

Positive Youth Justice Initiative Year 2 Evaluation Findings: Alameda County

Prepared by:

Resource Development Associates

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Alameda County

This summary reviews the implementation of the Positive Youth Justice Initiative (PYJI) in Alameda County during Year 2 of the initiative's implementation phase. The summary includes an overview of the County's implementation and structure; a synthesis of key strengths and challenges based on data from interviews, focus groups, staff surveys, and documentary data; and a description of results from the Year 2 youth and caregiver surveys and youth focus groups.

The Year 2 evaluation data collection included the following activities. The number in parentheses represents the number of respondents who participated in each of the activities. See **Error! Reference source not found.** for more detail about the evaluation participants.

- Key Informant Interviews with PYJI Leadership (7)
- Focus Group with Probation Supervisors (7)
- Focus Group with CBO Providers (6)
- Staff Survey (41)
- Youth Survey (27)
- Caregiver Survey (2)
- Documentary Data

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 Probation to increase the use of informal probation and diversion programs for crossover youth; and involving youth and families in screening and planning for out-of-home placement.

Implementation Highlights

During the second year of PYJI implementation, Alameda County:

- Began piloting the New Detention Risk Assessment Instrument (DRAI) in the Juvenile Field Services Division and Juvenile Facilities
- Revised Graduated Sanctions and Rewards Matrix and began development of Incentives Grid
- Created a Crossover Youth Fact Sheet and GIS Mapping tool
- Developed a Train-the-Trainer Model for TIC training in summer 2015
- Expanded number of Wraparound slots from 47 to 57 to accommodate crossover youth

Alameda County has defined crossover youth as **youth with an active probation case, or contact with law enforcement through a Notice to Appear (NTA), who have had an active child welfare case or a**

substantiated allegation of abuse or neglect within the last five years. According to their July 2015 data report, in 2014, of the 2,162 youth on probation supervision (including informal supervision), 211 were identified as crossover youth.

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 initial PYJI planning and implementation structure was 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 Probation. In Year 2 of implementation, Probation became the sole lead for PYJI. Planning and implementation for PYJI activities is carried out via a committee structure, with PYJI sub-committees responsible for identifying, recommending, and implementing PYJI activities. Sub-committees meet monthly and are currently chaired by mid-level leadership from Probation. Membership includes representatives from PYJI partner organizations and other interested stakeholders.

Alameda County Key Strengths and Progress

- Greater involvement of mid-level and line staff
- Integration of trauma-informed care into culture and concrete practices
- Communication and coordination with partner agencies
- Progress toward improved operational capacity

Alameda County Key Challenges and Opportunities

- Clarity and consistency in roles and responsibilities
- Support and involvement of line staff
- Staff training and confidence in Positive Youth Development (PYD)
- Barriers to operational capacity for service delivery

Key Strengths and Progress in Implementation

Greater Involvement of Mid-Level and Line Staff

In Year 2 of implementation, Probation transitioned the leadership of the county's PYJI workgroups from Division Directors to 12 Probation Unit Supervisors. Probation felt that including more staff at the mid-management level would not only increase participation and buy in from mid-level managers, but also impact the level of involvement and buy-in at the line staff level.

Leadership from PYJI partnering agencies shared in key informant interviews that the shift in workgroup leadership significantly impacted the commitment of the Unit Supervisors and the progress of the PYJI workgroups. One CBO leader shared:

They [co-chairs] are doing such a great job, they've blossomed and have been more engaged, active, and excited. I know they are bringing that to their units directly instead of high leadership.

Furthermore, in focus groups with Probation Unit Supervisors, participants acknowledged that increasing both their probation officers' and their own involvement in PYJI in Year 2 had promoted greater awareness about PYJI, offered leadership opportunities, and supported them in integrating the PYJI philosophy in their work. For example, line-staff and mid-level staff joined executive leadership in a trip to the New York City Department of Probation to learn about their neighborhood-based probation services (Neighborhood Opportunity Networks, or NeONs) to gather insight on how Alameda County might incorporate NeONs in the future. According to interviews with Probation, the trip to New York City inspired a culture shift from viewing NeONs as solely a location to understanding NeON as a philosophical approach embodying PYJI principles.

In an effort to foster greater familiarity with PYJI among line staff, the initiative's Trauma Work Group conducted an interactive meeting with Juvenile Institution Officers, probation officers, clinicians, and community providers in which participants worked together to develop common trauma-informed practices for probation-involved youth in Alameda County. County leadership agreed that this activity was a powerful step toward gaining buy-in from line staff and informing concrete actions related to TIC practices.

