

**A TALE OF TWO COUNTIES:
THE EVOLUTION OF COORDINATED SERVICES
IN MARIN AND SANTA CLARA COUNTIES**

Jonathan Weinberg*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In the early 1990s, Marin and Santa Clara Counties each engaged in independent needs assessments of their communities. Although dissimilar in size and demographics, both counties identified the same population needing services (youth in, or at imminent risk of, out-of-home placement), the same gaps in service delivery (duplication and inefficiency in service delivery to families with children in need of, or already in, level 13/14 placement, when receiving services from two or more public entities simultaneously), and ultimately created programs that led to the same outcomes (improved collaboration and coordination of services and a reduction in high-level placements). The differences between these two counties arose in the development and internal workings of the systems each created.

**MARIN COUNTY:
THE YOUTH PILOT PROJECT**

The Youth Pilot Project (YPP), was established in 1995 as AB1741. Some primary components are:

- Primary impact on public sector entities of Child Welfare, Juvenile Probation and Mental Health
- Cost-avoidance funding stream based on cost of residential placement avoided by creative use of services while keeping youth at home or stepping down to less restrictive placement
- Pooled monies and resources.

- A single, facilitated, consensus-driven decision-making mechanism, known as Family Network meetings, that involves family members, support people and service providers
- Oversight provided by Coordinated Youth Services Council, a non-profit agency
- Significant increase in efficiency of service delivery and decrease in costs
- Decrease in level 13/14 placements

**SANTA CLARA COUNTY:
A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM**

In 1987, Santa Clara County established the Placement Review Committee (PRC) as a gate-keeper for high-level placements. By 1999, the PRC evolved into a multi-tiered system of meetings between public and private sector entities. Today, an intricate network of meetings creates a balanced system. Some primary components are:

- Primary impact on public sector entities of Child Welfare, Juvenile Probation and Mental Health.
- Services-rendered funding stream (SB163) based on services provided through creative use of services while keeping youth at home or stepping down to less restrictive placement.
- Pooled monies and resources.
- Facilitated, consensus-driven decision-making mechanism that involves family members, support people and service providers, known as Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings.

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- Separate consensus-driven decision-making mechanism for all high-level placements that involves stakeholder professionals and agencies.
- Oversight provided by collaborative of stakeholder representatives.
- Significant increase in efficiency of service delivery and decrease in costs.
- Decrease in level 13/14 placements.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite dwindling budgets and resources, both Santa Clara and Marin Counties run successful programs to address the needs of youth and families with high-level placement issues. These programs highlight collaboration and pooled monies to create best practice service delivery. There are only a few recommendations for Santa Clara County to

consider in fine-tuning its current system. The county should:

- Compare YPP funding stream to SB163 funding stream and determine which is best for Santa Clara County.
- Assess Family Network Meetings for consideration of use by Joint Decision-Making unit on CCF cases.
- Consider introducing direct parent involvement in more meetings, including Resources & Intensive Services Committee meetings.

Both Marin and Santa Clara Counties have created systems that work well for their communities. Each system reflects the dynamics and relationships in their respective communities and achieves similar outcomes despite numerous differences in size and demographics.

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INTRODUCTION

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...”

So began Charles Dickens' well-known tale. So too were the circumstances and forces at play in many counties in California in the early 1990s. The economy was booming and services were on the rise, yet needs assessments were indicating that clients were falling through the cracks. In the following pages, I will explore the parallel processes that took two dissimilar counties on different paths towards the same ends, the integrated delivery of services to families with children and youth at risk of entering, or remaining in, high-level out-of-home placement.

In both Marin and Santa Clara Counties, the early/mid-1990s saw the identification and delivery of services to this population of high-risk youth and their families. Through needs assessments, both counties found families who were receiving services from two or more departments to be falling through the cracks of uncoordinated services, in particular, those youth in need of high-level placements. Taking different paths, both counties pursued protocols that have established longstanding successes in coordinating services to these youth and families in their respective counties.

