

WORKING P A P E R

Los Angeles County Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act

Fiscal Year 2003-2004 Report

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INFRASTRUCTURE, SAFETY, AND ENVIRONMENT

SUMMARY

In 2000, the California Legislature passed the Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act, which authorized funding for county juvenile justice programs and designated the Board of Corrections (BOC) as the administrator of funding. A 2001 Senate Bill extended the funding and changed the program's name to the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA). This effort was designed to provide a stable funding source for juvenile programs that have been proven effective in curbing crime among at-risk and young offenders (California Board of Corrections 2004). Counties were asked to submit plans to the state for funding that identified programs that filled gaps in local services. These programs were to be based on empirical findings of effective program elements.

Administration of the JJCPA program is the responsibility of the BOC. The Board is required to submit annual reports to the California legislature measuring the success of JJCPA. The legislation identified six specific outcome measures ("the big six") to be included in annual reports from each of the individual JJCPA programs. These outcomes include successful completion of probation, arrests, probation violations, incarcerations, successful completion of restitution, and successful completion of community service.¹ Each county can also supply supplemental outcomes to measure locally identified service needs. JJCPA programs were first implemented in summer and fall of 2001 and are now in their fourth year of funding.

The Los Angeles County Probation Department documented that juvenile justice programs were weakest in the area of mental health assessments, treatment, and services, and programs targeting juvenile probationers and at-risk youths living and attending school in 85 high-risk school service areas. Two major initiatives were undertaken to address these weaknesses. The "mental health" initiative aimed to decrease mental health risk factors by increasing mental health services. The "school success" initiative's goal was to increase protective factors through promoting school success. Both initiatives provide a full continuum of care that includes prevention, early intervention, intermediate intervention, out of home intervention, reintegration, and suppression strategies, targeting neighborhoods of highest need across the county.

¹ For at-risk youths, only arrests and incarcerations are reported, since the other four measures relate to probationers.

EVALUATING JJCPA PROGRAMS

Los Angeles County Probation Department submitted program evaluation designs, approved by the BOC, which used a quasi-experimental method. In this method, programs utilized a group of youths with characteristics similar to those of program youths where appropriate, and a pre/post measurement design in instances where no appropriate comparison group could be identified. Most comparison groups were selected by Probation. Given that no randomized designs were used and we were not able to verify the comparability of comparison groups for many of the programs, we caution that observed program effects may not be attributable to the programs themselves, but may be confounded with other factors we have not measured. Generally, outcomes are measured for a six-month period after program start, or after release into the community (for camp and juvenile hall programs). In addition to the “big six,” working with the BOC, the Los Angeles County Probation Department defined supplemental outcomes specific to each program, which are also reported to the BOC on an annual basis.

The Department contracted with the RAND Corporation to assist in the data analysis to determine program success after the research designs and outcome measures had been approved by the BOC. In addition, RAND also provides technical assistance, research expertise, and generation of scheduled and ad hoc reports as required by the Department and the BOC. The technical assistance is provided to JJCPA service providers to direct ways to improve service delivery and program results.

Programs in Initiative I: Mental Health Services

Before JJCPA, the Department processed juvenile referrals in a manner similar to most probation departments in California, offering crisis intervention services only. There was no dedicated court to address youths with severe mental health issues, few if any placement options for crossover populations, and no cost-effective family-based community treatment service. These problems were addressed by initiating four programs within the mental health services initiative: Mental Health Screening, Treatment, and Assessment (MH); Special Needs Court (SNC); Community Treatment Facilities (CTF); and Multisystemic Therapy (MST).

Outcomes for the Mental Health Initiative

Overall, JJCPA youths in the mental health initiative showed higher rates of completion of probation, restitution, and community service, and lower rates of arrests

and incarceration, than youths in the comparison groups. A larger percentage of youths in Community Treatment Facilities have successfully completed probation than comparison youths. The number of hospitalizations and the number of days hospitalized have decreased following program entry. Since its inception, Special Needs Court has provided screening and assessment for over 200 youths referred by other bench officers, and the psychosocial function of the participants has increased. On the other hand, probation violations were higher for program youths than for comparison youths in all four mental health initiative programs, possibly due to the increased scrutiny and closer supervision and monitoring afforded this population.

Programs in Initiative II: Promoting School Success

Programs and services included in this initiative are: School-Based Probation Supervision for middle and high school probationers and at-risk youths (SBMS and SBHS); Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT); Extended Day Community Supervision (JST); Gang Intervention Services (GIS); Youth Substance Abuse (YSA); Gender-specific programs in camps (GS-CAMP), juvenile halls (GS-JH), and the community (GS-COMM); After School Enrichment (PARKS); Housing-Based Day Supervision (HB); Law Enforcement Program (LEP); Intensive Transition Services from camp to community (ITS-CCTP); and Inside-Out Writers (IOW).

Outcomes for the School Success Initiative

Youths in the school success initiative were evaluated based on an appropriate comparison group, whenever possible. If no appropriate comparison group could be identified, youths were evaluated by comparing their outcomes in a reference period prior to enrollment in the program to their outcomes in a comparable reference period after joining the program.