Survey responses also indicated widespread awareness of PYJI, with 90% of probation line staff respondents having heard of PYJI and (78%) of CBO line staff having heard of PYJI. Additionally, about 65% of probation respondents offered some level of agreement that leadership in their agency communicates with staff about changes related to PYJI, with 47% reporting that they somewhat agreed, and 18 % reporting they agreed.

Integration of Trauma-Informed Care into Culture and Concrete Practices

Alameda County held a variety of TIC PYJI-supported training activities and invited representatives from Probation, Child Welfare, Behavioral Health, the Public Defender's Office, the Public Health Department, and the Delinquency Prevention Network— Probation's contracted network of youth-serving CBOs. In nearly every focus group and key informant interview, Probation and other County agencies discussed the positive impact of the TIC training. Many participants indicated that these trainings fostered a new awareness of how to interact with crossover youth. Probation articulated that the trainings have informed how they conduct supervision with youth. One Probation leader observed:

It's very difficult to move from a compliance model of supervision to a support service model. We've done a good job in the short period of time doing it.

"We all have the idea that we want youth and families to be successful, but we have come at it from different attitudes. Now we are more on the same page."

– Probation staff

Further, Probation supervisors noted that they are now

working with the District Attorney's office to divert crossover youth cases and that they feel more empowered to advocate for youth to receive social services from Child Welfare. Leadership from Behavioral Health Services reported that after the TIC training they began sending clinical workers to each Juvenile Hall Unit to spend four hours on site every day. Staff survey responses also suggest that Probation and CBOs have a reasonable understanding of TIC practices. The majority of Probation line staff somewhat agreed (36%) or agreed (46%) that they feel well trained to implement TIC practices in their work with crossover youth. CBO line staff reported even higher confidence, with 33% reporting they somewhat agreed and 67% reporting they agreed.

Communication and Coordination with Partner Agencies

According to key informant interviews with County leadership, Probation is including a wider network of youth-serving CBOs and parent voices in both the PYJI work groups and PYJI activities. In key informant interviews and focus groups, CBOs involved in the DPN noted a substantial shift in the degree to which the Probation Department sought and utilized their expertise in working with youth and families.

In key informant interviews, Probation and County leadership made a point of clarifying the distinction between collaboration and communication, explaining that while many of the PYJI partners have a history of collaboration through other initiatives, the level of actual communication has varied among different partners. Leadership reported that PYJI has enhanced the level of communication among agencies with a long history of collaboration, describing that the relationships developed in the PYJI work groups have made it easier for staff from different agencies to communicate about youth. One leader from BHS communicated:

Probation turns to us in a different way as result of the PYJI. It helped build trust that hadn't been there, because we hadn't worked as close on an administrative interagency project that brought us all together in a common goal.

In addition, throughout interviews with leadership and staff, a consistent theme emerged surrounding the impact of concurrent or pre-existing initiatives and practices in the County. It is worth noting that while these initiatives and practices were not directly related to PYJI, staff felt they impacted communication, service capacity, and concrete changes for crossover youth. For example, leadership from Probation explained the addition of a Child Welfare Liaison staff, who is housed in and funded by Probation, has resulted in probation officers receiving a thorough history on crossover youth. According to Probation, Probation works with the Liaison on the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS) to determine if a youth has an open case in child welfare. If a case is open, then the liaison connects the probation officer to a supervisor on that case.

In addition, leadership from the court explained that the County's participation in the Georgetown University Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) built the foundation for the

"Part of the work we've done is such to make sure that the child's voice is at the center of the table and the child feels empowered. Playing to their strengths leads to better outcomes."

– Court leadership

planning of the Crossover Youth Diversion Program, which provides diversion opportunities for youth involved in a wide range of delinquency of cases. The program is now in the stage of creating a service delivery plan to ensure that Social Services and Probation provide a distinct and tailored approach for crossover youth.

Improving Access to Youth and Family Services

Leadership from PYJI agencies described progress toward service delivery improvements for both youth and family. Through contracts with Project Permanence and Lincoln Child Center, Probation is able to refer crossover youth and their families to case management services. According to Probation, BHS increased the number of slots available for crossover youth to receive wraparound services. Probation is working toward incorporating youth and caregiver voice in their Screening for Out of home Services (SOS) Committee meetings. Leadership from Probation shared:

The great modification we're making to that process [SOS meetings] is integrating the crossover youth and their parent and caregivers. So they can be apprised of the conversation, where youth may be placed, and get a jump start on reentry planning and having a supporting network.