Each county appears to have developed a system that has, and continues to, reflect the dynamics of its own county culture. What is similar? Each county system addresses the same three overlap-

ping areas: Child Protective Services (CPS), Juvenile Probation Department (JPD), and County Mental Health (CMH). Each county system has oversight. Each county utilizes a specific stream of government funding to support creative but targeted service delivery. And each system appears to be realizing similar positive outcomes, including better delivery of services to clients, better communication and coordination between public entities, and a reduction in use of high-level, out-of-home residential placements.

What is different? Although accessing government funds, each county does so through a different funding stream. Also, while both systems are consensus driven, each county uses different meetings, group decision-making processes, and participants at key decision points.

I went to the Youth Pilot Project (YPP) in San Rafael, California, to learn about how Marin County provides services to this particular population. In the end, I think I learned as much about my own county as I did about my host county. I also learned several basic tenets of good program planning and implementation.

MARIN COUNTY: THE YOUTH PILOT PROJECT

Background

Despite having a reputation as a home for the wealthy, by 1990 Marin County had a growing population of low-income residents, including a signifi-

cant influx in the immigrant population. A needs assessment conducted in 1995 identified a serious gap between client needs and system priorities, with regard to services received by families with child in, or at risk of, out-of-home care.

Three target populations were specifically identified as needing assistance:

- Families active with at least two of the three entities: CPS, JPD & CMH.
- Families eligible for case management through Healthy Start Programs.
- Any children at risk of immediate removal from their home.

The needs assessment called for a mechanism to mobilize community resources to keep families safe, healthy and together. Noting that Marin County was characterized by strong private-public partnerships throughout all areas of service, the needs assessment was the impetus for the process that resulted in the YPP.

In 1995, the Marin Partnership For Families With Children, Marin County's oversight collaborative, endorsed the pursuit of AB1741, a state waiver program using a cost-avoidance billing system, eventually to become known as the YPP. Marin was chosen as one of six counties in California for the project. The goals put forth by the grant program were:

- Determine the best use of state and local human service funds.
- Blend these funds to facilitate integrated services to families and children.
- Increase efficiency in administration of human services.

For the Marin Partnership For Families With Children, the YPP was adopted as a strategy to answer two questions:

- Can children at imminent risk of placement remain at home with collaborative planning and provision of intensive services?
- Can children already in out-of-home care be moved to lower levels of care or returned home sooner, with collaborative planning and provision of intensive services?

The YPP Today

The philosophy behind the YPP project is that families working in concert with their personal and professional support systems are the best resource to create and implement a plan to protect their children with special placement needs. To realize this, the YPP contracted with the Coordinated Youth Services Council (CYSC), a non-profit members organization comprised of public sector agencies, schools, non-profits, individual providers, and parents. CYSC's goal is to create streamlined provisions of services, eliminate fragmentation, and reduce duplication for families involved with two or more systems of care. A guiding principle of the CYSC is that children should be, to the greatest extent possible, with their families. To the extent that placement is necessary, children should be placed in such a way that existing emotional bonds with family, friends and community can be maintained.

The YPP continues to focus on three sources of referrals from case managers in each respective arena:

- CMH: School identified AB 3632 candidates assessed by CMH for out-of-home level of care needs
- CPS: voluntary and non-voluntary placements.

- JPD: 602 status offenders who are not showing stabilization or decrease in risky behaviors.

This is a voluntary program and parents must be willing to fully engage in the program and services. Beyond that, they must have a child in out-of-home care or at imminent risk of such; there must be an available parent or relative with whom the child wants to live; and, the child must be able to safely return home should intensive services be made available to the child and caregiver.

Staff from the different stakeholder entities seem to like the program and believe it provides best practice services to these youth and families. They also state that a positive outcome has been the collaboration, cooperation, and coordination that have developed between CMH, CPS, & JPD.

