Probation Division Annual Reports and Assessment Reports are examples of the implementation of evidence-based practices by Santa Cruz County. These reports include analyses of best training practices; archival records provided by the Resource Development Associates through their Review of Best Practices in Probation with the LA Probation Governance Study and the Department of Probation and LA County Administrative Office; and reviews of administrative data on youth contact with the justice system and juvenile probation from the United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), and *The Administrative Office of the United States Courts Federal Probation Journal*.

The methodology of evidence-based practices bridges research and practice in juvenile probation and juvenile justice, allowing the probation department, courts, government, and community partners to rethink strategies that promote long-term change through inter-department data collection and the careful management of inter-agency collaborations and staff trainings. At a time when the number of people, adults and youth alike, under probation supervision has grown to over four million people across the United States, it is clear that probation staff training practices need to change.⁸ The 2017 Los Angeles Probation Governance Study authored by the

⁷ Griffin, Patrick and Torbet, Patricia *Desktop Guide to Good* Juvenile Probation Practice* (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2002): 97. Problem-centered approach- approaches clients with attention to their failure, dysfunction and deficits, with an eye to fixing their flaws. This assumes an “expert” role in naming the client’s problems and then instructing clients how to fix them.

⁸ Rabinowitz, Mikaela. "Report Highlights Best Practices in Probation," *Resource Development Associates* (2017).

Resource Development Associates (RDA) utilized evidence-based and research-based data in their review of current probation practices and concluded that probation agencies should focus on harm reduction training and community engagement, not heavy-handed supervision and incarceration. This study also demonstrated that cohesive communities and informal controls are more effective at reducing juvenile crime than considerable supervision of low-risk youth and probation violations that land youth back in overcrowded detention facilities.⁹ The research provided by the RDA, OJJDP, the annual and assessment reports from the Los Angeles, King, Santa Cruz Counties, and the *U.S. Courts Federal Probation Journal* synthesizes research across a number of subject areas, including criminal and juvenile justice, organizational development, case planning, understanding risk assessment tools, leadership training, probation practice, youth development and family engagement.

Analysis

Juvenile Probation Departments require probation managers and staff to study and receive training on the disproportionate rates of minority contact¹⁰, and the importance of language competency on serving a predominantly 50% Latino population.¹¹ Those requirements are applied through home-based trauma-focused therapeutic approaches. Together, these strategies create more stability for youth in their homes and communities. They also prevent out-of-home placement; address the intersectionality of juvenile detention, training, and community

⁹ Rabinowitz (2017).

¹⁰ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, “Program Summary” (2019). Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC), according to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, refers to the disproportionate number of minority youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

¹¹ Foglesong, Todd, *The Role of Probation in Reducing Minority Youth Confinement: Justice Development in Santa Cruz County, 1990-2008* (2010): 2.

involvement; and bring about results-based leadership tools for the entire agency in ways that address potential biases while placing youth development at its forefront.

Research data from Santa Cruz County argues that the key to improving probation strategies, services, and operations is securing the trust, commitment, and confidence of the employees of the Probation Services Division. In order for probation officers to subscribe and be open to change, it is imperative that they learn about evidence-based practices and understand what will be expected of them in an improved probation system focused on client outcomes. Santa Cruz County has been chosen specifically for its client-based outcomes approach to juvenile justice and probation, as opposed to the traditional supervision practices such as those executed in San Diego County which focus on compliance with court orders and conditions of release. The Santa Cruz Probation Services Divisions have focused their efforts, research, and staff education on the formation of community supervision programs and evidenced-based strategies.

Santa Cruz County

Santa Cruz County utilizes evidence-based research that places the safety and justice for minority youth at the center of their probation officer training and programming. This approach is coupled with staff trainings, workshops, and certifications centered on youth trauma and development, language competency to address a predominantly Latino population, and alternative approaches to detention and use of force. It also focuses on the importance and effectiveness of direct community collaboration and counseling.

With the support of The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Santa Cruz Probation Department hosted the Deep End Probation Transformation Technical Assistance training in 2017 which underscored their innovative approach, specifically their emphasis on inter-agency and

community collaboration, data collection, and race equity, and inclusion. The training, which was framed around collaboration, data collection, and race equity and inclusion, was attended by Probation Services Divisions from across the country.