As part of their efforts to improve services for crossover youth and their families, the Probation PYJI team planned to conduct a pilot program specifically for crossover youth and their caregivers in the summer of 2015 to evaluate strengths and barriers of Multidisciplinary Team (MDT). This pilot will inform recommendations to Probation leadership about the use of MDTs moving forward.

A majority of staff survey respondents reported that the county promotes youth and family participation in services. The majority of Probation (90%) and CBO (81%) respondents at least somewhat agreed that the agencies and organizations serving crossover youth promote youth and family participation in service provision. However, fewer CBO respondents stated firm agreement (24%) compared to Probation respondents (40%).

Progress toward Improved Operational Capacity

Data Collection and Use

PYJI leadership and management from agencies including Probation, SSA, and Alameda County Office of Education highlighted the county's progress toward accessing and analyzing data on crossover youth. Since PYJI Implementation, Probation has updated their case management system and petition charging sheets to include a mechanism to indicate whether or not a youth is a crossover youth. According to Probation, the ability to flag crossover youth had increased the Department's ability identify proper resources and make referrals for youth. One County leader shared:

We're further along than we were two years ago, when you look at the things they've implemented to improve the work.... We know who crossover kids are. Our data is amazing.

During key informant interviews, Probation discussed creating a Crossover Youth Alameda County fact sheet and a qualitative comprehensive profile of crossover youth to inform practice and strategies. In progress reports from October 2014-March 2015, Probation reported partnering with the Public Health Department to develop a GIS map of Alameda County youth on probation. According to the report, the GIS map will inform the planning and decision making toward neighborhood-based probation services or pilot NeON.

Case Planning Tools

According to interview participants from the Probation focus group, Probation staff utilized case planning tools and data to inform case planning more frequently than in the past. Probation leadership and line-staff specifically highlighted successfully using the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) Risk Assessment, the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) risk needs assessment, and the Imminent Risk and Reasonable Candidacy Declaration for youth on probation.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

Clarity and Consistency in Roles and Responsibilities

Probation and County agencies observed that decreased involvement of executive level leadership from partner agencies, along with staff turnover at the leadership and line staff levels, led to some confusion about the roles and responsibilities of PYJI partner agencies. First, according to BHS leadership, once PYJI partners realized that PYJI was intended to target youth currently on probation—unlike the Georgetown University’s Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM), which is focused on preventing youth from being dually involved—partner agencies viewed Probation Department as the main focus of the initiative. As a result,

“It isn’t going to be one agency that drives this. Everyone has to work together in a collaborative and respectful way with a common goal of better outcomes for kids; and people who are willing to see and accept that they can do better.”

– County partner

Probation took more of a lead role and partner agencies began to see PYJI as a “Probation initiative.” In addition, leadership from PYJI partner agencies noted that when Unit Supervisors took over the work groups, executive level leadership from partner agencies also sent lower-level staff to replace them and reported overall less involvement in PYJI. In addition, some PYJI partner agencies noted that turnover in their executive leadership impacted the continuity of their agency’s participation in PYJI:

One of our biggest challenges has been lack of continuity [of leadership]. Not that you can expect that everyone can be in the same place year after year, but you have to have continuity [of] commitment. This [PYJI] is worth it. We signed on to do this and it is a priority.

Mid-level Probation staff voiced some frustration about the decreased role of Social Services in PYJI and the impact on communication between the two departments. Similar to Year 1, leadership from Probation observed that while communication is strong at the leadership level, the two departments

continue to disagree over their respective roles and responsibilities in serving youth, as well as over who should have the primary responsibility for particular youth. At the same time, leadership from Social Services described not having a clear understanding of how Child Welfare staff should be concretely involved in PYJI, given that most PYJI youth do not have current involvement in the child welfare system. Leadership from Probation and Social Services also suggested that Social Services had less involvement in Year 2 because they have already reformed their department and completed PYJI equivalent work such as incorporating team decision making (TDM), youth voices, and parent advocates.

Leadership from BHS and ACOE also confirmed that their departments were less involved in PYJI in Year 2. BHS leadership mentioned staff capacity as a barrier to the amount of work needed to implement PYJI. ACOE leadership described that they did not always feel included in PYJI activities, in addition to difficulties balancing the PYJI meeting schedules with competing work priorities.

