

# Positive Youth Justice Initiative Phase II, Year 1 Implementation Evaluation

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March 2017



The Positive Youth Justice Initiative is a Sierra Health Foundation initiative managed by the Center for Health Program Management, with additional funding from The California Endowment and The California Wellness Foundation.



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## Phase II Implementation Highlights

Sierra Health Foundation launched the Positive Youth Justice Initiative (PYJI) in 2012 with the goal of supporting California counties to change the way they approach and work with justice-involved youth. Through an integrated model that invests in youth, treats trauma, provides wraparound service delivery, and strengthens local infrastructure, PYJI seeks to reduce barriers to youths' successful transition to adulthood, including structural biases that exacerbate the over-representation of youth of color in the juvenile justice system.

PYJI Phase II began in January 2016 with awards to two of the Phase I counties: San Joaquin and Solano. In addition to continuing organizational development strategies that shift systems toward a youth development approach, Phase II guides counties to scale reforms to all youth on probation, particularly those at highest risk of recidivism. Counties are also encouraged to deepen partnerships with youth-serving agencies including education, law enforcement, judicial officers, and community advocates. (For more information on the evolution of PYJI, visit <http://www.shfcenter.org/pyji/background>.)

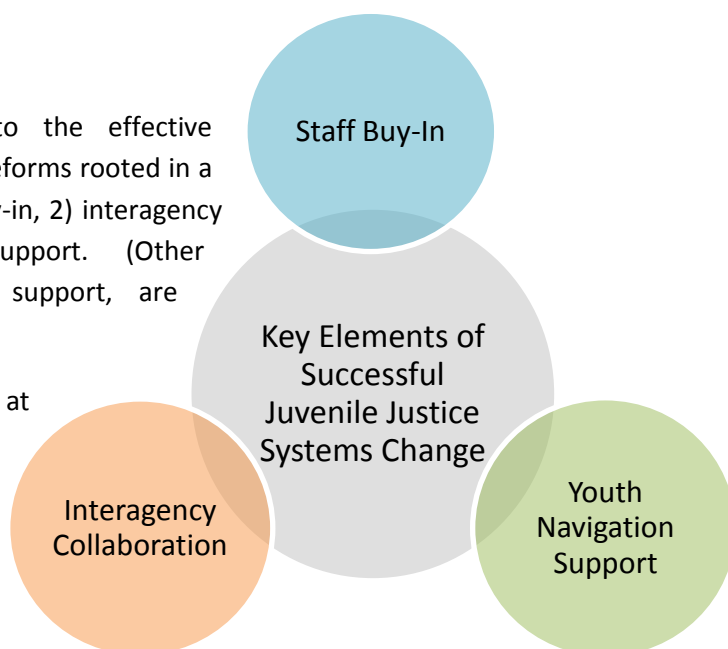
## Purpose and Scope

This brief summarizes the key findings that emerged from a recent evaluation as PYJI counties moved forward in their efforts to achieve reforms that are both impactful and sustainable. Sierra Health Foundation contracted Resource Development Associates (RDA) to conduct the external evaluation of the implementation of systems change reforms through PYJI. The evaluation employed interviews, focus groups, and surveys with staff and youth in participating counties to explore the successes and challenges of implementing this far-reaching and ambitious initiative. This brief and the accompanying report do not address all aspects of PYJI implementation, focusing instead on the three major themes that emerged in data collection carried out in 2016. For more information and previous reports, visit: <http://www.shfcenter.org/pyji/evaluation>.

## Implementation Lessons

The evaluation identified three keys to the effective implementation of juvenile justice system reforms rooted in a positive youth justice approach: 1) staff buy-in, 2) interagency collaboration, and 3) youth navigation support. (Other important factors, such as leadership support, are discussed in previous evaluation reports.)

**1) Staff Buy-in.** Support for PYJI from staff at all levels was essential for the successful implementation of systems changes. For agencies in which more staff supported a trauma-informed, positive youth development, and collaborative approach,



and believed that PYJI would bring about meaningful system changes, culture change occurred more quickly and employee engagement in the initiative was stronger. At the same time, when there was less consistent support for PYJI among staff at all levels, agencies were less likely to achieve non-punitive, positive youth development approaches to working with young people involved in the juvenile justice system.

**2) Interagency Collaboration.** Leadership across PYJI partner agencies identified collaboration as one of the key strengths of PYJI. In some cases, PYJI was the impetus for agencies to begin building relationships with other youth-serving organizations, which moved partners toward a new norm of working together. Increased coordination also supported consistent messaging and learning across agencies. When agency leadership and staff developed relationships outside of their agencies, they could more easily and quickly troubleshoot issues pertaining to youths' transitions between different systems. As a result of increased cross-agency communication, staff became more aware of each other's programs and therefore have been able to provide more targeted referrals to meet youths' and their families' needs. Youth also underscored the importance of communication between various youth-serving systems to ensure their success in completing their probation requirements.

**3) Youth Navigation Support.** In the PYJI evaluation, a trusted point person who could help youth navigate the juvenile justice and related systems and serve as both an advocate and a confidante was identified as crucial to supporting justice-involved youth. Youth described needing to have at least one adult in their lives who would encourage them and advocate for them across various youth serving systems. In one county, youth pointed to numerous examples of assistance from designated PYJI staff that included collaboration with school staff to ensure they had the appropriate classes needed for graduation and coordination with social service providers.

Below we highlight recommendations for making an impact in each of these three areas. While not the only elements required to transform juvenile justice and related systems into environments that support positive youth development, these three were identified as important opportunities for moving systems change forward. In Phase III, PYJI will be supporting community-based organizations in their organizing and advocacy for a healthy juvenile justice system.

## What works to develop buy-in?

**Why It Matters:** Buy-in not only impacts staff's willingness to make changes in how they do their job; it also influences the sustainability of an initiative. Staff buy-in is particularly critical to successful juvenile justice systems change because the success of the justice system relies heavily on the interactions and relationships between staff and youth.

1. **Develop an implementation plan.** Phasing in reforms can prevent staff from getting overwhelmed and also allow time for thoughtful planning. It is important, however, to ensure that there is constant progress and the initiative does not lose momentum. As part of the implementation plan, agency leadership should create a communication plan for how they will explain the initiative's benefits and the upcoming changes and their timeline to all staff.
2. **Provide a variety of staff trainings to educate staff about the evidence base.** Train staff in the research supporting positive youth development and trauma-informed care and provide them tools to implement this new approach.
3. **Involve midlevel and line staff early in the reform process and provide staff meaningful and regular opportunities for feedback.** Including staff from all levels early in the initiative will increase buy-in and facilitate implementation.
4. **Celebrate successes.** Positive reinforcement is an effective tool to generate buy-in. Celebrating small successes can motivate staff and reinforce a positive agency culture.
5. **Plan for staffing needs.** Staff will be more resistant to reforms if they view reforms as tasking them with additional responsibilities that they do not have the time or capacity to take on.
6. **Identify and leverage staff champions.** Staff who embrace reforms will be particularly effective at messaging the benefit of the initiative to their coworkers.
7. **Integrate initiative principles into job descriptions and hiring.** This will ensure new staff are on board with the initiative and promote its sustainability.
8. **Expect that some staff may never buy into the initiative.** If some staff continue to resist changing their approach, consider shifting their responsibilities to minimize interactions with youth, if possible.
9. **Model the way. PYJI strives to focus on youth development, rather than punitive sanctions.** In a similar vein, agency leadership should motivate staff through inspiration and information (e.g., communicating a shared vision, trainings) rather than intimidation or punitive measures.

