

Positive Youth Justice Initiative Year 1 Evaluation – Summary of Implementation in Alameda County

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December 2014



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.



Alameda County

This summary reviews the implementation of the Positive Youth Justice Initiative (PYJI) in Alameda County during Year 1 of the initiative's implementation phase. The summary includes an overview of the County's implementation plan and structure; a synthesis of key strengths and challenges based on data from interviews, focus groups, and staff surveys; and a description of results from the Year 1 youth and caregiver surveys.

The Year 1 evaluation data collection included the following activities. The number in parentheses represents the number of respondents who participated in each of the activities or the number of focus groups that were conducted.

- Key informant interviews with PYJI leadership (9)
- Focus group with Probation Supervisors (1)
- Focus group with Child Welfare Division Directors (1)
- Focus group with community-based organization (CBO) providers (1)
- Site Visit
- Documentary Data
- Staff Survey (67)
- Youth Survey (23)
- Caregiver Survey (3)

Implementation Plan and Structure

Implementation Plan

The **Alameda County Probation Department (ACPD)** is the lead agency for Alameda County's PYJI. The County's PYJI implementation plan sets out a path for broad-based system reform with goals of creating a more youth-centered, gender-responsive, data-driven, and culturally-sensitive system for crossover youth. As such, the County's PYJI encompasses countywide, multi-system activities with a focus on providing training in trauma-informed care (TIC); developing data systems and capacity; expanding the use of wraparound services for crossover youth; changing practices in ACPD to increase the use of informal probation and diversion programs for crossover youth; and instituting youth and family involvement for youth being screened for out-of-home placement.

Implementation Highlights

During the first year of PYJI implementation, Alameda County:

- Submitted a revised implementation plan
- Implemented a collaborative PYJI planning structure
- Included PYJI language in Probation policies procedures and contracts
- Explored greater use of informal and formal probation for youth instead of out-of-home placement
- Moved toward the use of team decision making in Probation

Alameda County has defined crossover youth as **youth with an active probation case who have experienced a substantiated allegation of abuse or neglect within the last five years**. According to their July 2014 data report, in 2013, of the approximately 2,600 youth on probation supervision (including informal supervision), 282 were identified as crossover youth.

Recognizing that its initial implementation plan did not fully reflect the specific needs and goals of the County, ACPD submitted a revised implementation plan midway through the first year of implementation. The revised plan added emphasis on developing a collaborative leadership structure; data-driven decision-making; and youth, family, and community engagement.

Implementation Structure

Alameda County's PYJI is housed under the Juvenile Justice Partnership (JJP), a pre-existing collaborative comprised of executive leadership from 12 County agencies. The PYJI planning and implementation structure is led by two co-chairs, the Deputy Chief Probation Officer for Juvenile Services and the Social Services Administration (SSA)-Child Welfare Services Director, and supported by a dedicated PYJI Project Manager within ACPD. Planning and implementation for PYJI activities is carried out via a committee structure, with four PYJI sub-committees responsible for identifying, recommending, and implementing PYJI activities. Sub-committees meet monthly and are chaired by senior leadership from ACPD and SSA. Membership includes representatives from PYJI partner organizations and other interested stakeholders.

Pre-Implementation Context

Interview participants and survey respondents observed that Alameda County entered the PYJI implementation process with several important strengths. First, the participation of key justice and child welfare system partners in previous collaborative efforts, such as Georgetown University's Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) and the Juvenile Justice Partnership (JJP), provided a foundation of collaboration from which to build. Interviewed participants noted that the Health Care Services Agency (HCSA) had demonstrated a commitment to juvenile justice and had designated a member of senior leadership to be in charge of youth entering behavioral health care from the juvenile justice system. Members of leadership also explained that ACPD has also been able to draw on lessons learned from Child Welfare Services' experience implementing systems-change initiatives over the past ten years.

In addition, leadership from PYJI partner agencies highlighted a number of ways in which Alameda County had explored or implemented elements of PYJI prior to the initiative. For example, Alameda County has an existing protocol that addresses services for girls in Juvenile Hall, the Alameda County Juvenile Court has a history of providing gender-responsive services, and ACPD had already begun exploring the development of a girls' supervision unit. The first wraparound model in Alameda County started in 1997 with children in the child welfare system, so the Probation Department benefits from having a strong framework to build upon. Since then, many County agencies have developed experience with wraparound and team-based approaches, including SSA and BHCS. Further, both PYJI partners and technical assistance (TA) providers observed that Alameda County has a rich array of community-based providers that serve youth involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. This includes a

partnership between ACPD and the County's Delinquency Prevention Network (DPN), which was created specifically to provide diversion and prevention services for early justice-involved youth.

