# Santa Clara County's Dually Involved Youth Initiative

Hannah Slade

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Santa Clara County's Dually Involved Youth (DIY) Initiative created a DIY tracking tool and a DIY unit in 2014 to try to better address the high needs population of youth involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. These crossover youth have proven to cost counties significant amounts of public service dollars well into adulthood and their outcomes are disproportionately poor.

The DIY unit is comprised of probation and child welfare staff who sit and work together, under the guidance of a supervisor and manager from each agency. Each DIY case is assigned a worker from both agencies that collaborate on services, court reports, and all case actions. Extensive data are entered into a tracking tool developed to help identify needs and areas of improvement in services for DIY.

Contra Costa County would benefit from adapting Santa Clara County's data tracking tool and increasing focus on this high needs population. With the valuable data provided by this tool, Contra Costa County could strategize early intervention tactics for at-risk crossover youth, which may improve outcomes and even reduce future public service costs for these youth.

Contra Costa County has a valuable opportunity to adapt tools and ideas from Santa Clara County and to possibly expand and enhance its own Dual Jurisdiction Committee. Adapting these ideas could save the county valuable dollars in the long run with dually involved youth.

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## Background

Research shows that children who have been subject to abuse, neglect, and maltreatment, are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior. Similarly, children who have had involvement in the juvenile justice system often end up in foster care. The amount of crossover between the juvenile justice and child welfare systems is significant and this population is of growing concern as they have shown not only to have extremely poor outcomes, but also to use large amounts of public service dollars after exiting these systems (Herz, et al., 2012).

"In comparison to foster youth with no involvement in probation, crossover youth were more than twice as likely to be heavy users of public systems in adulthood, three times as likely to experience a jail stay, 1.5 times more likely to receive General Relief, and 50 percent less likely to be consistently employed" (Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, 2011).

Assembly Bill No. 129, Chapter 468, states that the county probation department and the county children's and family services agency shall develop protocol and jointly determine which agency will best be able to serve the dually involved youth, while also maintaining the safety of the community. Based on the special needs and high risk factors for this population, dually involved youth require more intensive, and often more creative, approaches to services than the average foster youth.

## Santa Clara County's Approach

In 2012, Santa Clara County Probation Department, along with Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) and the courts, applied for and were chosen to receive a technical assistance grant, which provided consultation from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the MacArthur Foundation on the integration of services for child welfare and juvenile justice agencies.

Santa Clara County began planning the Dually Involved Youth (DIY) Initiative in June 2013; significant stakeholder participation has been involved from the beginning stages of planning through stages of implementation. The initiative continues to have the support of the juvenile court, District Attorney, Child Welfare Director, Probation Chief, and various other important stakeholders.

## The Dually Involved Youth Unit

The Dually Involved Youth (DIY) unit is the main component of the DIY initiative in Santa Clara County. After more than a year and a half of planning, the DIY unit was formed and started accepting cases in July of 2014. The DIY unit consists of two social workers and two probation officers who sit adjacent to one another. They are under the guidance and leadership of a supervisor and manager from DFCS and a supervisor and manager from the Probation Department's Juvenile Services Division (JPD).

Each case is assigned one probation officer and one social worker in the DIY unit who then are able to work on the case collaboratively. The two workers develop case conference plans, actions, events, and write court reports together. Both workers on the case attend all court hearings for the youth and have access to probation's JAS system and child welfare's CWS/CMS. All cases that are referred to the unit

go through a screening process to determine if the DIY unit is best suited for them. The DIY initiative has identified three special target populations to focus on serving. They include youth under 14, pregnant or parenting youth, and Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC).

## Challenges

Anytime two large agencies try to work collaboratively, there are inevitably going to be some challenges. Santa Clara County has discovered that many of the challenges of working with dually involved youth are caused by the two agencies' differing policies and procedures, in addition to their differing mindsets and abilities. In children and family services, the agency is entirely dependent on families' compliance. While probation officers can order monitoring or drug testing, and can implement consequences for non-compliance, DFCS does not have that capability.