## What works to develop collaboration?

**Why It Matters:** Positive youth justice reforms seek to improve the overall health and well-being of justice-involved youth in order to support reduced negative contact with justice systems. This work cannot be completed by one agency alone; it relies upon a collaboration of youth-serving agencies that partner together to support youth and make meaningful and comprehensive reforms to practice and policy.

1. **Focus on common goals and highlight the mutual benefits of collaboration.** Recognizing that youth-serving agencies across the juvenile justice system, education system, and nonprofit sector all aim to benefit youth and prevent recidivism can provide a foundation for collaboration.
2. **Make concerted efforts to include all necessary partners at the planning table.** It can be difficult to engage partners if they were not part of the initiative's development and planning.
3. **Create opportunities for frequent contact across organizational hierarchies and different agencies.** Interagency training and meetings strengthen relationships and promote collaboration.
4. **Take the time to share information about how each agency operates.** Opportunities for deeper collaboration can arise when agencies communicate about their policies and practices.

## What works to develop youth navigation support?

**Why It Matters:** In addition to personal support, justice-involved youth need someone to help them navigate the various public systems with which they and their families interact, including the juvenile justice, education, mental health, and child welfare systems. Ideally, this person has the knowledge and resources necessary to advocate for and support youth across systems. While this element may be challenging to scale due to the intensive time and financial resources needed, it is important to explore how jurisdictions can sustainably support youth and family navigators and advocates on staff as part of their efforts to promote system-wide culture change and collaboration.

1. **Dedicate resources to youth and family advocacy and support.** Even if reforms are made within youth-serving systems, youth and their families will need someone they trust to help them navigate each system and advocate for them. Providing meaningful advocacy and support requires time, funding, and space for individual meetings.
2. **Recognize that trust takes time to develop.** Matching youth with someone from a similar background with similar experiences can help build trust.
3. **Endeavor to build lasting relationships.** Advocates that will continue supporting youth and families after they complete probation or graduate from school can provide longer-term support.
4. **Empower navigators to effectively advocate for their clients.** Navigators should understand how other systems operate and should have access to staff and decision-makers across systems.



## Introduction

### Positive Youth Justice Initiative: Background and Context

Sierra Health Foundation launched the Positive Youth Justice Initiative (PYJI) in 2012, following years of on-the-ground experience in youth development, extensive research into the key issues affecting youth wellbeing, and in the context of a favorable policy environment for juvenile justice reform. Through an approach that invests in youth, treats trauma, provides wraparound service delivery, and strengthens local infrastructure, PYJI seeks to reduce barriers to youths' successful transition to adulthood, including structural biases that exacerbate the over-representation of youth of color in the juvenile justice system.

In Phase I of PYJI, which spanned from 2012-2015, four California counties (Alameda, San Diego, San Joaquin, and Solano) received grants to support their commitment to changing their systems and shifting their systems and organizational culture toward a youth development approach and away from harmful punitive practices. The first phase of PYJI focused on crossover youth, or youth who have been involved in both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

Given counties' progress, and with the recognition that systems reform takes time, Sierra Health Foundation launched Phase II of PYJI in January 2016 with awards to two of the Phase I counties: San Joaquin and Solano. In addition to continuing organizational development strategies that shift systems toward a youth development approach, Phase II guides counties to scale reforms to all youth on probation, particularly those at highest risk of recidivism. Counties are also encouraged to deepen partnerships with youth-serving agencies including education, law enforcement, judicial officers, and community advocates. In this way, the foundation seeks to support counties in achieving the three elements of a healthy justice system: a focus on well-being, improving justice system practices, and reducing justice system involvement.<sup>1</sup>

### Evaluation Purpose and Scope

Sierra Health Foundation contracted with Resource Development Associates (RDA) to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation and early impacts of PYJI. By assessing the system change process in PYJI counties, the evaluation of PYJI seeks to build a body of knowledge that system leaders and advocates can use to build systems that embrace a positive approach to youth justice.

#### Evaluation Questions

1. What strategies are counties using to manage the system change process in a way that ensures sustainability of reforms? What internal and external factors facilitate and hinder implementation of systems change?
2. As a result of system reforms implemented under PYJI, what has changed in how systems identify, refer, place, and serve high-risk youth? To what extent do the youth who are targeted by system reforms report positive experiences in the systems with which they interact?

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<sup>1</sup> See: [http://www.shfcenter.org/assets/PYJI/PYJI\\_Infographic\\_8.5x10\\_July\\_2016.pdf](http://www.shfcenter.org/assets/PYJI/PYJI_Infographic_8.5x10_July_2016.pdf)

To inform the evaluation questions and indicators, RDA conducted a literature and best practice review of evaluation studies and performance measures in relevant fields such as youth systems, criminal justice systems, and collaborative system-wide initiatives. This review focused on determining outcome domains and performance measures applicable to the scope and goals of PYJI.<sup>2</sup>

## Phase II Evaluation Domains

### Change Management and Sustainability

- This domain addresses how counties are managing the system change process by preparing, implementing, and institutionalizing reforms. From this analysis, the evaluation will document promising practices in change management.

### Implementation Facilitators and Challenges

- This domain explores facilitators and barriers to successfully changing juvenile justice and other youth-serving systems, guided by the domains of systems change identified in the Phase I literature review. From this, the evaluation will synthesize lessons learned and effective practices for successful systems change.

### System Outcomes

- This domain assesses youth perceptions of the systems with which they interact, including probation, education, child welfare, behavioral health, and community-based services. This will allow the evaluation to triangulate findings from our assessment of counties' implementation with evidence of the extent to which reforms have shifted youth experiences.

## Evaluation Design and Methods

The evaluation team, in collaboration with Sierra Health Foundation, identified the following data collection activities designed to produce a thorough understanding of implementation activities and strategies.

- **Key informant interviews** with PYJI leadership in each county to understand facilitators and barriers to implementation, change management strategies, and perceived impact of PYJI.
- **Focus groups with staff** from PYJI partner agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) in each county to explore how line staff practices have changed as a result of the reforms.
- **Two focus groups with youth** in each county to understand how youth experience the probation system and other youth-serving systems with which they are involved.