The County's advanced Medi-Cal reimbursement strategy also allows the County to leverage Medi-Cal funds for behavioral health treatment services and, as a federal Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver county, Alameda is able to use flexible funding to support the work of PYJI. County stakeholders also identified SB 163 foster care funding as potentially useful for supporting wraparound service provision. ACPD also draws support from Mental Health Services Act funding, Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act, and Youth Offender Block Grant funding.

Key Strengths and Progress in Implementation

Strong Support from County Leadership

County leadership reported high levels of buy-in and participation at the leadership level, citing strong participation in PYJI planning efforts, a shared commitment to PYJI values and practices, and an openness to tackling tough system-level changes. Leadership from PYJI partner agencies and staff from community-based organizations (CBOs) also observed that PYJI represents a significant organizational and cultural shift for Probation and recognized that ACPD has begun to make progress in growing its capacity for organizational and philosophical change. Several Probation Department stakeholders commented that Probation's Deputy Chief of Juvenile Services, in particular, has been actively involved and essential to moving PYJI implementation forward.

There is willingness and desire and commitment to really making a different system for crossover kids across the board.

This is all new territory, we're making some really huge shifts in terms of our practices and how we think and treat crossover youth; it's a big deal.

Involvement of Diverse Stakeholders in PYJI Planning and Implementation

Interview and focus group participants noted that ACPD has closely involved diverse partners in the PYJI planning process. By situating PYJI within the countywide JJP, leadership from key County and City agencies have been involved in PYJI from the start. The JJP includes executive level representatives from the Juvenile Court, Probation Juvenile Field Services, SSA-Child and Family Services, Health Care Services Agency-Behavior Health Children's Services, Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE), Public Health Department, Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), Public Defender's Office, and the District Attorney's Office. Owing to their experience with prior system-change projects, both Probation and Child Welfare staff highlighted that senior management from Child Welfare Services have supported ACPD in their efforts to spearhead PYJI.

The active involvement of Court stakeholders in the PYJI planning process, including the Juvenile Court, Public Defender's Office, and District Attorney's Office, stands out as a strength in Alameda County. Key informants also mentioned that leadership from the ACOE and OUSD, along with CBOs, have become

more involved in PYJI planning and implementation over the course of the first year. One County leader shared:

There are a lot of people at the table, and they keep coming. There is a strong investment in the work.

Growth in Operational Capacity

Interviews with leadership from PYJI partner agencies highlighted a number of efforts Alameda County has undertaken to increase its operational capacity to carry out PYJI-related activities. Key areas of progress include:

Policies and Procedures. ACPD Juvenile Field Services has begun the process of incorporating PYJI into its departmental policies and procedures manual, including revisions to intake, case planning, and documentation procedures. ACPD has also begun developing a protocol for identification and notification of relevant parties for crossover youth involvement. Additionally, ACPD plans to include language around positive youth development (PYD) and trauma informed practices in contracts with community-based providers.

Data Capacity, Sharing, and Use. ACPD has taken steps to improve its ability to identify and capture data on crossover youth, which will allow the department to make decisions based on a more robust understanding of this population. PYJI partner agencies are also in the process of developing cross-agency information-sharing guidelines. ACPD has also implemented a data-informed graduated response grid and plans to develop an incentives grid and is piloting the addition of a crossover youth component to its detention risk assessment tool.

Staff Training. PYJI stakeholders reported that the TIC sub-committee has actively moved forward with the training component for TIC, identifying a train-the-trainer model and planning for the rollout of cross-agency trauma training.

Staffing and Resources. PYJI partner agencies are preparing for or contemplating the feasibility of additional staffing to support PYJI's goals. The County is exploring the possibility of using funding from Title IV-E, SB 163, and/or EPSDT, as well as drawing on Medi-Cal resources. Various County agencies are also pushing to hire staff with trauma experience.

Improvements in Service Delivery

ACPD leadership underscored several areas in which the department has begun to modify service delivery practices to align with PYJI. ACPD is taking steps to increase family participation in team-based planning by piloting a version of Team Decision Making (TDM) for youth involved in the 241.1 joint protocol process. ACPD has also begun working with the District Attorney's Office to expand Probation's ability to use informal probation without going through the Court, in order to expedite processes and reduce court involvement of youth. As a result of the Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) the District Attorney's office is developing a diversion program for crossover youth. Supported by PYJI, ACPD is also continuing its plans to develop a gender-specific supervision unit.