For the DFCS, the assessment of the family and their needs drive the services provided to them. In contrast, probation services are driven by the charges against the youth. For example, when a youth's charges get reduced from felony to misdemeanor, it can change the entire approach to the case for probation. Because the behavior of the youth was the same regardless of the way the youth is charged, the focus of DFCS would be the same. If a youth commits larceny and assault with a deadly weapon with intent to cause great bodily harm and injury and the charges are reduced, probation will not look at the case as seriously as DFCS who is looking at the extremely serious behavior. This can create challenges when trying to serve the youth as each agency is looking at the youth and family with different criteria but needs to develop and provide a unified service plan and presentation of such to the judge.

Basic process and procedural differences between the agencies have also been a challenge as probation typically does not transport children, and social workers transport children on a frequent and regular basis. Social workers are also used to spending more time in court than probation officers. Probation officers in the DIY unit have adapted to trying to understand the background of the child as well as the whole family versus a primary focus on safety and security.

## Benefits of DIY Initiative

Despite the challenges presented by the DIY initiative, the unit has experienced numerous benefits and positive indicators of success, even in its short existence. Having direct and frequent contact with both the social worker and the probation officer allows for more natural connections and relationships to form between the youth, the family, and whichever worker they feel more comfortable with. The families have reported that they appreciate that everyone is on the same team. The close collaboration also prevents youth from trying to pit the agencies against one another. There is greater accountability for the youth as they know the probation officer and social worker discuss and review all case actions and services together.

The DIY workers reported that they have more quality time with the youth in their caseload and usually see them multiple times per month. Relationships and permanent or long-term connections are some of the most powerful ways to influence a youth involved in the juvenile justice or foster care system. This program encourages and supports those connections. One youth in the DIY unit stated that his workers were like a mom and a dad, which speaks volumes about the work that this unit is doing.

Several of the members of the DIY unit also mentioned that they have more freedom in developing case and service plans in the DIY unit than they previously had. They often brainstorm creative, "out-of-the-box" ideas to address the unusual situations and circumstances they encounter in their DIY cases. DIY workers reported that the judge usually supports their creativity and they have had success in many of their more creative case plans.

## Outcomes and Data Tracking

Using the technical assistance grant consultation, Santa Clara County developed an extensive data

tracking tool, with the ultimate goal of showing progress and improved outcomes for DIY through data. DIY is an area with many different variables and possible outcomes, therefore the tracking tool covers a wide spectrum of indicators, including:

- Identification of Youth
- Court Process
- Youth's Living Situation
- Youth Family Team Meetings
- Well-Being
- School Attendance and Engagement
- Services Needed and Received
- Family Finding and Placement Type
- Demographic Information and Immigration Needs
- Restoration of Victims and Communities, and Probation Rehabilitation Goals
- Faith-Based Connections
- Closure Reasons

The data tool tracks these variables every six months and specifies which worker should enter which data. The goals for outcomes vary depending on the youth. For some, success will be reducing frequency and duration of periods of absence without official leave (AWOL). For another, it may be reducing drug use and dependency from methamphetamines to marijuana. The ultimate goal and ideal outcome would be to graduate youth out of both systems and into a stable and self-sufficient adulthood, and this data tool will provide valuable information on how counties can work toward that goal by serving this population more effectively.

Although there is not yet enough data to make significant conclusions about the direct impact of the DIY initiative because the unit has only been taking cases since July of last year, the feedback from youth, workers, and judges has all been positive. Those involved feel like they are able to make positive changes and provide important support to youth who were previously at a disadvantage due to the lack of collaboration. Situations like a child's release from Juvenile Hall to a parent when there is an active protective custody order can be avoided.

## Keys to Success

Everyone involved in the DIY initiative confirmed that one of the main keys to success has been having the right people in the right places. DIY workers require a passion for high needs teenagers. Santa Clara's program managers, supervisors, director, and county counsel are completely invested in this initiative. They also have a Juvenile Probation Liaison and Youth Advocate who work with DIY and attend juvenile court hearings with the youth.

Also critical to the program's success has been extensive cross-training, including trainings on the Child and Family Practice Model, Trauma-Informed Practice, Cultural Humility, Juvenile Justice 101, Dependency 101, TARGET Trauma, and many other specialized trainings for those involved with DIY.

