

# Positive Youth Justice Initiative Year 1 Evaluation – Summary of Implementation in San Diego 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.



## San Diego County

This summary reviews the implementation of the Positive Youth Justice Initiative (PYJI) in San Diego 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 (8)
- Focus group with PYJI leadership (1)
- Focus group with PYJI partners and community-based organization (CBO) staff (1)
- Site Visit
- Documentary Data
- Staff Survey (8)
- Youth Survey (8)
- Caregiver Survey (5)

## Implementation Plan and Structure

### Implementation Plan

San Diego County's PYJI is led by the **San Diego County Probation Department** and housed within the Probation Department's Breaking Cycles division, a family-centered division with a team approach to juvenile delinquency prevention and intervention. San Diego County's PYJI is a pilot project focused on neighborhoods including the two zip codes with the highest number of youth involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.<sup>1</sup> The pilot will pave the way for countywide implementation in the future. San Diego's PYJI approach also includes a countywide training component for providers that work with crossover youth.

San Diego County's PYJI program was designed to complement the County's existing Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM); while CYPM youth have an active child welfare case (dual status), the County has defined PYJI youth as **youth in the probation**

### Implementation Highlights

During the first year of PYJI implementation, San Diego County:

- Created a supervision level in Probation data system to track crossover youth
- Held trauma-informed care training for Probation staff and collaborative personnel
- Hired probation officers and treatment providers for the pilot area caseload

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<sup>1</sup> San Diego recently expanded the geographic reach of their pilot to incorporate the neighborhoods surrounding these zip codes. Because this occurred after the data collection period, this report focuses on their plan and progress prior to the expansion.

**system who have a *prior* child welfare history and are no longer receiving active services through a Child Welfare caseworker.** The Probation Department is currently developing a system to track the number of crossover youth based on its PYJI definition; according to their July 2014 data report, in 2013 approximately 5,400 youth were on probation supervision, including 26 dual jurisdiction youth (meeting the CYPM definition of crossover youth).

San Diego County's implementation plan outlined a number of strategies to promote PYJI service provision in its pilot project. Probation officers assigned to the crossover youth pilot program will be on specialty assignment with a reduced caseload and they will receive individualized trauma-informed care (TIC) and positive youth development (PYD) training. Probation also planned to hire dedicated mental health and substance abuse specialists to work with the youth in the pilot caseload. In addition, Probation planned to incorporate PYJI-related provisions in contracts with service providers, communicate about PYJI to County political leaders, and review its assessment and screening tools to include PYJI design elements.

### Implementation Structure

The PYJI Leadership Team, which draws on existing structures built under the CYPM, is comprised of San Diego County Probation, Child Welfare Services (CWS), Behavioral Health Services (BHS), the Public Defender's Office, the District Attorney's Office, and representatives from three community-based organizations (CBOs). The leadership team convenes at the bi-monthly CYPM Guiding Coalition Workgroup meeting. The County established a subcommittee of the PYJI leadership team to develop and establish TIC training for staff. A team of Probation leadership meets weekly to discuss implementation progress and challenges, with participation from other members of the PYJI leadership team on an as needed basis.

### Pre-Implementation Context

Many members of County leadership pointed out that San Diego County's PYJI has benefitted from a strong history of collaboration. County agencies including Probation, CWS, BHS, the District Attorney's Office, the Office of Education, and the Juvenile Court reported developing strong collaborative relationships through previous partnerships, particularly the CYPM, which many felt contributed to readiness for continued relationship building and culture shift under PYJI. Probation also identified prior success with pilot programs such as the one planned for PYJI.

Interview and focus group respondents shared that San Diego entered PYJI implementation with many PYJI elements in place, including multidisciplinary teams developed under CYPM, relationships with many partners (often formalized with MOUs), and an existing emphasis on TIC in behavioral health. Probation leadership also spoke about the department's "balanced approach philosophy," with a focus on youth resiliency and a history of hiring staff with social work and psychology backgrounds. Leadership also noted that many Probation staff had been trained in Integrative Behavioral Intervention Strategy (IBIS), motivational interviewing, and cognitive behavioral therapy, and have participated in cross-agency trainings with CWS. Probation also recently created and hired a Treatment Director position. San

Diego has also emphasized integrated services; for example, co-locating probation officers with a team of child welfare staff who are engaged with crossover youth.

