

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PROBATION'S FAMILY PRESERVATION/GROW PROGRAM

History:

In 1989 Santa Cruz County Juvenile Probation redirected its efforts to become a System of Care county. This was in response to rising placement costs for juvenile wards who were removed from their family home. Santa Cruz County, with a population of approximately 250,000, averaged approximately, 104 group home placements per year. Following the introduction of a System of Care approach this amount was reduced to a yearly average of 67 placements per year during the period from 1989 through 1997. The System of Care approach promoted cooperative work among mental health, juvenile justice and social service agencies. It also included partnering with schools to focus rehabilitation efforts on the family. The six essential characteristics of the System of Care approach were a clear definition of the target population, simple, clear and measurable goals and objectives, interagency coalition building, integrated, collaborative delivery of a wide range of services, incorporation of cultural competency and internal and external evaluation of outcomes.

Following this eight-year period the number of county group home placements for the Probation Department began to increase. To address this increase the System of Care partners created a new placement prevention program. This program is known by the somewhat strained acronym, GROW (GRADUATED RETURN TO OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY). It was hoped this program would keep seriously at-risk juveniles in their homes and if juveniles were in placement it would allow them to be returned home more quickly than the previous norm.

The staffing of the program was originally designed to be co-directed by a Probation Department supervisor and a senior Mental Health professional. The line GROW staff was designed to consist of three teams of one probation officer and two Mental Health workers. Each team was intended to serve approximately 15 juveniles. This intense collaboration between Children's Mental Health and Probation was somewhat unusual at that time. The intent of the GROW Program was to maintain Probation youth in the least restrictive environment, that being their family's home. Efforts to provide the family with new resources, education and support services were designed to increase parental effectiveness as well as accomplish behavioral and therapeutic goals.

The initial funding sources for the GROW Family Preservation Program in 1997 included Mental Health EPSDT (Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment) funding from the state, Probation Federal Title IV-E funding and General County Funds. Following the initial success of the program County General Funding took over a larger portion of the expense. TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) funds from welfare reform were later used to support collateral services such as recreational and employment opportunities.

From April 1997 through December of the same year, the GROW Program served 55 minors, who the Court found to be at-risk of out-of-home placement or return to out-of-home placement.

Following involvement in the GROW Program only 6 of these 55 wards subsequently required out-of-home placement. Of these same 55 participants only 13% were adjudicated on new law violations, conversely 87% did not commit new crimes while on the program. Fifty-four percent were adjudicated on probation violations while conversely, 46% did not commit probation violations.

In calendar year 1998 the GROW Program served 77 minors. Only 19% were adjudicated on new law violations, conversely 79% did not commit new crimes while on the program. Sixty-two percent were adjudicated on probation violations while 32% did not commit new probation violations. Ninety-seven percent of the GROW participants in this period committed no new felonies. This was done at a cost reduction for the years of 1997 and 1998, the county cost of the program was approximately \$330,000 annually. This investment avoided \$1,096,068 in county placement costs over the same two years.

From January through December of 1999 the GROW Program served 71 youth. Of these participants 17% were adjudicated on new law violations, conversely 83% had no new law violations. Of the same 71 youth, 60% had technical probation violations reported to the Court, conversely 40% did not even have probation violations. Once again 97% of the youth on the GROW Program committed no new felony violations.

From January through December of 2000 the GROW Program served 61 youth. During this period the program entered a new phase of being used as a control group for a Board of Corrections Challenge Grant study. This resulted in a reduced number of youth served. Nonetheless, only 10 less youth were served as in the previous year. Of these 61 youth, 24% were adjudicated on new law violations, conversely 76% had no new law violations. Sixty-nine percent had technical probation violations, conversely 31% did not even have probation violations. For the third year in a row, 97% of the youth in GROW committed no new felonies.

Throughout these years many violations involved drug usage. Nonetheless, the program continued to provide a successful, community-based, financially-sound alternative to removal of youth from their home. This has been accomplished with relatively low-risk to the community and with the invaluable aid of community partners.