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<sup>2</sup> This review was presented in the Year 1 evaluation report and is available at the following link: [http://www.sierrahealth.org/assets/PYJI/SHF\\_PYJI\\_Year\\_1\\_Evaluation\\_Performance\\_Measures\\_Literature\\_20150108.pdf](http://www.sierrahealth.org/assets/PYJI/SHF_PYJI_Year_1_Evaluation_Performance_Measures_Literature_20150108.pdf). Domains of system change implementation included leadership vision and support; line staff vision and support; partnerships and collaboration; policies and procedures; data collection, sharing, and use; family and community engagement; training; and resources and sustainability. The full set of RDA reports related to PYJI can be found at <http://www.shfcenter.org/pyji/evaluation>.

- **A survey of youth** to gather feedback from a broader array of youth than would be captured through youth focus groups alone.<sup>3</sup>

Appendix A lists the numbers and participants in each of the qualitative data collection methods. The evaluation team also reviewed documentary data from each county and from the foundation and met regularly with the Sierra Health Foundation PYJI team.

## Report Organization

The report discusses the implementation and impacts of PYJI that counties have experienced thus far in Phase II. It is organized in three sections:

- **Key areas of progress and challenges that counties have experienced in Phase II implementation.** In first discussing the key areas in which counties made more or less progress in implementation, the report sets the stage for the subsequent discussion of the impacts that have followed from these activities.
- **An analysis of the most notable impacts of PYJI to date,** including both system-level impacts and impacts on youth and caregivers' experiences.
- **Recommendations** to support the ongoing efforts and sustainability of juvenile justice reform in current PYJI counties and to identify promising practices for other counties and jurisdictions seeking to reform their juvenile justice systems.

The report includes corresponding icons to illuminate what works well in systems-change implementation and to showcase youth voice. The light bulb icon represents facilitators of success and lessons learned during implementation—strategies counties used that helped during implementation or that they would recommend in the future. The caution icon represents pitfalls to avoid or address. The comment bubble icon represents youth experiences of the systems with which they interact, as a way to highlight potential strengths and challenges of implementing system-level reforms.



What works well



What to avoid



Youth voice

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<sup>3</sup> RDA did not receive sufficient survey responses from one of the PYJI counties to include in the analysis. In addition, focus group conversations with youth revealed that for some questions, youth interpreted survey questions differently than intended. Because we do not have survey findings from both counties, and because of concerns about the validity of the survey responses, we do not include the survey findings in this report.

## Implementation Progress

In the first year of Phase II implementation, counties have taken targeted actions to continue the momentum of systems reform and address some of the challenges they have encountered thus far. Counties have increased family and youth engagement, addressed information and service gaps, emphasized youth development, strengthened interagency communication and data sharing, and continued to promote the sustainability of reforms by institutionalizing changes. This section describes these implementation highlights, as well as challenges counties faced during the first year of Phase II PYJI implementation.

## Implementation Successes

### Increasing family engagement

Over the course of implementing PYJI, counties recognized that for system reforms to succeed, parents and families must be active partners and participants. In Phase II, counties have created more opportunities for families to become involved in youth-serving public systems. For example, one county invited parents to a Back to School night at the school located in the juvenile detention facility. To proactively engage parents, one school district began sending school-based PYJI staff to youths' homes if these staff had difficulty getting in contact with the youth's parents. These visits have been so successful in contacting hard-to-reach families that that some teachers now ask to join the PYJI staff on these trips. To address family needs in case planning and goal setting, one county's probation department revised their case plans and social history reports to require information about the family strengths.



Counties said that families are an important partner and their engagement is necessary to fully support youth and reinforce positive youth development elements.

### Strengthening youth engagement

As part of the initiative design, PYJI aimed to engage youth in all aspects of the initiative, from planning to implementation. Youth participation is congruent with a positive youth development (PYD) view of young people as resources who can contribute valuable knowledge and experiences. Youth participation has been found to strengthen personal and social development, promote civic engagement, and even reduce behavior that is characterized as delinquent.<sup>4,5</sup> As noted in the Phase I cumulative report, some service providers suggested that counties gather feedback from youth about their perspectives on the services they have received and their relationships with probation officers. Thus far in Phase II, one county assembled a youth justice leadership team to provide feedback about the program and discuss

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<sup>4</sup> Checkoway, B. (2011). "What is youth participation?" *Children and Youth Services Review* 33(2): 340- 345.

<sup>5</sup> Crean, H. F. (2012). "Youth activity involvement, neighborhood adult support, individual decision making skills, and early adolescent delinquent behaviors: Testing a conceptual model." *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*.

the same agenda items covered in county PYJI leadership meetings; the youth leaders also act as mentors to younger youth in elementary schools. Another county gave surveys to youth in juvenile hall to allow them to anonymously provide feedback about programs and make suggestions for improvements.

*“We see we need to do a better job in bringing young people’s voices and opinions into this work ... giving young people a legitimate stake in the game when it comes to their insight and feedback on what we should do regarding next steps.” –County Leadership*



Providing youth opportunities to share feedback about their experiences can help counties improve services and reinforce a youth-centered approach to supervision and service delivery.

### **Emphasizing youth development**

PYJI aims to encourage system transformation focused on the development of healthy youth, rather than punitive sanctions and confinement. In Phase II, counties have made progress toward implementing a youth-development approach in public agencies—such as the district attorney’s office and probation department—that had previously taken more of a punishment-based approach to youth. Counties developed or expanded diversion programs to ensure that low-risk youth do not formally engage with the juvenile justice system, operating from the assumption that if low-risk youth are diverted from the juvenile justice system, counties will focus probation resources on medium- and high-risk youth—a noted best practice in juvenile and criminal justice practice.<sup>6</sup> In one county, a juvenile probation office moved to an existing multi-service center to create a warmer environment and facilitate access to rehabilitative services. In another county, the school in the juvenile detention facility received a Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation so that youth can graduate directly from the facility.

*“I was skeptical going into PYJI. As a prosecutor, we tend to be in a certain mindset. I’ve seen that PYD concepts, they really can motivate youth to succeed and not reoffend.” – District Attorney staff*

### **Increasing interagency collaboration among line staff**

PYJI seeks to bring about broad, systemic reform that relies upon interagency collaboration. Generally, PYJI counties initially developed cross-system collaboration through executive-level meetings. Recognizing the benefits of deeper collaboration—particularly among line staff—counties have established new meetings between line staff from youth-serving institutions and agencies. In one county, the probation department developed a monthly meeting between staff from community-based

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<sup>6</sup> Latessa, E. and Lowenkamp, C. (2006). What Works in Reducing Recidivism. *University of St. Thomas Law Journal*, pp. 521-535.

organizations and probation officers to build relationships and increase collaboration. When the county noticed low attendance at PYJI program orientations for youth, this group of line staff provided suggestions about how to increase turnout. In another county, school staff, probation officers, and community partners have attended interagency trainings covering topics such as adolescent development and cultural responsiveness; this group also meets for annual PYJI summits and collaborative meetings.