In addition, stakeholders explained that because San Diego is a dual jurisdiction county, the county entered PYJI implementation with an existing data-sharing system between Probation and Child Welfare. Probation stakeholders added that the PYJI pilot program itself is founded in a history of data collection, and the pilot area was identified using data on the county regions with the highest numbers of youth on probation. At the time of implementation planning, TA providers identified several strengths for the County, including sophisticated electronic screening and intake mechanisms for Probation and CWS, Probation's own electronic record and information technology systems, and a strong array of community-based services, including those for female youth offenders.

Probation leadership highlighted the department's use of evidence-based screening and assessment tools for youth, including an Evidence-Based Practice Strategic Planning Committee, which has developed and adopted a graduated sanctions and rewards matrix for youth. Wraparound services are already used by Probation, with County wraparound contracts allocating service slots for Probation's needs. Probation also has a girls' detention facility as well as a contract for gender-specific programming, and BHS provides gender-specific programming as well. BHS leadership described that because the agency contracts out most of its services to CBOs, the agency can leverage existing community-based partnerships in its PYJI work.

At the same time, there have been serious concerns around disciplinary practices used in San Diego County juvenile detention facilities, including the use of pepper spray. In July 2014, a coalition of San Diego legal and community organizations filed a formal complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) for excessive use of pepper spray and other practices that may violate youths' constitutional rights. San Diego's planned training for their juvenile facilities in their implementation plan is in response to the high use of pepper spray.

## Key Strengths and Progress in Implementation

### Strong Support for PYJI among Leadership

Leadership from participating County agencies highlighted their commitment to PYJI as one of San Diego's primary strengths, expressing that they support PYJI philosophy, are motivated to work together, and perceive PYJI as a good fit with both the existing CYPM implementation and the system-level changes needed within the County. These stakeholders also observed strong support for PYJI from Probation, CWS, and BHS across multiple levels of the agencies. Probation leadership discussed the County's use of the early adopters' model in garnering support across multiple levels of staff, describing that involving management level staff in the implementation process has allowed these staff to educate colleagues both above and below them about the initiative. PYJI leadership also noted that PYJI updates are given at various team meetings across staffing levels. Most of the survey respondents from County agencies and CBOs also indicated that strong working relationships exist between their agency or organization and the other agencies and organizations serving crossover youth. For example, all respondents from Probation and CWS agreed that their agency has strong working relationships with

BHS, and all respondents from Probation agreed their agency has strong working relationships with County youth and family agencies as well as law enforcement.

### **Collaborative Planning Efforts**

County leadership emphasized that leveraging the existing work of the CYPM Guiding Coalition Workgroup has helped County and CBO partners promote further collaboration under PYJI. According to its March 2014 progress report, San Diego's PYJI team had participated in approximately 40 activities, including meetings, conference calls, or events related to PYJI. County leadership shared:

*[PYJI has] really allowed us to break down walls.*

*Philosophically, there's a real community.*

*We're speaking the same language now.*

Findings also pointed to strong collaboration across agencies. For example, interview participants noted that CWS and BHS have been closely involved in bringing TIC and wraparound services into the Probation Department's efforts. Probation has also focused on increasing partnerships with community-based providers, including TIC and wraparound providers. Probation and the Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) have incorporated PYD and TIC language into CBO contracts and two additional community-based partners have been added to the PYJI network, according to the County's progress report. Staff surveys appeared to corroborate these findings, with all survey respondents from County agencies agreeing (63%) or somewhat agreeing (38%) that the agencies and organizations serving crossover youth in San Diego collaborate effectively. Most of the respondents from CBOs also agreed (56%) or somewhat agreed (33%) that the agencies and organizations collaborate effectively.

Probation leadership described that the County has also made efforts to engage the broader community in PYJI through presentations about PYJI to communities and school districts, and the public launch announcement of PYJI was featured in local news.