Taken as a whole, youths in the school success initiative showed improvements in completion of probation, restitution, and community service, as well as improved school attendance. They also showed a decrease in arrests, incarcerations, school suspensions, and school expulsions. However, violations of probation were higher for program youths than for comparison youths for most programs in this initiative, and in those programs where a pre/post evaluation design was utilized, rates of probation violations were higher after entering the program than before. This high rate of violations may be due to the increased scrutiny and closer supervision and monitoring afforded this population.

JJCPA Per Capita Costs

A total of 33,510 youths were served in JJCPA in fiscal year 2003-2004 (FY 03-04), at a total cost of \$36,398,881, or \$1,086 per participant. As one might expect, some programs had lower per capita costs than others. In general, the larger programs, such as Mental Health Screening, Assessment, and Treatment, had the lowest per capita costs, while the programs that offered more extensive services to a smaller population, such as Special Needs Court, had higher per capita costs. Overall, the cost per youth in the mental health initiative in FY 03-04 was \$682, while the school success initiative programs cost nearly twice as much, \$1,296 per youth.

LESSONS LEARNED AND EMERGING DIRECTIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT

The Probation Department believes that success of JJCPA juvenile justice programs is the result of several committed partners that represent diverse sectors of the County: schools, service providers, Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), the Board of Supervisors, and the Probation Department. As part of this report, Probation staff gathered information from program staff and clients over the past year to document the successful, and unsuccessful, “lessons learned” during FY 03-04. These lessons are presented below; some of these lessons have already been incorporated with the programs for Year 4.

- Deputy Probation Officers (DPOs) in the School-Based Supervision Program have become an integral component of the educational process and campus life at School-Based sites.
- School-Based Program is an effective strategy and service delivery model for at-risk and high-risk probation youths.
- It is critical to maintain data and information sharing among JJCPA stakeholder agencies, community-based service providers, and program participants.
- In neighborhoods where gangs and violence are prevalent, there are consequences for youths residing in those neighborhoods.
- It is desirable to continue to promote strategies that hold youths and their parents responsible, accountable, and answerable.
- Increased mental health services for detained youths have resulted in earlier detection of problems and more immediate access to treatment.

- For youths entering juvenile hall, mental health treatment starts at the point of the screening process.
- It is desirable to continue to promote school success as a central strategy and intervention for probation and at-risk youths.
- It is desirable to continue to promote and provided early intervention and prevention services for at-risk youths.
- JJCPA services should support the family as a unit, rather than focus on the youths in isolation.
- Transportation services are essential to youths and their families having access and participating in JJCPA programs and services.

PERSPECTIVES AND CONCLUSIONS PER EVALUATOR'S OBSERVATIONS

Researchers at RAND have served as the evaluators for JJCPA program outcomes since Year 1 of the program. While largely focusing on the analysis of outcome measures required by the Board of Corrections, RAND has also assisted the Probation Department in assessment of program implementation, development of case management activities, and modification/refinement of outcome measures for programs. Emerging directions include:

- Data collection has improved substantially and efforts to improve data quality and completeness should continue.
- Programs are evidence-based, but continued assessment of program fidelity is needed.
- Continued outcome evaluation has suggested ways to add/modify/drop programs.
- JJCPA programs are complex collaboratives and require constant care and feeding.
- JJCPA programs show success, but improvements in youths' behaviors are relatively modest.

Evaluation Limitations

As with any evaluation, there are inherent limitations in our assessment of the Los Angeles County JJCPA. The current evaluation uses quasi-experimental designs to test the effectiveness of JJCPA programs. Quasi-experimental designs construct comparison groups using matching or other similar techniques, then compare the performance of the treatment population to that of the comparison group. Such comparison groups are

always open to the criticism that they are somehow not comparable to the program group, so that observed differences are not due to the program, but rather to differences between the groups.

Data for some programs were relatively complete--e.g., approximately 70% of youths in the School-Based programs had data related to school attendance, suspensions, and expulsions. In other programs, only a small fraction of program youths had data available for supplementary measures, calling into question the appropriateness of any findings based on such small sub-samples.

CONCLUSIONS

Implementation of JJCPA by the Los Angeles County Probation Department consists of two major initiatives, one to address mental health issues and the other aimed at school success issues. Both probationers and at-risk youths were targeted, with each initiative including several individual programs. In FY 03-04, JJCPA provided services to 11,450 youths in programs in the mental health initiative, and to 22,060 in programs in the school success initiative. Overall, youths in both initiatives showed reductions in rates of arrest and incarceration, as well as increases in the rate at which they successfully completed probation, restitution, and community service. School attendance improved, and school suspensions and expulsions decreased after entering the program.

Stakeholder statements suggest that the JJCPA programs are seen positively and perceived to contribute to improved performance and reduced juvenile delinquency. DPOs assigned to schools were praised for their efforts at improving both conduct and school performance. Probation's Cluster Managers, who oversee probation staff in each of Los Angeles County's five supervisor districts, have offered assessments of the progress made and the challenges that remain. Probation continues to monitor and improve the implementation of JJCPA programs.