Inter-Agency and Collaboration

Santa Cruz County Probation Department trainings promoted community engagement in juvenile justice reform and meaningful youth engagement. Collaborating with community organizations, families, and government enabled probation departments to be well-versed in communication skills and tools, such as creating a safe space where youth feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings, educating youth on how policy and practice works within their jurisdiction or organization, and distributing power with youth to ensure they are not just a voice but a partner.¹² This allowed them to effectively intervene at every level within the juvenile probation process and for youth to receive the best care possible.

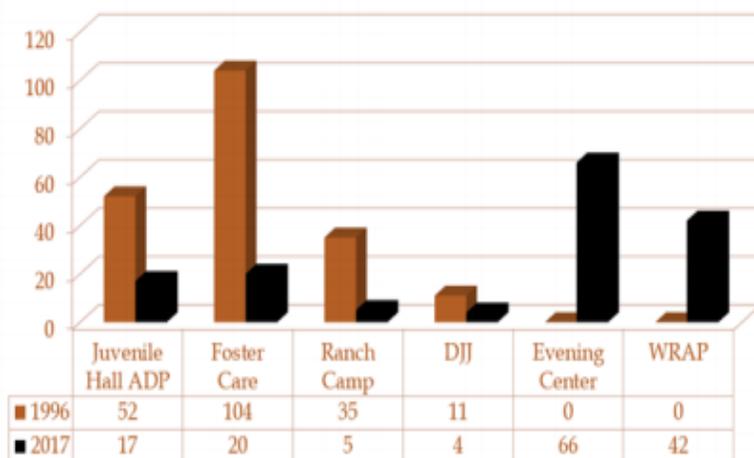


Figure 1. Reductions at all levels of institutional care within Santa Cruz County

¹² "Expansion of JDAI to the Deep End Resource Guide," *The Annie E. Casey Foundation* (2019): 1c.

The factors that led to this achievement, but perhaps the most notable initiative was the implementation of the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), which comprehensively reformed placement and treatment options for foster children. The CCR was part of a comprehensive two-year study to outline a process to eliminate “traditional” group homes and replace them with Short Term Residential Treatment Programs that emphasized mental health services. The Juvenile Division staff was actively involved in numerous CCR trainings and Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings throughout the year. The CFT meetings were facilitated by probation staff and allowed the youth and families to have a stronger voice in the process and outcomes of their cases as well as influence on probation supervision strategies.¹³ Efforts by the Juvenile Division staff and court partners to keep youth in their communities were met with a great deal of success.¹⁴ The number of court-ordered, out-of-home placements declined throughout the year. The last six months of the year saw no new orders for out-of-home placement made by the Juvenile Court.

The JSD partnered with social workers and counselors through the implementation of self-reflective training, a strengths-based and motivational interviewing approach for probation officers and staff. These psychology-based therapeutic trainings help engage youth to become active participants in their communities, while simultaneously increasing cooperation and motivation. A strengths-based approach teaches probation officers and staff to focus on youths’ abilities and talents instead of deficits.¹⁵ The motivational interviewing approach helps youth

¹³ Doty, et. al. (2017): 4. Figure 1 provided by Santa Cruz County showing reduction at all levels of institutional care, while increasing capacity of community-based interventions.

¹⁴ Doty, Robert and Juvenile Division Staff. “Juvenile Probation Division Annual Report,” *Santa Cruz County Probation Department* (2017).

¹⁵ Lucas County Court of Common Pleas and Youth Treatment Center. *2016 Annual Report* (2016):

employ change surrounding their actions and behaviors from within themselves.¹⁶ Together, these two approaches meet the requirements for probation officers and staff to become aware of how their own behaviors can affect youth outcomes.¹⁷

Data Collection

Data collection and disaggregated research allow Juvenile Division staff to better identify and address problems within the juvenile justice system such as the root causes of implicit biases, disproportionate minority contact, and practices that may produce disproportionate minority contact that creates the imbalance within the juvenile justice system.¹⁸ Strategies include identifying ethnicity when reviewing intake reports, new placement orders, and caseload types to help monitor and re-categorize various youth risk levels. Monitoring data issued by the Juvenile Services Division (JSD) allows departments to continue use of research-based and effective supervision practices that suit the needs of their youth. Further, the training equipped JSD staff with the resources needed to return to their counties, educate their probation staff, and implement these practices.