### **Steps toward Increasing Operational Capacity**

Findings from interviews and Probation's PYJI progress report point to important steps in hiring and training staff, incorporating PYJI language in County contracts, and creating an infrastructure for improved data tracking.

**Staffing.** The Probation Department has hired two deputy probation officers (DPOs) for the PYJI pilot caseload, as well as the program's Youth and Family Counselor (YFC) and Juvenile Recovery Specialist (JRS) through existing contracts with community-based providers. The Probation Department has also designated a supervisor to manage the PYJI planning and implementation process.

**Staff Training.** A number of interview participants discussed the County's progress in implementing trainings related to PYJI elements. In April 2014, the County began providing training in trauma-informed care and PYD for line staff from County agencies and community partners. These trainings were informed by collaboration with TA providers, who supported the development of a "train-the-

trainers” curriculum to ensure both County staff and collaborative partners are knowledgeable about PYJI elements. Probation staff also attended two supportive trainings on the topics of Alternatives to Detention and Medi-Cal Coverage for Extended Foster Care Youth. Most staff survey respondents indicated familiarity with TIC and PYD, though it is not clear whether this is as a result of PYJI or prior trainings. All survey respondents from County agencies and CBOs reported that TIC has been introduced in their place of work, and most respondents from County agencies (88%) and CBOs (67%) reported that they have heard about the application of PYD in their agency or organization.

**Policies, Procedures, and Contracts.** Findings from interviews and Probation’s PYJI progress report indicate that thus far in implementation San Diego has established protocols for screening, referral, and service requirements for PYJI efforts, including eligibility criteria for identifying crossover youth for the PYJI pilot. Additionally, PYJI design elements have been incorporated into several Probation, HHSA, and BHS contracts for community-based providers. The job announcement for the new PYJI DPO position also included PYJI language.

**Data Collection, Sharing, and Use.** At the time of the implementation plan, TA providers recommended that the County develop a mechanism to measure the number of crossover youth in the juvenile justice system. While Probation is still in the process of modifying its Case Management System to identify youth who meet the PYJI definition of crossover youth, Probation has established a data field to track participants participating in the PYJI pilot, which will enable the County to monitor data specific to pilot program participants. In line with practices developed under CYPM, survey respondents from Probation and Child Welfare reported that they share data with other agencies serving crossover youth and that they have adapted their data and reporting systems to track crossover youth.

### Preparing for Service Delivery

In April 2014, San Diego began accepting cases for the pilot program. The team for serving these cases will consist of one Supervising Probation Officer, two DPOs, the YFC, and the JRS (the JRS has been hired and is slated to begin in September). Probation staff noted that wraparound care coordinators, education liaisons, and other collaborative partners will be added to youth teams on an individualized basis. Because data collection for this report occurred prior to the beginning of service delivery, information is not available about progress or challenges in serving the program’s caseload.

PYJI leadership explained that San Diego’s’ implementation efforts have focused on increasing service availability so the county can ensure that there are support services in place to meet the needs of the incoming caseload. For example, San Diego has created a mechanism to ensure that the PYJI pilot population has access to wraparound services through existing providers in the County. A majority of staff survey respondents indicated knowing how to refer youth to support services and understanding the formal referral process for wraparound services, with all respondents reporting that they agree (50%) or somewhat agree (50%) that they know where to refer youth for support services.

Leadership also highlighted the County’s strong focus on evidence-based practices. For example, at the time of implementation, Probation’s Evidence-Based Practice Operational Support Team began

exploring areas for policy review, program enhancement, and training based on a review of evidence-based practices in PYD and TIC.