The YPP program uses a waiver under AB1741 to invoice the state for monies that otherwise would have been used for out-of-home care. The waiver is based on cost of placement avoided. Marin County YPP invoices the State of California for the state's portion of the avoided placement costs. Marin must then make a county match in funds for the portion the county would have paid for those placements. The specific invoicing is as follows:

- For federally eligible children, the program bills the state 20% of the total cost of placement avoided by the children. The county matches 30% of the avoided placement cost.
- For non-federally eligible children, the program bills 40% of the total cost of placement avoided by the children. Sixty percent of the avoided placement cost is matched by the county.
- According to program staff, it is difficult to determine an 'average' placement cost as they can range from \$250 to \$6500 per month, based on the level of care. Tracked internally by the

YPP, the state is billed monthly. Any surplus of money at the end of the year is rolled over into the next year and remains available for use with future YPP families.

Services provided through the YPP and CYSC have opened up a wide array of delivery options, such as respite care, tutoring, parent training, anger management classes, extraordinary basic needs expenses, substance abuse treatment, therapy, extra-curricular activities and mentoring. Many of these services were not available through more traditional funding streams prior to the YPP.

A central element of the YPP is the use of Family Network meetings, a form of family group decision-making, created by the CYSC. The Family Network meetings are used for planning and implementing the services designed to reduce the need for out-of-home placement. The purpose of a Family Network meeting is to set goals, assign specific activities to participants, to check-in and coordinate with service providers and the family to adjust or change goals as needed, and to help the team evaluate the outcome of work achieved to date.

The Family Network meetings consist of a team coordinator (usually the referring case manager), CYSC staff, the parent, the child (if age appropriate), key family members, key support people, and any service providers currently involved with the family and related to the case plan. Included in this team may be a parent advocate from a non-profit parent support agency that provides advocacy in the educational and mental health systems for parents with children with disabilities. Additionally, a community-based parent support group funded through Systems Of Care (SOC) may provide in-home parenting assistance to YPP clients who are served by CMH.

The parent identifies who s/he wants on the team and, in conjunction with the team coordinator, identifies goals to address the placement issue. The team generally meets every four to six weeks, although meetings do occur with greater and lesser frequency as each case merits. CYSC provides the site and staff to facilitate and record all Family Network meetings. CYSC will also travel to most any Marin County location that is convenient to the family. The facilitation and recording staff only interacts with the family during Family Network meetings. Although CYSC staff provide no direct service to the families involved with the program, the YPP considers the meeting facilitation to be the most important direct service provided to the family it serves as it teaches the family a different set of skills for gathering and communicating with various personal and community supports. Another important service provided by CYSC staff is consultation with professionals involved with the family to facilitate coordinated service delivery.

The Family Network meetings focus on goal attainment to drive the duration of services, although these are aligned with any pertinent court-driven time-lines, such as the Dependency Family Reunification service timeline. Each goal has quantified signs of success attached to it and the parent and service providers are asked to check-in on them at each meeting. A case plan document provides the structure for the Family Network meetings and is updated following each meeting. The meetings generally last two hours. Upon the conclusion of observing a Family Network meeting, I had the opportunity to ask the CMH worker, who was also the team coordinator, if the time involved in the YPP program increased her work. She responded that though it does indeed take a lot of time, it is worth the pay-off because of the collaboration and sharing of knowledge.

The YPP program is administratively operated out of the CPS branch of Marin County Social Services. While it does share an increased administrative burden through staffing of this program, the participants indicate that it is a system from which all still benefit. Both Marin's CMH and CPS agencies believe placements are down in their areas. The YPP program is also seen as providing better, more skilled services now, so it is actually spending less per family than previously.

The most recent annual YPP report (FY2003/4) provides an overview: 68 total different public and private agencies and other services providers attended Family Network meetings; 140 individuals identified as family, extended family and friends attended meetings; 54 families were served, comprising 111 children (70 of whom were focus children). Of these families, 15 came from CMH, 23 came from CPS and 16 came from JPD, with 24 families involved in at least two county agencies. Of youth served, 27% were African- American, 23% Hispanic, 37% White, and 13% multi-ethnic.