Leadership from PYJI agencies also described that BHCS has begun extending wraparound services to probation youth. As part of this effort, BHCS clarified referral processes with Probation staff, which BHCS leadership noted has led to marked improvements in Probation's understanding of when and how to use particular behavioral health services. Staff survey responses also suggested that Probation staff have an understanding of referral processes and knowledge of available support services. A majority of respondents from Probation indicated that they agreed (45%) or somewhat agreed (40%) that they understand the formal referral process for wraparound services. In addition, 50% agreed and 42% somewhat agreed that they know where to refer youth and 55% agreed and 42% somewhat agreed that they know how to refer youth for support services.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

Achieving Widespread Dissemination and Support for PYJI

Findings from key informant interviews, focus groups, and staff surveys suggest that Alameda County has made limited progress in bringing staff from multiple levels of County on board to PYJI. Members of leadership explained that on the whole, the county has undertaken PYJI promotion and preparation largely at upper levels and mid-levels of staff, with plans to disseminate to line staff once the PYJI sub-committees have determined details of how PYJI will affect their day-to-day work. Survey respondents from Probation and CBOs conveyed mixed perspectives on county and organizational practices, indicating that Alameda County is still in an early stage of PYJI implementation and that the County's involvement in PYJI and its progress toward PYJI objectives has not been communicated widely. Survey respondents demonstrated somewhat limited awareness of PYJI, with slightly more than half of respondents from Probation (56%) and CBOs (54%) reporting that they have heard of PYJI.

In interviews and focus groups, County leadership and management expressed mixed feelings about this approach. On the one hand, PYJI leadership sought to be mindful that informing lower level staff about PYJI before a concrete plan was in place could create unnecessary confusion and worry. On the other hand, some expressed concern that limited rollout could impede buy-in from lower level staff, noting that without early education and invitations to participate in PYJI, mid-level and line staff might feel resistant to changes perceived as top-down. Highlighting common challenges with culture shift, conversations with ACPD staff at the leadership and management levels confirmed that mid- and lower-level Probation staff would likely be apprehensive about or resistant to PYJI due to fears of added responsibilities, experiences with past initiatives that were introduced but not sustained, and recent changes in executive level leadership. One County leader shared:

With PYJI, you are trying to change people's thinking from years of how everything has been done. Everyone is not on board with that. So you have to find people within the agencies that are on board, and educate the ones that are not.

Strengthening Partnerships

While interview and focus group findings point to Alameda County's progress in enhancing partnerships among County agencies under PYJI, sources noted that in many cases these partnerships are strongest

at the executive leadership level. PYJI stakeholders from diverse organizations acknowledged that Alameda County is in the process of addressing historically entrenched barriers to communication and collaboration—a challenge common to cross-system efforts in many public systems. For example, focus group and interview participants explained that Probation and Child Welfare line staff come from different organizational cultures and practices, and as such are still in the process of developing common language and procedures for working with youth involved in both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. In particular, focus group participants from Probation and Child Welfare voiced some disagreement about when it is appropriate for a youth to move from Child Welfare to Probation’s jurisdiction.

ACPD leadership also identified the need for targeted expansion of PYJI partnerships, including a desire to engage the Oakland Police Department and other law enforcement agencies, as well as to increase involvement of the educational system.

PYJI leaders within ACPD have also recognized a need to bring in CBOs as closer partners in the PYJI planning and implementation process. At the same time, ACPD leadership explained that determining appropriate CBOs to partner with under PYJI can be a challenge given the multitude of CBOs in the county. While ACPD’s partnerships with community-based service providers have grown and deepened through PYJI implementation, both County stakeholders and community-based providers noted that clarifying roles and responsibilities, particularly at the line staff level, would improve the collaborative process. For example, a number of community-based service providers identified challenges in coordinating and collaborating with County agencies, including difficulties in obtaining timely and sufficient information from probation officers and child welfare workers about the crossover youth they serve, as well as some confusion about which agency is or should be responsible for coordinating the care of children who are dually involved.

Survey responses alluded to possible tensions between the agencies and organizations serving crossover youth in Alameda County. One-third of respondents from Probation replied that they disagree (23%) or somewhat disagree (10%) that the agencies and organizations serving crossover youth collaborate effectively. Likewise, almost one-third of respondents from CBOs indicated that they disagreed (11%) or somewhat disagreed (19%) that these agencies and organizations collaborate effectively. This is despite the fact that almost all respondents from CBOs reported they agree (39%) or somewhat agree (58%) that their organization has a strong working relationship with Probation, and most respondents from Probation felt similarly, with 37% reporting they agree and 45% reporting they somewhat agree that their agency has strong working relationships with CBOs. However, respondents from CBOs were less favorable concerning their organization’s relationship with other public agencies, most notably almost 40% of respondents from CBOs replied that they disagreed (8%) or somewhat disagreed (31%) that their organization has a strong working relationship with Child Welfare.