## Key Challenges and Opportunities

### Broadening Support and Shared Vision for PYJI

While findings from interviews and focus groups highlighted the shared vision and high level of support for PYJI among agency leadership, at the same time, County agency representatives recognized that implementing a shared vision can be complicated because all agencies “speak different languages.” Additionally, at the time of data collection for this report, County leadership observed that the strong vision and support of leadership-level stakeholders had not yet reached mid- and lower-level staff. The recent complaint regarding the use of pepper spray in juvenile detention facilities discussed above also indicates that there is substantial work to be done to bring line staff on board both philosophically and in practice. Because of the county’s two-pronged approach to PYJI, staff hired to serve the pilot caseload have been brought on board, but other County staff may not yet understand how PYJI will affect their day-to-day responsibilities. As such, some members of County leadership recognized that the perception of additional work resulting from PYJI implementation may seem overwhelming to mid- and lower-level staff. County stakeholders anticipate that further rollout will resolve some of these challenges as staff become familiar with their roles, responsibilities, and activities under PYJI.

### Enhancing Partnerships and Collaboration

Some stakeholders also spoke of a need for broader involvement in PYJI. While San Diego has made progress in terms of engaging youth and their families through community-focused events, both Probation and CBO staff acknowledged that there is room for growth in bringing youth and family voices to the table. Additionally, they noted that there could be a wider and stronger array of partnerships with community stakeholders such as workforce groups, education groups, drug and alcohol services, and contracted providers in the pilot project region. Notably, although all staff survey respondents from County agencies reported having heard of PYJI, only about half of CBO respondents reported having heard of PYJI. In addition, fewer CBO survey respondents replied that their organization has worked with new government agencies (44%) or CBOs (44%) than respondents from County agencies (63% and 75%, respectively). Probation has voiced a desire for strengthening such partnerships, and the efforts to better engage these stakeholders may already be contemplated or underway as San Diego’s pilot rollout continues.

### Responding to Staffing Changes

Probation leadership pointed out that a major challenge in San Diego’s preparation for PYJI services has been staff turnover. Early on in the PYJI implementation period, Probation experienced several key staffing changes that resulted in the need for additional training and onboarding to new staff members’ roles within PYJI. Probation reported that while the transition has gone as well as could be expected, these unforeseen circumstances have contributed to a somewhat slower implementation than initially planned. The pace of implementation may also have been affected by the need to hire staff to support



the pilot program, which according to some County stakeholders took longer than expected. Probation mentioned that during this time, the County continued to promote PYJI by focusing its efforts on informing stakeholders countywide about the mission, goals, and elements of PYJI.

### **Growing Data Capacity**

At the time of the implementation plan, TA providers identified San Diego's understanding and use of data as one of the County's primary challenges. TA providers recommended that the County ensure PYJI stakeholders have a common understanding of the purpose of decision-making tools, develop key indicators to review and monitor crossover youth, establish an institutionalized response to using data, and train staff about the value and uses for data to develop policy solutions. While San Diego has laid the foundation for improved tracking and monitoring, as of the County's initial progress report, data collection, data sharing, and outcome measurement related to PYJI had not yet begun. As with most counties, San Diego expects challenges around data privacy requirements, which will become clearer as data collection and sharing efforts mature. While a majority of survey respondents from County agencies reported that, to some or a great extent, their agency shared data with other agencies serving crossover youth (100%) and adapted data and reporting systems to track crossover youth (88%), fewer respondents from CBOs reported that their organization shared data (56%) or adapted data and reporting systems (44%).

## **Youth and Caregiver Experiences: Survey Data**

### **Respondent Description**

In San Diego County, the Probation Department administered the youth survey to the eight youth participants who had been enrolled in the pilot program at the time of data collection. The ages of youth ranged from ages 12 to 17 and the mean age was 15. Sixty-three percent of youth respondents were male and 38% were female. Youth respondents were predominately African American/Black (50%) and Hispanic/Latino (50%), followed by 25% White/Caucasian and 13% American Indian/Native Alaskan.

The County collected five responses to the parent/caregiver survey. Of these, four were mothers and one response represented a mother and a father who took the survey together. Sixty percent of caregivers were Hispanic/Latino followed by African American (40%), American Indian/Native Alaskan (20%), and those who identified as another race/ethnicity (20%).