Support and Involvement of Line Staff

While interviews and focus group findings point to Alameda County's progress toward a culture shift among mid-level and line-level staff, PYJI partners noted that effects of the initial rollout of PYJI still impacted their satisfaction with the initiative. In focus groups with Probation, mid-level staff expressed dissatisfaction with the inclusivity of the initial PYJI rollout and wanted more direct communication about how it would impact their work. Additionally, Probation staff said they felt pressured to put on several trainings, share information with their line staff, and gain their buy-in with unclear direction. Survey respondents also indicated that the rollout of PYJI was generally dissatisfactory. Over a third of Probation respondents disagreed (18%) or somewhat disagreed (18%) that they feel satisfied with how PYJI has been rolled out in their agency, with 35% reporting that they do not know. Director- and manager-level respondents were also not satisfied, with 7% reporting they disagreed and 33% reporting they somewhat disagreed. Half (50%) of line staff reported they did not know their level of satisfaction with PYJI rollout, suggesting that they may still not be aware of how PYJI has been rolled out in their agency.

Staff Training and Confidence in Positive Youth Development (PYD)

Some PYJI leadership reported that while TIC was the primary focus in Year 2, the integration of PYD was a secondary focus (Note: Probation is rolling out PYD training in July). Some focus group participants recommended advanced training on the practical integration of TIC and PYD practices. Staff survey findings suggest that even though PYJI has increased probation line staffs' awareness of TIC, fewer line staff felt trained to provide PYD-informed services with crossover youth. Two thirds of probation line staff somewhat agreed (33%) or agreed (33%) that they feel well trained to provide PYD services. One half of CBO line staff somewhat agreed (33%) or agreed (17%).

Barriers to Operational Capacity for Service Delivery

Staff Turnover during Initiative

As mentioned above, leadership from PYJI agencies noted the staff turnover in leadership during PYJI was a barrier to success. Probation leadership shared that personnel changes in the Probation Department led to confusion on the direction of PYJI. CBOs further underscored that staff turnover in the Probation Department was a particular challenge for youth who, as a result, had several different probation officers in short amount of time. They indicated that youth received varying messages from probation officers, some of whom continue to take a punitive approach to supervision, while other have a trauma informed approach. In key informant interviews, leadership from ACOE discussed that having several directors throughout the initiative had lessened their level of involvement in PYJI and obscured their role in providing support.

“Personnel changes led to confusion of direction of PYJI. If I could do it differently, we would have spent more time preparing the line staff and having them more robustly involved...instead of bringing more partners to the table.”

– County leadership

Data Sharing

Nearly all County and community-based partner staff conveyed that data sharing is still an obstacle and there is work to be done toward creating a formal process for data sharing. CBOs also discussed the need for increased collaboration on streamlining case planning data tools across all PYJI partners and youth-serving organizations. Over a third of probation respondents disagreed (15%) or somewhat disagreed (20%) that the agencies and organization serving crossover youth collect and share data effectively, with 45% reporting they somewhat agreed and 20% reporting they agreed. Similarly, almost a half of CBO participants disagreed (10%) or somewhat disagreed (38%), with 48% indicating they somewhat agreed and only 5% reporting they agreed. Director- and manager-level respondents were less satisfied with the County’s data sharing, with 56% reporting that they disagreed or somewhat disagreed that agencies and organizations collect and share data effectively, compared to 32% of line staff respondents. Forty-four percent of directors and managers indicated that they somewhat agreed with this statement, though none indicated that they agreed.

Youth Experiences

Twenty-seven youth and two caregivers responded to the survey.¹ Six youth participated in the youth focus group.

Key Findings

- Across youth serving systems, most youth indicated that adults want things to go well for them.
- At the same time, youth indicated limited consistency in the extent to which these adults talk with them about how things they have been through in their life affect them, or about programs that might be helpful to them—questions designed to capture whether adults exemplified a TIC or PYD approach, respectively.
- Overall, youth responses regarding their experiences with law enforcement officials and teachers were mixed, while their responses about experiences with caseworkers were more positive.

Experience with Juvenile Justice System

Youth responses regarding their feelings toward supervisory probation officers, judges, and officers in juvenile hall were mixed. Overall, youth reported having somewhat more positive experiences with supervisory probation officers than with judges and officers in juvenile hall and indicated that supervisory probation officers usually treat them fairly. Survey responses also indicated that probation officers seem to use a team-based approach with youth.