*“Philosophically, it’s a different relationship with the school district than it used to be. Before, we’d get calls from school administrators that they wanted probation officers to get kids out of school or lock them up. But there’s now a philosophical change at the district level to keep them in school. Now we work collaboratively with schools instead of trying to get them out.” – Probation staff*



Establishing opportunities for interagency line staff to regularly meet and collaborate supports relationship building that can lead to on-the-ground collaboration and consistency in implementing reforms.

### **Developing operational procedures to promote sustainability**

To support the long-term sustainability of system reforms, counties continued to institutionalize system reforms by integrating positive youth development and trauma-informed care elements into agencies’ policies and procedures, particularly within probation departments. New policies and procedures spanned supervision, risk assessments, detention policies, and internal case audits. Counties are also actively planning to revise new employee orientations and job descriptions to include positive youth development and trauma-informed care elements.

*“Elements have to be built within the organization ... they have to be the foundation of how you function to be sustainable, in everything we do and say. We have to continue to embed it in the areas of organization where it will get the attention it needs.” – County Leadership*



Embedding system reform elements within agencies’ policies, job descriptions, and performance assessments institutionalizes the reforms and integrates them into day-to-day department processes and activities.

## **Implementation Challenges**

### **Limited resources to engage families**

Though counties made progress engaging families, they recognized that fully serving families is a challenging endeavor that requires dedicated resources. One community-based provider observed that parents and families oftentimes require just as much support as youth. Family needs span mental and physical health, transportation, employment, and family strengthening. Language barriers can also

create challenges if agencies do not have bilingual staff or interpretation services. In one county, a Parent Partner position was created specifically to inform and engage families about the juvenile justice system and PYJI services.

*“By the time a youth is on probation, there have been years of dysfunction. Trying to get parents on board at that point, when they’re at their wits end, is hard to do. That’s one of our main focuses.” –County leadership*



Counties found that dedicated resources were necessary to fully engage and serve families; therefore, cross-system collaboratives should include organizations that can provide services and resources to address family needs.

### Getting all staff on board

In some cases, limited staff buy-in created barriers to PYJI implementation. For example, one probation department created a sanctions and rewards matrix, but found that officers were not consistently using the daily incentives to reward youth for positive behavior. Reward underutilization was partly due to the cumbersome process for documenting reward provision, but also compounded by some staff’s belief that rewards were not always appropriate, as shown in the quote below. Trainings can improve buy-in, but even when staff attended trainings they found useful, such as learning about trauma-informed care, these staff did not always support department-wide reforms that required them to change how they did their job and interacted with youth. (See the next two sections for an in-depth discussion about staff buy-in.)

*“I think we try not to lock kids up. By doing so, to me it’s a backwards way of thinking. We give them a lot of stuff when they don’t deserve it. And we try to keep them from juvenile hall, when they should be there. We don’t use it as a resource when we should.” –Probation staff*

### Coordinating new programs and policies

Through PYJI, counties implemented new programs and services, such as referrals to contracted community-based services. In some instances, new programs were duplicative of existing interventions because youth already received some of the services offered by the new programs. Scheduling new programs and services was also challenging; one county found that the programs offered by community-based organizations were sometimes scheduled at the same time as probation-mandated classes for youth. Some new coordination problems also arose as counties expanded their system reforms to include all youth on probation. For example, one county found that as more youth became eligible for PYJI-funded programs, they had difficulty getting all referred youth to attend a required PYJI orientation.

## Gaps in communication and information sharing between line staff

When counties first began implementing PYJI, agencies knew they would need to build relationships and create communication mechanisms to work collaboratively. Throughout the initiative, agencies have increasingly gained clarity about the specific type of information they needed from PYJI partners. As agencies have deepened their collaboration over time, new and more targeted communication and information sharing needs have surfaced. For example, when one county instituted referrals to PYJI-funded community-based services, probation officers realized that they needed a way to find out how youth were progressing in these programs. In addition to sharing information about service receipt and progress, staff from probation, schools, and community-based organizations pointed to gaps in knowledge about each other's policies and programs. In one county, probation officers were unclear about the specific services offered by the contracted community-based organizations; conversely, staff from community-based organizations were unclear about how completion of their program would affect youths' length of probation.

*"More information about the school system and their codes would help when we're trying to collaborate. Some things I think are right are not realistic in the school system because they have their rules and some things they think I should be doing are not possible." – Probation staff*

## Bringing all necessary partners to the table

Each county has a core group of partners that meets regularly to plan and monitor PYJI implementation. Consistent with Phase I findings, counties continued to face challenges engaging all necessary partners. One county struggled to engage local school districts, a particularly important partner not only because of the substantial amount of time that youth spend in school, but also because school police departments are an entry point into the juvenile justice system.

To engage less active law enforcement partners, such as police departments and courts, counties developed strategies such as adding PYJI as an agenda item to other juvenile justice meetings that included these stakeholders. Counties have also noted that leadership changes in stakeholder agencies can open up new opportunities for collaboration or threaten involvement from formerly engaged stakeholders.

*"It pains me to see that [the local school system] isn't engaged in [PYJI]. They do have a police department – that's kind of an entry point for young people into justice system that we don't have control over. With them not part of [PYJI], it's difficult to have conversations about what we're trying to change." –County leadership*



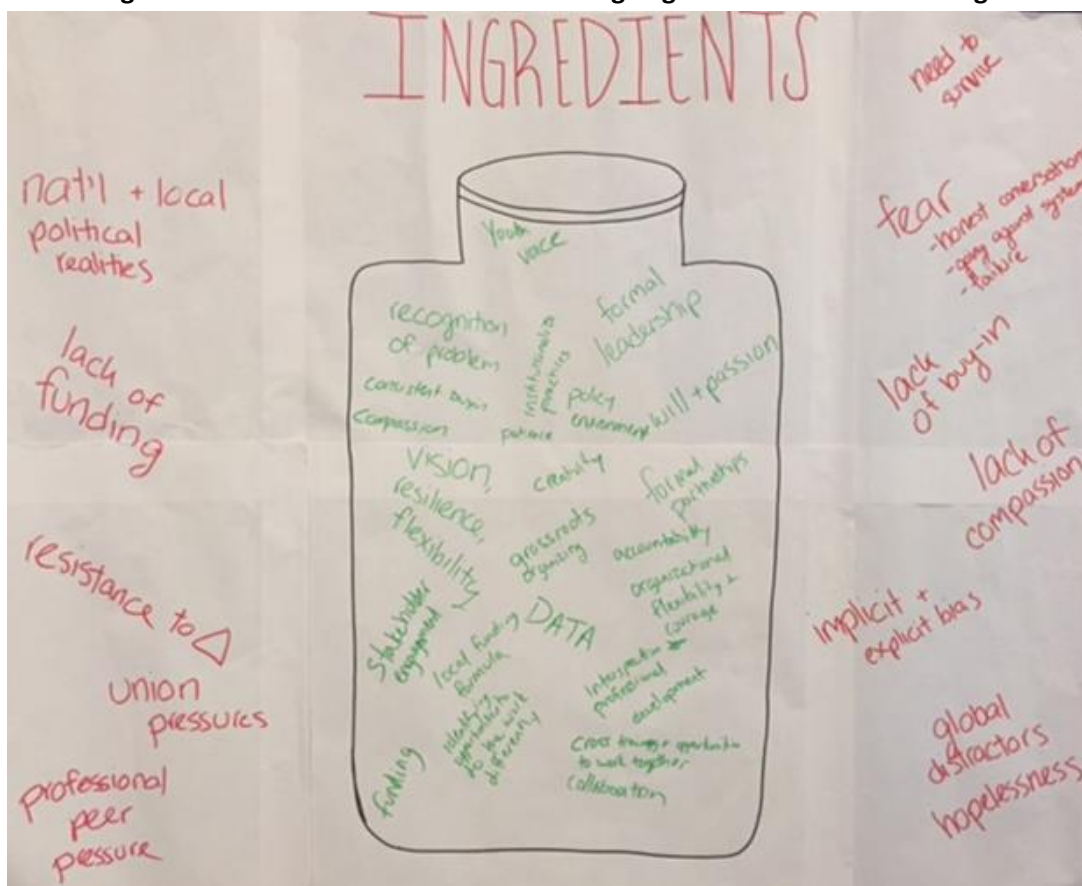
Integrating new reforms with other juvenile justice initiatives can educate and engage difficult-to-contact stakeholders.