Youth reported hearing about the survey from their probation officer (75%) and their counselor or therapist (38%). All youth and caregivers reported currently having a probation officer or having a child placed with a probation officer. One youth replied that he currently has a social worker through Child Welfare and two indicated having had a social worker in the past.<sup>2</sup> No caregivers reported having a child with a social worker. Most youth (71%) reported being currently in school, and 80% of caregivers responded that their child is currently in school.

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<sup>2</sup> Because PYJI youth in San Diego County are not intended to have social workers, the accuracy of these responses is unclear.

## Youth and Caregiver Responses

Youth and caregivers' responses suggest that overall they feel positively about their experiences and relationship with their probation officers. Most youth indicated that it is very true (75%) that their probation officer wants things to go well for them and that it is very true (86%) that it is easy to contact their probation officer when they need to. All caregivers reported that it is very true that their child's probation officer wants things to go well for them. One quarter of caregivers (25%) and 13% of youth responded it is not true that their probation officer tells them about programs that might be helpful for them.

Caregivers and youth had mixed responses about their experiences and relationships with teachers and adults at school. Half of caregivers and 40% of youth indicated that it is very true that their teachers want things to go well for them. While a number of youth responded that it is mostly true (40%) that teachers talk with them about how what they have been through in life has affected their lives, a survey question designed to capture whether staff are using a TIC approach, 40% of youth also responded that this is not true at all. Caregivers reported similarly mixed feelings as to whether teachers help their child understand how what they have been through affects their child's life. A majority of youth replied it is very true (60%) that teachers inform them about programs that might be helpful; however, 20% of youth answered that this is not true at all. Caregivers also expressed mixed feelings as to whether teachers inform their children about programs that might be helpful.

All youth and 80% of caregivers responded that their family is involved in deciding what kind of services would be most helpful. While all caregivers reported that their child's probation officer asks their child what kind of programs they want to participate in, only 63% of youth agreed. A majority of youth (88%) and caregivers (80%) indicated that there is a group of people that they (or their child) can meet with to decide what types of programs would be helpful.

Youth and caregivers provided differing responses as to who makes up a group that the youth meet with, a survey question designed to assess whether youth and families were involved in team-based case planning meetings. Both youth and caregivers identified family members, including siblings and grandparents, as part of this group. Similar percentages of youth and caregivers agreed that probation officers (88%, 100%) and mentors (50%, 60%) are part of this group. While 80% of caregivers indicated that teachers and therapists were part of this group, only 25% of youth identified teachers and 38% identified therapists. Among youth, 25% reported that social workers were part of this group, but no caregivers selected this. 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.

Youth and caregivers identified a variety of programs in which youth participate. Therapy and counseling was the activity most commonly reported by youth (63%) and caregivers (80%). Similarly, 50% of youth and 60% of caregivers reported that youth participate in programs to help them succeed in school. Interestingly, 40% of caregivers indicated that their child participates in job training or internship programs; however no youth replied that they participate in these activities. A quarter of youth (25%)

and 13% of caregivers reported that they or their child receive services from the Fred Finch Youth Center. No youth or caregivers indicated receiving services at Families Forward Wraparound.

Caregivers and youth responses suggested mixed feelings about how the programs youth are involved in affect them. More than half of youth (50%) and caregivers (60%) responded that it is very true that programs help them to do better in school. While more than half of youth reported that it is very true that programs help them participate in activities in school, 60% of caregivers reported that this is only a little bit true. A majority of caregivers responded that it is very true (80%) that programs help their child build skills that will be helpful in the future; however youth indicated more mixed feelings, with 50% responding that it is very true, 38% responding that it is mostly true, and 13% responding that it is a little bit true. Similarly, a majority of caregivers reported that it is very true (80%) that that the programs their children are involved in are a good fit for them, while youth responses were less positive, with 38% responding it was very true that the programs were a good fit for them and 38% responding that it is only a little bit true.

Youth reported that it is very true (63%) and mostly true (38%) that adults in their lives respect them. Three-fourths (75%) of youth and 40% of caregivers responded that it is very true that when they are feeling lonely there are people they can talk to; however 20% of caregivers replied it is not true at all. Similar percentages of youth (88%) and caregivers (80%) felt that is very true that when they need help in school they know where to find it.