Referral Process:

Referrals for the GROW Program were initially received through the Probation Screening Committee. This would involve a strength-based assessment completed by the supervising probation officer and presented to the committee. Community partners, such as Mental Health counselors and other interested providers are welcome at these screening committee meetings. These meetings are heard twice weekly and were usually initiated when a law violation or technical probation violation was proceeding through the Court. If sustained, these violations would provide the Court the opportunity to provide further intensive services or perhaps place a minor out of the home. If the committee felt the minor may benefit from Placement Prevention Services, an assessment team was assigned to meet with the minor, their family and other appropriate parties. At that meeting a strength-based assessment addressing the family's

perspective on needs, risks and concerns involving their child is completed. Children's Mental Health would also use that opportunity to explain services and costs and gain an initial insight into the family dynamics. At the completion of this process the assessment team would indicate to the supervising probation officer as to the suitability of the minor and the family for Placement Prevention Services. This information then would be utilized to make an appropriate Court recommendation.

As previously mentioned GROW became the control group in a Board of Corrections Challenge Grant study in 2000. This necessitated a random assignment between the community-based and the site-based programs for the purpose of the study. Families involved in this random assignment have agreed to be part of the study and have their rights and confidentiality clearly explained to them prior to signing the confidentiality waivers to allow their child's participation in the study.

GROW Program Implementation:

The GROW Family Preservation Program continues to work toward utilizing the wraparound process of service delivery to the youth and their families.

- Wraparound efforts must be based in community.
- Services and support must be individualized, built on strengths, and meet the needs of children and families across the life domains in order to promote success, safety, and permanency in home, school, and community.
- The process must be culturally competent.
- Families must be full and active partners in every level of the wraparound process.
- The wraparound process must be a team-driven process involving the family, child, natural support, agencies, and community services working together to develop, implement, and evaluate the individualized service plan.
- Wraparound teams must have flexible approaches with adequate and flexible funding.
- Wraparound plans must include a balance of formal services and informal community and family resources.
- The community agencies and teams must make an unconditional commitment to serve the children and families.
- A service/support plan should be developed and implemented based on an interagency, community/neighborhood collaborative process.
- Outcomes must be determined and measured for each goal established with the child and

family as well as for those goals established at the program and system levels.

Family Preservation GROW Program Level System:

Once a case is assigned to the GROW Program the strength-based assessment that was completed prior to the Court's placement into Family Preservation services is reviewed with the minor and their family to discuss and identify concerns, strengths and needs. This serves as the basis of a case/service plan to work with the minor and their family. This document is often referred to as progress and issues are evaluated throughout the minor's involvement with the program. A level structure was also created in an effort to provide some external framework of behavioral expectations for the minor and their family.

This level system consists of three levels which are flexible, yet attempt to provide some clear behavioral guidance. The first level, considered the Trust Level, limits the youth's activities to school, counseling, employment or whenever accompanied by a parent. The teen is otherwise expected to remain at home at all times and is not to have friends visit the family's home. On this level only approved persons may transport the minor to daily activities. Children's Mental Health counselors and/or Probation staff meet with the minor three to five times a week and family contact is expected to be on a weekly basis. The next level, considered the Responsibility Level, gives the minor up to four hours of self-structured daily free time and is negotiated with the parent and the case management team. Parents' permission for outings is necessary. The parent is expected to be responsible for knowing the minor's whereabouts at all times. On this level the contacts with Probation and/or Children's Mental Health will be up to four times per week. The third level is the Competency Level which gives the minor up to six hours of self-structured daily free time, which is negotiated with the parent and includes the treatment team. The parent is to continue knowing the minor's whereabouts at all times but the minor's curfew reverts to the originally Court-ordered 10:00 p.m. Contacts with Mental Health and Probation are decreased to once to twice a week.

Movement between this level system is discussed with the assigned youth counselor, the probation officer and the responsible parent during level review meetings. These meetings occur as often as every few weeks and towards the end of the level system occur on a monthly basis.