Growing Operational Capacity

As Alameda County spent much of the past year refining its implementation plan, ACPD has simultaneously planned for and begun implementation of proposed changes in Year 1. In this light, PYJI stakeholders identified several key areas for further attention as implementation continues.

Policies and Procedures. Stakeholders specified relatively limited changes to policies and procedures to support PYJI implementation and, as noted above, mid-level staff in particular specified a need for more formalized procedures detailing inter-agency roles and responsibilities in implementing the elements of PYJI.

Data Collection and Sharing. PYJI leadership and management from agencies including ACPD, SSA, and BHCS recognized that there is still much work to do to support formal data sharing agreements, and stakeholders specified a need for continued development of data systems to identify and track crossover youth.

Staff Training and Capacity. Nearly all County and community-based partner staff expressed the need for more staff training on PYJI and its elements, both to develop shared language and definitions about PYJI and crossover youth and to ensure that staff are confident in content about TIC. Staff at multiple levels observed that in some agencies, the need for more training is compounded by limited time and staffing resources available to support PYJI, while in some cases collective bargaining and service contracts for line staff and middle managers present challenges. Survey responses echoed a need for continued training related to PYD, TIC, and wraparound services. Slightly more than half of respondents from Probation reported that their agency had participated to some extent (29%) or to a great extent (27%) in training related to PYD, and a similar percentage of respondents from Probation indicated that their agency had participated to some extent (27%) or to a great extent (24%) in training related to TIC. Fewer respondents reported that their agency had participated to some extent (21%) or to a great extent (18%) in training related to wraparound services. Respondents from CBOs showed similar rates of organizational participation in these types of trainings.

Project Management Capacity. County stakeholders acknowledged that PYJI is a significant undertaking for the Probation Department and noted that it will be important to ensure that ACPD has sufficient capacity to manage the initiative. In this vein, ACPD staff from across organizational levels spoke about challenges with balancing the need for frequent meetings, communication, and participation from various County stakeholders with the ability to make timely decisions to address the needs of PYJI and the youth and families it serves. Some stakeholders also noted that the size and diversity of the County creates challenges in implementing and monitoring PYJI activities.

Improving Service Delivery

County and CBO stakeholders identified several areas for improvement in service delivery, which they hope PYJI will impact. ACPD, SSA, and CBO staff shared a desire for clearer and smoother communication and coordination among probation officers, child welfare workers, and community-based providers. With regard to youth and family involvement in services, SSA and CBO staff highlighted

that families and caregivers of crossover youth could be more empowered to participate in PYJI, feedback that is in line with the work ACPD has initiated to increase family engagement in team decision making.

CBOs also identified several areas they see as gaps in the continuum of services for crossover youth. In particular, stakeholders reported a need for expanded mental health services, especially in neighborhoods with higher populations of crossover youth. Some stakeholders commented that the transition from juvenile custody to the community could be more coordinated and smooth. Others noted a need for increased attention to the needs of transition-age youth, both in terms of probation supervision and coordination of services.

Youth and Caregiver Experiences: Survey Data

Respondent Description

In Alameda County, the youth survey was disseminated by several of the community-based providers that make up the Delinquency Prevention Network. Twenty-three youth and three caregivers responded to the youth and caregiver surveys, out of the approximately 280 crossover youth in the county. Caregiver respondents included two mothers and one employment coordinator. The age of youth ranged from ages 14 to 19 with a mean of 17. Males comprised 77% of youth respondents and females comprised 23%. The caregiver respondents were entirely female (100%). Hispanic/Latinos comprised 41% of youth respondents, followed by African Americans (32%), other ethnicities (18%), White/Caucasian (14%), Asian or Pacific Islander (9%), and American Indian/Native Alaskan (5%). Two caregivers were African American/Black and one was Hispanic/Latino.

A majority of youth heard about the survey from a CBO staff member (50%) or their therapist (36%). Nine percent heard about the survey from their probation officer. Of the 23 youth respondents, 60% reported that they currently have a probation officer, while 75% of youth without a current probation officer reported having had one in the past. Approximately three quarters of youth respondents (78%) indicated being in school. All caregivers responded that their children have a probation officer and are in school. Thirteen percent of youth indicated that they currently have a social worker through Child Welfare. Of the youth who replied that they did not currently have a social worker, 10% noted having had one in the past. One caregiver reported having a child with social worker. None of the youth surveyed reported receiving services from Lincoln Child Center, the county's wraparound service provider.