The cost of services provided through YPP on the 54 families was \$337,796. The projected cost of care avoided for the 70 focus children was \$1,212,519, a difference of \$874,723. According to program staff, some of the more expensive services that can be funded through YPP which were previously not available, include mentoring and single-incident expenses such as assistance with housing costs. The service seen as most helpful is the Family Network meetings, although additional services, such as in-home parenting and parent-child interactive therapy, are also considered highly effective.

**SANTA CLARA COUNTY:
RISC, FFA STAFFINGS AND
OTHER ASSORTED MEETINGS**

Background

As was the case in Marin County, Santa Clara County's process of identifying and improving service delivery to this population of youth began with a needs assessment. In 1999, the Board of Supervisors sponsored a review that also found children in, or at risk of, placement, and their families, to be falling through the cracks of services; as well as a lack of coordination amongst public sector agencies.

Amongst the focus areas and action plans identified by the review, one included the development of the Resources & Intensive Services Committee (RISC) to coordinate high-level placement resources to youth in need. This resulted in the consolidation of wrap around services, a single protocol for all group home and institutional placements, and a single entity with pooled money and authority for spending. The predecessor to RISC, the Placement Review Committee (PRC), began the process of collaborative work in 1987, when it was created as a gatekeeper for Level 13/14 placements. RISC goals included overseeing inter-departmental perspective regarding the selection and placement of Santa Clara County youth in residential mental health treatment. The target population included:

- Mentally ill and emotionally disturbed youth in need of out-of-home placement.
- Dependents, wards, conservatees, youth identified by AB3632, as needing residential treatment.
- Youth and families involved in services from multiple agencies.

In 1999, a RISC oversight committee was established from the PRC. Now known as the RISC Leadership Team, it meets monthly and continues to provide a collaborative and coordinated approach to managing the county's resources and maximizing service delivery.

Santa Clara County Today

The philosophy and goals of RISC, and the other Santa Clara County components of service in this area, are strikingly similar to those of YPP and CYSC. For example, cornerstones of both systems include:

- Youth in, or at risk of, high-level placements in out-of-home care.
- Families receiving services from two or more public entities.
- Specific collaboration between CPS, JPD and CMH entities with this client population.
- Collaborative approach to funding and service delivery.
- Pooling of resources to provide optimal levels of direct service.
- Reduction in the number of children utilizing such placements.
- Strengths-based and consensus-driven decision-making.

As is the case with the YPP, the Santa Clara County system draws from the same agencies serving the same populations of children. However, it differs in that it is made up of several layers of meetings each addressing a different issue. It also represents a larger number of agencies, public and private, responding to a significantly larger population of children needing assistance. It is worth noting that those staff involved in the Santa Clara County system verbalized the same goal of collaboration and

coordination of services, as was directly verbalized by line and supervisory staff in Marin County.

The multi-tiered Santa Clara County system operates under the umbrella of SB163 funding to support placement and associated activities for these youth. Under SB163, the county bills the state for services rendered.

As opposed to the YPP umbrella operated through Family Network meetings offered by the CYSC, Santa Clara County provides multiple types of placement meetings in conjunction with Child and Family Team meetings, a similar, but again different, counterpart to Family Network meetings. The following major meetings are available for youth and families experiencing, or at imminent risk of, out-of-home placement in Santa Clara County:

RISC: Gatekeeper for high-level placements, lower-level wrap services, intensive treatment foster care. All referrals to Level 13/14, wrap-around and above go through RISC. The RISC team meets weekly to review all applicable placement referrals. Team members include CMH, JPD, DFCS (CPS), Education, Department of Drugs & Alcohol, community-based organizations (CBOs), placement facilities, and parent partner advocates.

As does CYSC, the RISC team will provide consultation on treatment cases by providing a forum for coordination and linkage between member agencies and departments, as well as SOC youth in the county.