## Key Components and Impacts of System Reforms

Over the course of the initiative, PYJI counties have learned many valuable lessons about what it takes to successfully implement systems reforms and effect change. In an October 2016 meeting, representatives from a diverse group of PYJI partner agencies completed an activity about the facilitators and barriers to scaling organizational culture change to the entire juvenile justice system. As displayed in the figure below, facilitators (elements inside the ingredient jar) included internal factors such as buy-in, recognition of the problem, data, and political will; and barriers (elements outside of the jar) included external pressures such as the political environment, union pressures, and funding.

**Figure 1: Barriers and Facilitators to Scaling Organizational Culture Change**



Through this exercise, as well as key informant interviews and focus groups with leadership, staff, and youth on probation in PYJI counties, three overarching themes emerged as internal factors critical to effective implementation of PYJI: 1) buy-in, 2) collaboration, and 3) youth navigation support. This section discusses each element and describes why it is important and its status and impact in PYJI counties. The following section presents recommendations for furthering success in each of these areas.

## Buy-In for Reforms

### Why does buy-in matter?

Staff support for the philosophy of an initiative, coupled with the belief that system changes are important and achievable, are essential to systems change. Buy-in not only impacts staff's willingness to make changes in how they do their job; it also influences the sustainability of an initiative. Buy-in must be present at the leadership level for reforms to take hold. In an implementation evaluation of six counties engaged in jail reentry initiative, The Urban Institute found that "sites making the most progress were typically characterized by ongoing and active involvement of policy-level leaders in the jail and the community."<sup>7</sup> Additionally, as noted by the US Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, frontline staff are the "linchpins of change," since systems change initiatives can only be effective if they are put into practice.<sup>8</sup>

Staff buy-in is particularly critical to successful juvenile justice systems change because, as a youth development initiative, many PYJI activities center on the interactions and relationships between staff and youth. Integrating positive youth development (PYD) and trauma-informed care (TIC) into department policies supports the institutionalization of reforms, but for youth to view the juvenile justice system as fair and supportive, staff must buy into the goals of the initiative and employ a development-focused, strengths-based approach in all their interactions with youth. For example, one youth acknowledged that his probation officer would ask him how he was doing, but he believed the officer did not listen to his response or care about his well-being and only asked because it was a job requirement. When youth do experience different approaches from probation officers, teachers, and service providers, this can also shift their own views and help them build trust and engage in working toward successfully completing probation.

### What does buy-in look like in PYJI counties?

Overall, the leadership of agencies involved in PYJI have been aligned in their vision for juvenile justice reform and committed to integrating reforms within their agency. However, in PYJI counties, there have been varying levels of staff buy-in across agencies and there are indications that the culture shift across systems has not yet extensively affected the experiences of system-involved youth.

The evaluation found that staff and stakeholders' perceptions of what it means to support youth and hold them accountable influenced their support of reforms. Probation officers who believed that a punitive approach is the best way to facilitate behavior change were more resistant to PYJI reforms.

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<sup>7</sup> Willison, J. B., Jannetta, J., Dodd, H., Neusteter, S. R., Warwick, K., Greer, K., & Matthews, A. (2012). Process and Systems Change Evaluation Findings from the Transition from Jail to Community Initiative. Washington, DC

<sup>8</sup> National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care. (2010). Gaining Buy-In from the Front Line During Times of Change. Washington, DC: Children's Bureau.

Through the system reform process, staff have been expected to apply trainings they received to shift the way they interact with youth. Though almost all staff found TIC trainings useful and agreed with many PYD elements, a number of staff were still resistant to changing many of their practices and held very mixed attitudes toward the way PYJI reforms had been implemented in their agency. Some probation officers felt that PYJI undermined their authority by restricting their ability to use punitive sanctions and feared that this would lead to less youth accountability. Though staff agreed, in theory, that PYD and TIC-informed approaches were valuable, they shared frustration that they no longer had the same discretion to implement sanctions.

#### ***What factors affected staff buy-in?***

- **Openness to PYD principles.** This may stem from staff's academic or professional background.
- **Openness to change.** Veteran staff may be more resistant to change.
- **Trust between staff and leadership.** Without trust, staff are more likely to be skeptical or cynical about the intention of the initiative.
- **Perceptions of PYJI's effect on workload.** It is difficult for staff to buy in to reforms that they see as adding more job responsibilities.
- **Perceived permanency of PYJI.** Staff who have been part of past initiatives may experience "initiative fatigue."

Some staff expressed concerns that new policies and practices added to their workload, since some changes required staff to spend more time documenting interactions and justifying decisions. One department is planning to address this concern by undertaking a workload analysis to calculate how much time staff spend with youth. Staff also were less likely to embrace changes when they viewed PYJI as a passing fad, rather than a permanent paradigm shift within their field.

*"We have 100 percent buy-in at the formal leadership level ... where the work becomes more challenging is with the folks on the front lines ... Every year we get more and more buy-in, but it's not where we want it to be." –County leadership*

#### **What are the impacts of buy-in?**

##### **Impact on agency culture**

For agencies with broader buy-in, implementing PYJI reforms led to **culture change and increased employee engagement**, as staff increased collaboration with other PYJI partners and understood how their actions contributed to their agency's mission. When present, culture change was characterized by **new approaches to work and role redefinition**. For example, some probation officers stressed that they now see their jobs as youth advocates. One probation officer described that staff have shifted their approach to listening to youth and their families, rather than telling them what to do. Conversely, mixed buy-in negatively affected agency culture when it created internal divisions between those who were for and against the initiative.