Case Coordination:

The unique cooperation between Probation services and Children's Mental Health services to provide appropriate interventions with the youth and their families requires a large degree of understanding and cooperation between the Probation and Mental Health perspective. This necessitates a degree of sharing some of the probation officer's decision-making abilities in terms of case management. While Probation shares responsibility, and some decisions, the Probation Department continues to consider the probation officer as the primary case manager. They are the specialists who enforce probation conditions such as drug testing, curfews and house arrest compliance. The importance of their partnership with skilled Mental Health professionals and counselors is demonstrated in the complimentary services provided to the family through these professionals. They provide crisis intervention, individual and family counseling and support of

educational needs.

Both the clinical staff and the probation officer share in recreational activities with the minors. Some activities are appropriate to include the minor's family and siblings. These activities include typical outings, as well as culturally competent cultural events and team-building efforts. Examples of recreational and cultural events are fishing outings, basketball games, museum visits, college opportunity fairs at the University at California in Santa Cruz, cultural awareness events, ceramics classes and other flexible appropriate activities. Of noteworthy mention is the Unity Soccer Program which participates in a community soccer competition running throughout the year. Involvement in this program includes the minors of various gang affiliations with the expectation of building skills and creating an environment of understanding and team work. Due to the efforts of this program the Santa Cruz County Probation Department received a grant from the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County in 2000. This grant was used to provide a soccer camp where Probation youth were trained to teach elementary school children, through Parks and Recreation and the YMCA summer programs, to learn the basics of soccer. The competency building skills and leadership training this provides builds positive community perceptions for the youth and also builds job development skills. The flexible funds that are important to the concept of wraparound services are also utilized for the needs of minors and their families. This is most often seen in providing clothing for school or money for school supplies for our youth. It could also be used for tutoring programs and registration fees in various appropriate activities for the youth, such as football camp, and dance classes. It is always important to utilize GROW resources to help the minors and their families build on the minor's skills and interests in an effort to create more social competency.

TANF funding also has the use of the Probation Job Developer services. This provides focused efforts at obtaining employment to help sustain the youth in positive social interactions after completion of the program. The Job Developer often has classes that help the youth develop resumes and do mock-job interviews. Tours of employment sites and Job Corps are also available. Individual job placement and apprenticeships are created with community partners to help the youth gain positive job experience and employment skills.

Provider Network;

To address the varied and multiple needs of the families and youth served by the GROW Program, a varied and changing provider network is utilized. Examples of community partners to provide services include drug counseling and groups provided by Youth Services and Fenix Services, gang intervention counseling provided by Barrios Unidos, family counseling provided by the Parents Center, help for pregnant teenagers provided by the CAL WORKS Program through the Human Resource Agency, Women's Crisis Support, counseling and tutoring provided through the Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance Program, food and after school services provided by the Familia Services, family counseling provided by Planned Parenthood and housing assistance provided by Families in Transition. These serve as an example of the type of community partners and services utilized to try to provide comprehensive and effective service to our youth and families.

Program Completion:

As previously mentioned, the GROW Program serves as a control group for a Board of Corrections Challenge Grant study. This has created an effort to provide services in an approximate six-month period. This is a flexible time frame and the final determination is decided by the needs of the minor and the family. Minors who are not ready to work through the level system and families who cannot resolve their current issues through Family Preservation GROW intervention sometimes move on to out-of-home placement or individual family interventions. Family conferences are provided at all stages of the GROW Program to address the family's importance in the decision-making process. All efforts are made to respect the family's plans and goals for their children. For minors who are successful at completing terms of probation, dismissal of that probation grant is generally requested. Other minors make progress in strides towards resolving the various issues that led to their involvement with the juvenile criminal justice system, but do not successfully complete all probation terms within the desired time frames. These youth are returned to general, intensive or geographically appropriate caseloads to continue receiving services and supervision. Mental Health services continue to be provided, when appropriate, throughout our partner agencies such as Children's Mental Health outpatient services and Youth Services.