Child & Family Team (CFT) Meetings: Every child in wrap-around services, therapeutic, and/or residential placement is assigned a CFT. Similar to Family Network meetings, a CFT meeting is composed of the child (if age appropriate), parents, key

extended family members, foster parents/relative caregivers, key family support people, professionals, service providers, caseworkers from other agencies and parent partners (former clients or parents of high needs kids who have been hired and trained to provide advocacy for parent clients). A case plan is developed. In the beginning CFTs meet weekly or bi-weekly, but eventually the frequency of meetings lessen as case plan progress indicates.

Starlight Oversight Committee: Meets monthly to review all cases at the only locked facility in Santa Clara County.

WRAP/UPLIFT Oversight Committees: Meets monthly or bi-weekly, conducting a random sampling of cases to ensure programmatic quality.

Foster Family Agency (FFA) Staffing: Meeting monthly, this staffing reviews an average of 20 children. It is attended by all FFAs and presenting caseworkers who share known information about the children to facilitate the appropriate placement. It is the one arena in which all FFAs are able to look together at a single child and the available placements within the county.

Team Decision Making (TDMs): A form of family group decision-making utilized in Santa Clara County to bring about a departmental decision that engages the family. It is not uncommon for a TDM outcome to recommend a RISC referral.

Numerous smaller committees also exist specifically to enhance communication between the different placement-related agencies.

The arenas through which these children are served include:

MATRIX: Use of 'Professional Parents', skilled foster parents who take Level 13/14 placement children with a "no eject or reject" commitment to the placement.

System Of Care (SOC): Therapeutic in-home support. Must have open CMH case. Use of TBS.

Residential Treatment Facilities: Levels 14 and below.

Starlight: Santa Clara County treatment facility (only locked facility for voluntary and conserved youth).

Family Finding: A recent activity, use of genealogy and computers has resulted in the identification of numerous extended family members. This has resulted in an increase in formerly "unplaceable" youth being placed with relatives.

There is no single overseer of these programs, such as the YPP and CYSC partnership. Rather, operating loosely under the umbrella of the RISC oversight committee and numerous other collaboratives, an intricate set of checks and balances guide placement and service decisions by using gatekeeper and multi-disciplinary team meetings. The result is a system that functions in concert to provide better services at lower costs. Multiple successes exist: Since the implementation of Family Finding, FFA and group home placements have decreased; Level 14 beds are not being filled to capacity as they were in the past; and the number of high-level needs children at the Children's Shelter was significantly reduced.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SANTA CLARA COUNTY

As stated previously, although different in its internal structure from Marin, Santa Clara County has a system to address high-risk youth and their families. The one significant difference existing between the two systems is the level of integration of services. Marin's YPP presents a fully integrated system, from funding through service delivery. Santa Clara County, however, operates on a more layered collaboration process.

Interestingly, the motivating forces that brought about these programs, as well as the outcomes that have been realized in both counties, are nearly identical, the most significant of these including:

- Improved coordination of service delivery to mutual clients between public sector entities.
- Improved collaboration between public sector entities resulting in better services to youth and families.
- Reduction in targeted area of high-level placements.
- Oversight committee(s) to monitor and promote continued development of the program.
- Recognition that the best way to help hard to place children is often by helping and stabilizing the parents or caregivers.
- Philosophical and case practice shift towards more strengths-based, group decision-making orientation that engages the family more directly.

Further, a similarly expressed opinion is the acknowledgment by line and supervisory staff that although these systems and meetings take more time, the results they render for the families they serve far outweigh the extra work involved.

In fact, the striking nature of similarities between Santa Clara County and Marin County leaves few recommendations for change. They are to:

- Explore the YPP funding stream to determine if it would be more cost-effective than the SB163 draw down. Include determination of whether accessing YPP funds would require increased administrative or other costs and whether accessing YPP funds would in any way impact the functioning of RISC.
- Explore viability of utilizing YPP funding stream at the front-end as a resource to divert families from the child welfare system at TDMs. Explore ability of CBOs to create a YPP-CYSC type system that could provide services on a voluntary basis outside of the child welfare system through pooled monies and resources.
- Consider mechanism to include parents more directly in decision-making at CFT and RISC meetings.
- Have DFCS Joint Decision Making Unit, in conjunction with CCF Units, assess the viability of Family Network meetings for Santa Clara County.
- Nurture the linking of knowledge exchange between funding and service staff to maximize opportunities for departmental and agency-wide growth.