## Impact on youth

Similar to Phase I of PYJI Implementation, youth focus group participants reported that the **quality of their relationships** with probation officers, school administrations, and program staff still depended on the individual. In both counties, some youth expressed having positive and supportive relationships with their probation officers and teachers; however, other youth commonly reported feeling intimidated and judged by their probation officers and teachers.

One of the indicators of culture change in action is the presence of youth-serving adults who are approachable, give youth multiple chances to stay on track, and acknowledge their success and progress. In one county, a youth focus group participant shared that his family had a long and difficult experience with the justice system, but his experience with his probation officer had been supportive. He shared that his probation officer did not treat him like he was on probation, but rather like a “human being.” Additionally, his probation officer connected him to job opportunities.



*“My probation officer really gives me chances. She has patience with me, and she was nice. She would call me and talk about what I was thinking and took me to her job. She seriously treated me like I was one of her kids.”*

Focus group discussions about interactions with probation officers and the probation system revealed that many **youth continued to experience punitive approaches** intended to stop young people from engaging in delinquent behavior, rather than PYD approaches that seek to build on their assets. Several youth in one focus group shared their experiences of having probation officers place them in handcuffs as they searched their homes. Youth described these encounters as upsetting and retaliatory. One youth remarked that the same probation officer who would give him gift cards would also conduct home searches that would, “leave my house a mess,” and show up to school and search him in front of other students.



*“She [probation officer] has weird jokes like ‘I almost put a warrant out for your arrest.’ But that’s not funny or they’ll say, ‘You don’t want to listen? You’ll listen when you’re in the hall.’”*

## Interagency Collaboration

### Why does collaboration matter?

PYJI seeks to improve the health and well-being of justice-involved youth and reduce barriers to their successful transition to adulthood. This work cannot be completed by one agency alone; it relies upon a collaboration of youth-serving agencies that partner together to support youth and make meaningful and comprehensive reforms to practice and policy.

As noted by the Crime and Justice Institute, collaboration among system stakeholders “eliminates barriers, increases opportunities for success, enriches the change process, educates stakeholders about the agency’s work, and creates a shared vision that supports the systemic change efforts.”<sup>9</sup> Collaboration should include a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies, community-based organizations, community groups, and representatives from the communities most affected.

### What does collaboration look like in PYJI counties?

Leadership across PYJI partner agencies identified interagency collaboration as one of the key strengths of PYJI. In some cases, PYJI was the impetus for agencies to begin building relationships with other youth-serving organizations, which moved partners toward a new norm of working together. In one county, monthly executive steering committee meetings include representatives from a number of agencies, commissions, and community-based organizations. However, consistent participation from some agencies has been a challenge. In other cases, agencies’ participation in the initiative was limited because the representatives attending these meetings did not have decision-making power to commit to PYJI reforms.

One of the implementation highlights discussed in the previous section is interagency collaboration among line staff, which has been strengthened through meetings and trainings attended by line staff from different agencies. Team-based decision making meetings also provided an opportunity for probation officers and representatives from youth-serving agencies to support youth through collaborative case planning. However, the frequency of team-based decision making meetings varied across counties.

As noted in the previous section, there were still gaps in communication and challenges within collaboration and bringing all necessary partners on board. Sierra Health Foundation’s *Positive Youth Justice Initiative: Implementation Phase II Concept Paper* highlights the importance of partnering with the education system, law enforcement, judicial officers, and community advocates and organizers. Though these partners were generally aware of PYJI activities, they were not always actively engaged in the initiative. This was particularly true of law enforcement agencies and judges, two groups that possess significant influence in determining who enters the juvenile justice system. Youth consistently

#### ***What factors affected collaboration?***

- **Agency leadership buy-in to reforms.** This will be impacted by leaders’ openness to PYJI principles, openness to change, and agency priorities.
- **History of collaboration.** Agencies that have experience working together have a foundation for collaboration.
- **Resources and time to support collaboration.** It can be difficult for agencies to collaborate without funding to support partnerships.
- **Timing of collaboration invitation.** Reaching out to agencies during the planning phase can help secure collaboration and buy-in.

<sup>9</sup> Crime and Justice Institute. (2010). Implementing Evidence-Based Principles in Community Corrections: Collaboration for Systemic Change in the Criminal Justice System. National Institute of Corrections. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/abstractdb/AbstractDBDetails.aspx?id=252378>

described negative experiences in the courts, indicating that reforms must be extended to courts in order to change how youth view the juvenile justice system.

## What are the impacts of collaboration?

### Impact on agencies

Increased coordination has supported **consistent messaging and learning across agencies**. One county invited staff from all PYJI partner agencies to trainings. This ensured that staff across agencies had the same knowledge base and spoke a similar language in regards to terms such as trauma-informed care, and also resulted in potential cost savings by leveraging an economy of scale.

When agency leadership and staff developed relationships outside of their agency, they could more **easily and quickly troubleshoot issues pertaining to youths' transitions** between different systems. For example, in one county, probation and the school system were able to quickly address an issue regarding school placement for a youth leaving the detention facility because leaders in these agencies could call each other to discuss the issue. Because relationships are central to effective collaboration, even when formal agreements are in place to guide cross-agency processes, positive personal connections can be crucial to make linkages across systems.

Increased cross-agency communication can also support **wider adoption of a PYD approach**. One prosecutor recounted that the district attorney's office had previously operated with minimal communication to other juvenile justice system partners, but PYJI changed the approach of juvenile prosecution as the office began to collaborate with other agencies, both public and nonprofit. This collaboration influenced the DA's adoption of diversion programs. Now, probation officers frequently call the district attorney's office to clarify whether they should handle cases informally or refer youth for prosecution. One stakeholder credited this communication as the reason that the district attorney's office files fewer cases.

As a result of increased cross-agency communication, staff have become more aware of each other's programs and therefore have been able to **provide more targeted referrals** to meet youths' and their families' needs. In one county, probation officers learned through PYJI that schools offered anger management classes. Youth required to complete anger management as a condition of probation can now take these classes in school, rather than having to find transportation to another location.

*"Before this, it was very siloed. We had these resources, they had their resources. We didn't know what was going on over there. This has assisted in tearing down silos. We're more collaborative."*

*—County leadership*

### Impact on youth

From the difficulties of navigating the various youth-serving systems to the siloed nature of those systems, many youth underscored the importance of collaboration among adults and youth-serving



systems to ensure their **success in completing their probation requirements**. After the death of his aunt, one youth focus group participant explained that he was unable to attend his mandatory drug treatment classes for two weeks. He communicated his circumstance to his probation officer, who was then able to work with the drug treatment program staff to revise his class schedule. Typically, not attending mandatory drug treatment classes might lead to an additional violation. In this case, the probation officer was flexible and partnered with both the youth and the drug treatment staff to ensure he could complete the program and meet his probation requirements.