In addition, the co-location of social workers and probation officers allows for optimal collaboration between the agencies. The simple fact that the probation officers and social workers are sitting within a few feet of one another, forced the early collaboration of services, and continues to provide daily opportunities to check in with one another on case actions and service plans. It also allows the workers to include one another easily on phone calls and correspondence with the youth.

Judicial support has also been a huge component of the DIY initiative's success. The ability of a juvenile judge to see direct results from dually involved youth who have been served by the DIY unit and resources is almost as powerful as the data that will eventually be produced by the data tracking system.

## Contra Costa County Procedures

Currently in Contra Costa County, there is a Dual Status Protocol that was established in accordance with AB 129. A Division Manager from Children and Family Services (CFS) and the Placement Probation Supervisor meet on a regular basis to review cases of any dually involved youth that have been identified. Youth are usually identified by probation who will call CFS when they are brought into Juvenile Hall. The managers then review the case and

circumstances with the social worker, social work supervisor, and probation officer via conference call, ultimately determining which will become the lead agency. The social worker and the probation officer then collaborate on services provided to the youth.

## Recommendations

Rather than trying to replicate Santa Clara County's DIY Initiative, Contra Costa County would benefit from adapting some of Santa Clara County's ideas and experiences to support the Dual Status Youth protocol and business processes currently in place.

Contra Costa County would initially benefit from developing a similar tracking tool that allows the opportunity to look at the number of children who are dually involved, and the earliest point at which those youth can be identified. In addition, Contra Costa County could strategize some early intervention tactics for children in CFS at risk of entering the juvenile justice system. Intervening early may enable Contra Costa County to prevent some of the crossover of youth, avoiding future county costs in addition to reducing negative outcomes.

Contra Costa County may also benefit from expanding the Dual Jurisdiction Committee to include additional participants who meet regularly to discuss crossover cases and ways to collaborate and integrate services. Ideally, this group would include a representative from the court in addition to representatives from Juvenile Probation and CFS. Contra Costa County would also need to generate interest surrounding this population and potentially work off momentum surrounding CSEC, as there is likely a fair amount of overlap, to try to get some key stakeholders to see the value in integrating services and increasing collaborations on DIY cases.

## Cost Implications

The majority of the costs associated with the DIY initiative in Santa Clara County have been absorbed between the two departments. Juvenile Probation was able to move and shift responsibilities to allow for two probation officers to be assigned to the DIY unit, as well as a Probation DIY Supervisor. Santa Clara County DFCS pulled from within its own staff, taking two social workers who were carrying approximately 24-26 continuing services cases and giving them DIY caseloads of eight in exchange. The DIY caseload size will likely increase, as the capacity for the unit was set at 26, however the initial caseloads were set conservatively to allow for adjustments to a new, collaborative service model.

For Contra Costa County, the impact of pulling two workers from approximately 25 caseloads for a specialized unit with only 12-13 cases each would be equivalent or similar to losing almost one full time case-carrying staff position. This also may cause a union labor relation's barrier with specialized, reduced caseloads. However, the potential to serve even a limited amount of youth with increased collaboration would save the county public service dollars later if it can improve their outcomes.

## Conclusion

> *"Crossover youth – i.e. those involved in both child welfare and juvenile justice systems – comprise a particularly vulnerable group of exiters. Policymakers might consider specifically targeting this group for ongoing outreach and intervention in an effort to increase the likelihood that, as adults, they will successfully adapt to and assimilate mainstream norms and expectations"*
>
> (Culhane, 2011).

Santa Clara County is breaking ground with this important population. Its DIY unit is serving youth in innovative ways with cohesive and collaborative case plans. The data-tracking tool will provide valuable data for not only Santa Clara County, but also other counties looking for ways to improve services and outcomes for dually involved youth. The opportunity for Contra Costa County to try to increase positive outcomes for dually involved youth and serve families more effectively is a challenge that needs to be addressed. Contra Costa County may be

able to significantly decrease the amount of public service funds required by these crossover youth if it can integrate and improve services before they exit the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

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