For example, Santa Cruz County's initial reform efforts during the 1990's addressed severe overcrowding, the uneven profiling of youth in custody, and overworked probation officers and detention staff. In 1997, Juvenile Hall held more than 48 youth on average daily, when it was designed to hold no more than 42 kids. Nearly 60 percent of the youth in detention on any given

¹⁶ Hettema J, Steel, J, Miller WR. Motivational Interviewing, *Annual Review Clinical Psychology* (2005): 1:91-111. Motivational Interviewing is a counseling method that helps people resolve ambient feelings and insecurities to find the internal motivation they need to change their behavior. It is a practical, empathetic, and short-term process that takes into consideration how difficult it is to make life changes.

¹⁷ Greenglow. "What Is Solution-Focused Therapy?" *Institute for Solution-Focused Therapy* (2019).

¹⁸ This leadership training analyzed the disaggregation of data and how to best examine the root causes of implicit biases and disproportionate minority contact.

day in that year were Latino, close to two times their representation in the county's general population.¹⁹

Figure 2. Composition of the Youth Population in Detention in Santa Cruz County, 1997

Ethnicity	Youth Population (Ages 10-17)	Juveniles in Detention (Average Daily Population)
Anglo	16,623 63.5%	16 33.1%
Latino	8,251 31.5%	28.9 59.7%
African American/Other	1,325 5.0%	3.5 7.2%
Total	26,199 100%	48.4 100%

Source: Probation Department, Santa Cruz County

By collecting data and monitoring reform efforts over the past 20 years, Santa Cruz County exhibited lower numbers of Latino youth in custody and success for rehabilitation. The numbers of youth in custody decreased from 52% in 1996 to 17% in 2017.²⁰ Extant data from King and Lucas County parallels results from the Juvenile Probation Department in Santa Cruz County, such that youth in custody in Lucas County from 2000 to 2016 dropped by more than 90%.²¹

Race Equity and Inclusion

Race holds a central place in our society's persistent patterns of social inequities, exclusion, and division. Without equity, economic stratification and social instability will continue to increase

¹⁹ Foglesong (2010): 5.

²⁰ Doty, et. al. (2017). Reductions at all levels of institutional care, while increasing capacity of community-based interventions data.

²¹ Lucas County Court of Common Pleas and Youth Treatment Center, *2016 Annual Report* (2016).

and far too many families and children will continue to lag behind. Without inclusion, many are marginalized economically, politically and culturally, facing bias and barriers when seeking basic opportunities for security and advancement.²² Juvenile justice and racial inequity in Santa Cruz County was badly distorted with a lopsided profile of youth in custody. Though extreme, the degree of disproportionality in juvenile detention in Santa Cruz County was much like any other jurisdiction in the United States at the time. Overrepresentation of minorities in juvenile halls was common across California, and researchers found similar patterns in counties on both coasts and throughout the North, East, and South.²³ “Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide, Embracing Equity: 7 Steps to Advance and Embed Race Equity and Inclusion Within Your Organization,” a training guide published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation on best practices to achieve equity, provided the JSD with the language to name, frame, and identify racism outside narrow and individualized definitions of racism to a more comprehensive and systemic awareness.²⁴

The manual outlined seven critical steps. The first step establishes “a shared language to present data, describe conditions and outcomes and identify root causes of inequalities,” using tools such as terminology sheets with definitions of core concepts that can help groups develop a shared language for race equity and inclusion.²⁵ The second step emphasizes the impact of systemic racism and the exclusion of people of color, the most direct stakeholders in the elimination of

²² The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2015): 2.

²³ Foglesong (2010): 1.

²⁴ “Expansion of JDAI to the Deep End Resource Guide,” *The Annie E. Casey Foundation* (2019): 3a.