- Three-quarters (75%) of youth said that it is very true or mostly true that their supervisory probation officer wants things to go well for them and treats them fairly, and approximately two-thirds (68%) reported that they can easily get in touch with their probation officer.
- Close to two-thirds (63%) of youth said that it is very true or mostly true that officers in juvenile hall want things to go well for them, but less than half (47%) expressed that it is very true or mostly true that officers in juvenile hall treat them fairly.
- Two-thirds (67%) of youth indicated it is very true or mostly true that the judge made a fair decision in their case, while approximately one out of five respondents (22%) perceived this not to be true at all.
- Under half (44%) of youth indicated that it is very true or mostly true that judges listen to them when making decisions, while a majority (60%) responded this way about whether judges listen to their family when making decisions.
- Nearly all (91%) of youth responded that they always, or sometimes, have a caregiver present when they meet with their probation officer, and close to half (48%) of youth reported having

¹ This was not a sufficient number of caregivers to include in the analysis; findings only include youth responses.

someone other than their caregiver (case workers or social workers, mentors, doctors, as well as other individuals) at the meetings as well.

While a majority of youth respondents expressed that law enforcement officers want things to go well for them, most also conveyed that law enforcement officials do not consistently talk with them about how the things they have been through in their life affect them, or about programs that might be helpful to them—questions designed to capture whether adults exemplified a TIC or PYD approach, respectively.

- Close to two-thirds (63%) of youth specified that it is not at all true or only a little bit true that their supervisory probation officer talks with them about how what they have been through in their life affects them.
- About half (53%) of youth reported that it is not at all true or only a little bit true that their probation officer tells them about programs that might be helpful to them.
- Almost half (45%) of youth responded that it is not at all true or only a little bit that they had an officer or staff person they could talk to in juvenile hall, and nearly the same proportion (42%) responded this way about whether they discussed a plan with a staff person for when they were released from juvenile hall.

The mixed feelings toward law enforcement officials among survey respondents align with what focus group participants conveyed. Youth focus group participants communicated that experiences with probation officers largely depended on specific officers, rather than a systemic approach to supervision, and that while some officers in juvenile hall treated them well, others gave some youth preferential treatment and even manipulated them by asking them to do unethical things, such as fight other youth, in exchange for preferential treatment.

Experience with Child Welfare System

Youth survey respondents generally demonstrated more positive feelings toward caseworkers compared to adults in other youth serving systems. Among eight respondents with a current caseworker:

- Three-quarters (75%) responded that it is very true or mostly true that their caseworker listens to them and the same proportion reported that that their caseworker wants things to go well for them.
- Three-quarters (75%) expressed that it is very true or mostly true that they can easily get in touch with their social worker and the same proportion reported that that their caseworker tells them about programs that may be helpful to them.
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) responded that it is very true or mostly true that their caseworker talks with them about how what they have been through in their life affects them, and the same proportion reported that their caseworker listens to their family.

Experience with School

Youth commented that adults at school want things to go well for them, but do not necessarily talk with them about their life experiences or programs that might be helpful to them. Of the youth enrolled in school:

- Close to 70% indicated that it is very true or mostly true that there are adults at school that want things to go well for them.
- At the same time, over half (56%) responded that it is not at all true or only a little true that there is an adult at school that talks with them about how what they have been through affects them, and the same proportion reported that there is an adult at school who tells them about programs that may be helpful to them.

Youth in focus groups described that while the school system as a whole does not support youth on probation, there are several teachers and staff members who have worked with them individually to help them graduate and improve their grades.

Experience with Programs

Despite the majority of youth indicating that a judge or probation officer decided which programs they participated in, youth did report some inclusion in the decision-making process.

- Over three-quarters (78%) of youth who participated in programs responded that a judge or probation officer decided what programs they would participate in.
- At the same time, over half (61%) of survey respondents indicated that they had input in the decision, and two-thirds (67%) indicated that their family had input.

Overall, youth responses were mixed regarding the degree to which program participation supported them.

- Two-thirds (67%) of survey respondents indicated that it is very true or mostly true that the programs they are involved with are a good fit, and over half (61%) indicated that it is very true or mostly true that that programs help build skills that will help them in the future.
- On the other hand, less than half (44%) reported that it is very true or mostly true that the programs they are involved with help their relationships with family, or help them become more involved in the community.

Student focus group participants asserted that the support they received at REACH's Soulciety program motivated them and helped guide them moving forward.

Overall Support from Adults

Youth conveyed that they felt somewhat supported by the adults in their life. Most youth expressed that adults in their life respect them, but the extent to which this was true varied.

- Approximately one-quarter (26%) of youth responded a little bit true, 44% responded mostly true, and 26% responded very true to this statement. Another 4% (one youth) responded that they do not feel the adults in their life respect them.
- Over three-quarters (78%) of youth indicated that it is very true or mostly true that if they need help to do better in school they know where to find it.
- Close to half of youth (44%) held that it is not at all true or only a little true that they have people they can talk to when they are feeling sad or lonely.