CONCLUSION: LESSONS LEARNED

It is still the best and worst of times. Interestingly, however, it is now the services that excel amidst a bad economy. When looking at two different counties that have independently created two different but equally successful systems addressing the same service delivery issue, I felt challenged to glean what commonalities exist to guide a county in replicating a program already existing somewhere else,

or in creating an altogether new program. There are different factors and challenges that go in to creating a program that crosses multiple systems. Some guiding principles to lead one to success are:

- Integration of services between service providers (public and/or private) is cost effective and benefits the family in service delivery. Sometimes contracted service providers will have more flexibility in funding and delivery of services.
- Once the program is up and running, maintain an oversight entity made up of stakeholder representatives who meet regularly. Activities should include: trouble shooting systemic issues as they come up; maintaining and growing inter-agency and community-based relationships; annual assessment of program; facilitating program growth and/or changes as indicated.
- Every county has its own identity and culture. Successful program implementation will reflect the key players and relationships that can best empower programmatic movement in that area. Consideration must be given to who the stakeholders are (people and organizations they represent), what form of decision-making is utilized, what relationships already exist or need to be developed, etc.
- Maintain a close link between fiscal staff and service delivery staff. The more they know about each other's needs, the better they can support each other. At minimum, basic cross-training should occur for all staff (including line staff) who will be involved in choosing or arranging services and thereby having the potential to impact funding.

A good program benefits all, first and foremost the family needing and receiving services, but, secondarily, the public and private agencies providing services and the communities which fund them and

whom they serve. Both Marin County and Santa Clara County have developed good programs that reflect their own internal dynamics and structures. Both programs continue to self-assess and change as the times indicate.

In conclusion, a final lesson I take from this internship is a renewed respect for the philosophy that one-size does not fit all, and the most creative service programs reflect the resources and culture in which they exist. Ironically, perhaps it is the current lack of resources and finances that have spurred us to our best standards of practice and collaboration in service delivery.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to the staff of Marin County Child Protective Services, in particular those associated with the Youth Pilot Project, and to the staff of Coordinated Youth Services Council.

Thanks also to those staff at Santa Clara County Department of Family & Children's Services who provided me insight in to my own county's inner workings.

RESOURCES

Department of Health and Human Services/Youth Pilot Project 2003/04 Fiscal Year Summary Report.
"Marin County's Youth Pilot Program: A community-based Alternative to Placement." Rebecca Feiner. Bay Area Social Services Consortium, Executive Development Program Case Study.

"A River Of Return For Our Families" A project of the Marin Partnership for Families with Children, 1995.

"What Is CYSC's Family Network?" A brochure handed to YPP participants at Orientation meeting.

RISC "Week In Review", March 25, 2005. Weekly update of activity.

RISC Oversight Committee Charter, updated 10/8/03.

Observation of actual Family Network meeting.

Interview with Paula Robertson, Program Manager, Child Protective Services, Department of Health and Human Services, Marin County.

Interview with Alva Ackley, MFT, Youth Pilot Project Program Coordinator, Child Protective Services, Department of Health and Human Services, Marin County.

Interview with Marcus Small, MFC, Clinical Director, Coordinated Youth Services Council, San Rafael, California.

Interview with Beth McGhee, Social Work Supervisor, Department Of Family & Children's Services, Santa Clara County.

Interview with Janet Atkins, Social Services Program Manager III, Department Of Family & Children's Services, Santa Clara County.

Interview with Richard Pantoja, Project Manager, Placement Support Services Bureau, Administrative Support, Department Of Family & Children's Services, Santa Clara County.

Interview with Barry Grigsby, RISC Coordinator, Department of Family & Children's Services, Santa Clara County.