²⁵ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, “Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide: 7 Steps to Advance and Embed Race Equity and Inclusion Within Your Organization,” *Inclusion Within Your Organization* (2015): 4. Step 1 of this training is to establish an understanding of race equity and inclusion principles. The core concept terminology sheet contains terms such as; equity, racial justice, internalized racism, and systemic racialization.

racism and those with the most first-hand experiences with its effects. The “Stakeholder Analysis Guide” ensures JSD had a mix of stakeholders to leverage change.²⁶

The third step requires gathering and analyzing disaggregated data within JSD respective departments as an integral part of the continuing improvement efforts, quality assurance, supervision and accountability processes. A “Systems Analysis Guide” facilitates the fourth step which requires Probation Departments to conduct systems analysis of root causes of inequalities taking into account “the convergence of race, place, class and history.”²⁷

After conducting a systems analysis to identify root causes of inequalities, the fifth step surveys possible strategies and racially equitable solutions for addressing the problems. Its goals are to help ensure that targeted strategies and investments yield the greatest impact for children, families, and communities of color. The sixth step conducts Race Equity Impact Assessments (REIA) for all policies and decision making. A REIA is a systematic examination of how a proposed action or decision will likely affect different racial and ethnic groups. Applied by Juvenile Service Divisions, this tool is useful for assessing the actual and anticipated effect of proposed policies, institutional practices, programs, plans and budgetary decisions.

Finally, the seventh step implements these strategies, continuously evaluating effectiveness and adapt strategies. Probation officers and staff thus recognize the salience of a racial equity and inclusion lens in every facet of their department. This critical perspective shifts the framework from identifying disparities that separate different types of children to creating equitable opportunities that help all children thrive.

²⁶ Step three addresses the impact of systemic racism and the exclusion of people of color, the most direct stakeholders in the elimination of racism and those with the most first-hand experiences with its effects.

²⁷ The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2015): 8.

Santa Cruz County is the nation's leading model for Juvenile Justice. Their evidence-based programs have transformed their probation and juvenile justice program, and their continued partnerships with organizations such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation and cutting-edge trainings have inspired other counties to follow their footsteps. Lucas County (Toledo), Ohio, King County (Seattle), Washington, Orange County (Santa Ana), California, State of Missouri and State of Washington are also incorporating data collection, collaboration and race equity and inclusion with similarly positive results.²⁸

Recommendations

The successful strategies employed by Santa Cruz County new strategies to address and alleviate incidents in juvenile detention facilities and build a sophisticated, fair, and effective system of juvenile justice. Recommendations include the following evidence-based approaches:

Inter-Agency and Community Collaboration

Inter-agency collaboration and community engagement are critical when embarking on a multi-level approach to partnering with impacted communities. Learning from and partnering with communities that have been directly impacted by the juvenile justice system is a priority and essential way to inform and enhance reform efforts. In order to achieve better outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system and safely eliminate the unnecessary out of out-of-home placements, community engagement must be a priority. In addition, partnering with counselors and social workers would help deepen Juvenile Division staff and youth relationships and understandings through therapeutic approaches.

²⁸ Griffin, et. al. (2002).

Data Collection

Advancing equity for the populations served requires data. The collection, analysis and use of race and ethnicity data should be an integral part of ongoing improvement efforts, quality assurance, supervision, and accountability processes in juvenile justice efforts. Monitoring data allows departments to continue use of research-based and effective supervision practices that suit the needs of their youth.

Race Equity and Inclusion

Everyone can be a race equity and inclusion leader. Require the Juvenile Service Divisions to address issues of race and focus on remedying racial discrimination and inequities even after they have already occurred. Racial justice advocacy must focus on institutionalizing racial equity and preventing institutional racism.

Conclusion

The practices set forth by Santa Cruz County provides both new challenges and new opportunities for San Diego County probation officer and staff training practices. They challenge practitioners to rethink their mission, develop and implement new programs, and coordinate and collaborate with others. Success will require strong leadership at all levels within juvenile probation services with the addition of new staff resources and training and an increased focus on monitoring services and evaluating outcomes.

Examples of evidence-based training practices offer the opportunity for juvenile courts and probation departments to direct resources toward the development of much-needed and effective programs; benefit from the knowledge and dedication of other public, private, and community-

based agencies; provide better services to all clients; and, ultimately, to restore the public's faith in the juvenile justice system.

This report provides initial guidance to courts and probation departments in understanding and incorporating the goal of building a knowledgeable workforce to better serve youth and families and reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system. The key elements and exemplary programs described here serve as a foundation on which courts and probation departments can build a comprehensive range of trainings capable of improving and reforming juvenile justice.

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