*“The more we know about resources, the easier it is on kids and family.”*  
—County leadership

## Youth Navigation Support

### Why does youth navigation support matter?

The literature on mentoring speaks to some of the benefits of youth navigation support. A strong research base supports the wide-ranging benefits of mentoring. One recent meta-analysis of more than 73 independent mentoring program evaluations found positive outcomes from mentoring in youth development areas including social, emotional, behavioral, and academic development.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, mentors that can act as “resource banks” or “resource connectors” amplify their impact by connecting youth with additional community resources.<sup>11</sup>

Through the PYJI evaluation, an element that emerged as a crucial factor in supporting justice-involved youth is the role of an advocate or champion to provide youth navigation support—a trusted point person who helps youth navigate various systems and serves as both an advocate and a confidante. Youth described that across the multiple systems with which they interact, including the education system, juvenile courts, and probation, they are more successful when they have at least one adult who will encourage them and advocate for them. In addition to personal support, youth oftentimes need someone to help them navigate the juvenile justice system, schools, and other systems they may touch such as behavioral health and child welfare. Ideally, this person possesses the knowledge and resources necessary to advocate for and support youth across systems.

*“Mentorship is what we found that is effective... it's proven that long term mentorship works—not just classes, not just groups, but putting them with someone that can walk through and mentor them through this thing called life.”* – CBO staff

### What does youth navigation support look like in PYJI counties?

PYJI counties have made efforts to integrate positive youth development and trauma-informed care throughout youth-serving systems and many PYJI youth could identify at least one adult who wanted

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<sup>10</sup>Bruce, M., & Bridgeland, J. (2014). *The Mentoring Effect: Young People’s Perspectives on the Outcomes and Availability of Mentoring*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED558065>

<sup>11</sup>Garringer, M. (2011). *“It May Be the Missing Piece” – Exploring the Mentoring of Youth in Systems of Care*. Portland, OR: Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring.

them to be successful and helped them navigate different systems. Each PYJI county had a unique approach to providing community and personal supports.

In one county, the probation department partners with community-based organizations that provide a variety of services to support youth, such as case management, policy advocacy training, and youth groups. By working with multiple service providers, youth referrals can be tailored to the organization that is the best fit for each youth. Organizations are spread across the county and each possesses different areas of expertise, such as working with gang-involved youth or supporting families to become financially stable. The probation department also employs a parent partner who helps parents support their child on probation.

Another county's service delivery model centers on a school-based staff person, the PYJI Liaison, who acts as a case manager and regularly communicates with probation officers and the county office of education. The probation department and schools are also partnering with the faith-based community to provide mentoring services.

#### ***What factors affected youth navigation support?***

- **Strong personal relationships.** Navigators can more easily develop trust when they have similar backgrounds or experiences as youth.
- **Interagency collaboration.** Navigators can better support youth and families when they have built relationships with other youth-serving agencies.
- **Navigators' knowledge and authority.** Navigators can best serve youth if they are knowledgeable about how youth-serving systems operate and are respected as youth advocates within those systems.

*"I heard a lot that kids enjoy one-on-one time, the time they have with some of the leaders... They really like the mentoring part of it. Not only talking about academics and terms of probation, but feeling like someone cared. To feel like part of a family."*

*—School staff*

#### **What are the impacts of youth navigation support?**

In one county, youth widely described the PYJI liaison as their designated advocate who would **champion their needs**. They pointed to numerous examples of the PYJI liaisons' assistance that included collaboration with school staff to ensure they had the appropriate classes needed for graduation and finding them places to live in times of hardship.



*"[School staff] will do anything to help. They will help me look for colleges and they let me know their own connections and help with jobs. They help me in ways my family won't even—they help me make connections to jobs, schools, etc."*

Some youth involved in PYJI programming articulated that program staff help them understand laws and the juvenile justice system, and **how to better advocate for themselves** as well as **make better choices**



**and deter them from further justice system involvement.** Youth also shared that program staff will often employ youth or connect them with other job opportunities.

## Scaling Organizational Culture Change: Recommendations

This section presents considerations for success in each of the three areas identified as key components of systems change: buy-in for reforms, interagency collaboration, and youth navigation support.

### What works to develop buy-in?

**10. Develop an implementation plan.** Phasing in reforms can prevent staff from getting overwhelmed and also allow time for thoughtful planning. It is important, however, to ensure that there is constant progress and the initiative does not lose momentum. As part of the implementation plan, agency leadership should create a communication plan for how they will explain the initiative's benefits and the upcoming changes and their timeline to all staff.



In some agencies, policies were rolled out incrementally, providing staff enough time to acclimate to new changes and avoid change fatigue.



In one probation department, officers were expected to give out daily incentives and document this provision, but the policy was implemented before data systems were in place to support tracking.

**2. Provide a variety of staff trainings to educate staff about the research supporting PYD and TIC and provide them tools to implement this new approach.**



One county took a train-the-trainer approach to TIC training, with the goal of building their internal capacity to carry on TIC training in the future.



Bureaucratic challenges with union contracts prevented certain agencies from mandating attendance at staff trainings.

**3. Involve midlevel and line staff early in the reform process and provide staff meaningful and regular opportunities for feedback.** Including staff from all levels early in the initiative will increase buy-in and facilitate implementation.



In one county, staff appreciated having continuous opportunities to provide feedback: *"Keeping the lines of communication open to continually address opposition was another good thing we did. Even though it seemed redundant, the administration allowed enough time to keep meeting and hearing the same issues said by different people. They didn't shut it off...they kept allowing people to vent and addressed those concerns."*



Feedback mechanisms can include anonymous surveys or forms, focus groups, and all-staff meetings. Taking periodic “pulse checks” to gauge staff support throughout the implementation process will help inform next steps.



In one probation department, line staff did not get advance communication about the planned reforms and felt blindsided when reforms were developed without their input.

**4. Celebrate successes.** Positive reinforcement is an effective tool to generate buy-in. Celebrating small successes can motivate staff and reinforce a positive agency culture.



In one county, staff were invited to celebrate successes in implementation during all-staff meetings.



In one county, probation leadership invited probation staff to the youths’ support group graduation ceremonies so that staff could see the results of PYJI-funded efforts.

**5. Plan for staffing needs.** Staff will be more resistant to reforms if they view reforms as tasking them with additional responsibilities that they do not have the time or capacity to take on.



One probation department is undertaking a workload analysis to calculate how much time staff spend with youth in order to ensure that new policies do not interfere with the amount of time probation officers spend with youth.



Some agencies hired PYJI coordinators, which helped staff feel that the initiative had dedicated internal support.

**6. Identify and leverage staff champions.** Staff who embrace reforms will be particularly effective at messaging the benefit of the initiative to their coworkers.