Youth and Caregiver Responses

Youth and caregivers expressed mixed feelings about their relationships and experiences with their probation officers. While more than half (53%) responded that it is very true that their probation officer wants things to go well for them, a sizeable minority of youth respondents (33%) also responded that it is not at all true that their probation officer helps them to understand how what they have been through affects them, a survey question designed to capture whether staff are using a TIC approach. Over a quarter of youth respondents (27%) indicated that it is not at all true that probation officers tell

them about programs that might be helpful. Only one of the three caregiver respondents reported that it is very true that their child's probation officer wants things to go well for them.

The three youth who reported currently having social workers suggested mixed feelings about their social workers. Youth respondents responded that it is mostly true (67%) and very true (33%) that social workers want things to well for them. At the same time, a majority of youth reported that it is a little bit true (67%) that their social worker helps them to understand how what they have been through affects them. Two out of three youth replied that it is a little bit true that they can easily get in touch with their social worker when they need to.

Both youth and caregiver respondents reported mixed feelings about teachers. More than half of youth (56%) responded that it is very true that teachers wanted them to succeed; however, many youth indicated that it is not at all true that their teachers help them understand how their experience affects their life (41%) or inform them of other programs that may help them (35%). Only one caregiver (33%) reported that it is very true that teachers inform their child about programs that may help them.

A majority of youth (61%) and all of caregivers indicated that families are involved in deciding what kinds of services are helpful. Interestingly, 65% of youth respondents reported that their probation officer, social workers, or others asked them about what kinds of programs they would like to participate in, despite mixed responses as to whether these same individuals informed them about programs that could be helpful.

Nearly half of youth (47%) identified probation officers, social workers, teachers, and mentors as individuals who are part of groups that they meet with, a survey question designed to assess whether youth and families are involved in team-based case planning meetings. Youth also mentioned parents and family members as well as staff at CBOs as being part of a group with whom they meet. Youth less commonly identified adults from a faith-based setting or their doctors as part of that group. Conversely, only one caregiver identified their child's probation officer, social worker, and teachers as adults that are part of a group with whom their child meets. It should be noted that while this survey question was designed to capture information about team-based decision making, it may not have been clear that a "group of people" referred to participants in *joint* meetings.

Almost three-fourths of youth (73%) reported that they participate in job training or internships. More than half (59%) of youth indicated receiving therapy and 41% reported attending school-based support programs. Some youth reported engaging in other programs, such as attending after school programs, participating in their church or temple, and helping out in their community. Caregivers also identified similar activities that their children participate in.

Youth respondents demonstrated mixed feelings concerning the benefit of the programs they are involved in. Almost half (47%) of youth indicated it is a little bit true that the programs they participate in help them do better in school, while 32% responded that the statement is mostly true. Caregivers' responses revealed similar ambivalence with one caregiver replying that it is not at all true and two replying that it is mostly true that their children's programs help them succeed in school. Likewise, while about half of youth indicated that it is mostly true (24%) or very true (24%) that their programs help

them get along better with parents, caregivers, or family, 19% responded not at all true to this statement and 33% responded a little bit true. Youth were similarly divided about whether their programs help them get more involved in community activities, with 20% responding not at all true to this statement, 35% responding a little bit true, 30% responding mostly true, and 15% responding very true. Despite this ambivalence, more than 80% of youth indicated that it is mostly true (41%) or very true (41%) that the programs they participate are a good fit for them. Similarly, a majority of youth replied that it is mostly true (43%) or very true (43%) that the programs they participate in help them build skills to succeed in the future. Aside from improvement in school, two caregivers indicated that it is mostly true and one indicated that it is very true that their child's programs have helped them to have a better relationship and helped their child get involved in positive community activities and build new skills that will be helpful for their child's future.

While youth generally reported that adults in their life respect them, they expressed mixed views on the extent to which adults respect them with 32% responding a little bit true, 36% responding mostly true, and 32% responding very true to this statement. Forty-one percent of youth indicated that it is very true that when they are feeling sad or lonely there are people they can talk to. While two out of three caregivers reported that their child has access to programs and services that help him/her to be emotionally healthy, one caregiver indicated that this is not at all true. All youth and caregivers responded that support is available to them to in school when they need it.