In one county, probation staff who regularly used daily incentives to reward youth for positive behavior were commended in staff meetings and asked to share their experiences with other staff.

- 7. Integrate initiative principles into job descriptions and hiring.** This will ensure new staff are on board with the initiative and promote its sustainability.



Job postings should include professional or educational backgrounds in fields that employ a PYD- and TIC-approach (e.g., experience working in social services, previous coursework in youth development) as desired qualifications.

- 8. Expect that some staff may never buy into the initiative.** If some staff continue to resist changing their approach, consider shifting their responsibilities to minimize interactions with youth, if possible.



One Chief Probation Officer expected that some probation officers would resist PYJI; he planned to change their assignments from youth supervision to another position that does not involve interacting with youth.



Veteran staff may be more resistant to change, as well as staff who believe that a punitive approach is the best way to facilitate behavior change.

- 9. Model the way.** PYJI strives to focus on youth development, rather than punitive sanctions. In a similar vein, agency leadership should motivate staff through inspiration and information (e.g., communicating a shared vision, trainings) rather than intimidation or punitive measures.



Some staff reported that they were simply ordered to change how they operate and that administration did not listen to staffs' concerns.

## What works to develop collaboration?

- 2. Focus on common goals and highlight the mutual benefits of collaboration.** Recognizing that youth-serving agencies across the juvenile justice system, education system, and nonprofit sector all aim to benefit youth and prevent recidivism can provide a foundation for collaboration.



In one county, PYJI provided a platform for the district attorney's office to collaborate with community-based organizations and other County agencies. This collaboration deepened once these agencies and organizations realized that they shared a common goal to reduce recidivism.



To engage less active law enforcement partners, such as local law enforcement agencies and courts, counties developed strategies such as adding PYJI as an agenda item to other juvenile justice meetings that included these stakeholders.

- 5. Make concerted efforts to include all necessary partners at the planning table.** It can be difficult to engage partners if they were not part of the initiative's development and planning.



One county leader stressed the importance of entering PYJI with strong relationships with education partners, such as the school system and county office of education.



In both counties, there were partners who were difficult to engage, particularly when they did not have a clear understanding of their role in the initiative.



Turnover of high-level leadership in stakeholder agencies can open up new opportunities for collaboration, but can also threaten involvement from formerly engaged stakeholders.

- 6. Create opportunities for frequent contact across organizational hierarchies and different agencies.** Interagency training and meetings strengthen relationships and promote collaboration.



In one county, school staff, probation officers, and community partners have attended interagency trainings covering topics such as adolescent development and cultural responsiveness; this group has also met for annual PYJI summits and collaborative meetings.

**7. Take the time to share information about how each agency operates.** Opportunities for deeper collaboration can arise when agencies communicate about their policies and practices.



In one county, the probation department's monthly meeting between staff from community-based organizations and probation officers provided a forum for each group to communicate about their processes and policies.



When probation officers and community-based providers struggled to understand each other's roles and responsibilities, this created barriers to effective referrals and coordination.

## What works to develop youth navigation support?

- 5. Dedicate resources to youth and family advocacy and support.** Even if reforms are made within youth-serving systems, youth and their families will need someone they trust to help them navigate each system and advocate for them. Providing meaningful advocacy and support requires time, funding, and space for individual meetings.



One county used PYJI funding to support a school-based PYJI Liaison that works directly with PYJI youth to provide mentorship and case management services.



One county developed a Parent Partner position to inform and engage families about the juvenile justice system and PYJI services.



Relying on probation officers as the primary navigation support can create missed opportunities for change, given the inherent power differences in the relationship between probation officers and youth.

- 6. Recognize that trust takes time to develop.** Matching youth with someone from a similar background with similar experiences can help build trust.



Both counties ensured that youth navigation support staff were from the same community as youth. Youth emphasized that they were better able to build trust with someone from a similar socioeconomic and cultural background; they felt this person understood them and had walked in their shoes.

- 7. Endeavor to build lasting relationships.** Advocates that will continue supporting youth and families after they complete probation or graduate from school can provide longer-term support.



One county works with a network of faith-based organizations that can provide mentorship and tutoring services, as well as support with meeting basic needs.



Turnover in youth navigation support positions can threaten the momentum of progress that youth may have made while working closely with one individual.

- 8. Empower navigators to effectively advocate for their clients.** Navigators should understand how other systems operate and should have access to staff and decision-makers across systems.



In one county, the PYJI liaison's understanding of school and probation systems and strong relationships with staff in both systems allowed him to immediately troubleshoot problems and bring together a wide range of stakeholders for team decision making meetings to support the youth.

## Conclusion

PYJI calls for counties to make systems-level reforms through investing in youth, treating trauma, providing wraparound service delivery, and strengthening local infrastructure. When counties first started Phase I of PYJI, they sought to undertake significant shifts in the ways they approached and worked with justice-involved youth. Over the first year of Phase II implementation, PYJI counties continued to integrate PYJI elements more extensively into public systems that serve high-risk youth in the juvenile justice system. As counties have identified specific areas in need of improvement, their activities have become more targeted and they have developed pointed strategies to meet continuing challenges.

The evaluation of the first year of Phase II highlights the mutually reinforcing relationship between buy-in for a positive and developmentally appropriate approach to working with youth and interagency collaboration; each bolsters the other, and both are necessary for reform. In addition, an element that was not central to PYJI's initial model, but that has emerged as a crucial factor in supporting justice-involved youth, is the role of an advocate or champion to provide youth navigation support—a trusted point person who helps youth navigate various systems and serves as both an advocate and a confidante. While this element may be particularly difficult to scale due to the intensive time and resources needed to sustain such a support person, it will be important to explore how counties can sustainably support youth and family advocates, along with their continued efforts to promote system-wide culture change and collaboration. It is the hope of the evaluation team and Sierra Health Foundation that the impacts and lessons learned captured in the evaluation will be useful for PYJI counties as they bring their reforms to scale as well as other counties that may be considering similar systems reforms.



## Appendix A: Qualitative Data Collection

Data Collection Method		Number of Participants	Participants
<b>Probation Focus Group</b>	Vallejo	10	Line staff, supervisors
	San Joaquin	12	Line staff
<b>Community-Based Organization Focus Group</b>	San Joaquin	5	CBO staff, parent partner
<b>School Staff Focus Group</b>	Vallejo	5	Student support specialist, PYJI liaison, principal
<b>Youth Focus Group</b>	Vallejo	10 (5 in focus group 1, 5 in focus group 2)	Youth Leadership Team members
	San Joaquin	18 (8 in focus group 1*, 10 in focus group 2)	PYJI youth from the three funded CBOs
<b>Key Informant Interviews</b>	Vallejo	5	Probation (2), school district, PYJI liaison, County Office of Education
	San Joaquin	6	Probation (4), PYJI coordinator, District Attorney's office

\* Several youth in focus group 1 were not PYJI youth; quotes from these youth were not included in the report.