

JUVENILE JUNCTION

ALCOHOL AND DRUG PREVENTION AND TREATMENT PROGRAMS IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

SUMMARY

According to the San Luis Obispo County Drug and Alcohol Services Division of the Behavioral Health Department, juvenile use of alcohol and drugs in SLO County exceeds both state and federal levels. In 2007, state government mandated a study by the San Luis Obispo County Drug and Alcohol Services using a planning and program design tool developed by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. A team of professionals and concerned citizens prepared the plan for the study of alcohol and drug problems affecting youth and adult populations. The team developed a 5-year Strategic Prevention Framework as a guide for the development of prevention and treatment programs.

Alcohol is the most widely used substance among youth, while marijuana is the most frequently used illicit drug among older students. Early and persistent alcohol and drug use are symptoms of problem behaviors that affect not only youth, but families and communities as well. Among the problems that emerge are academic difficulties, criminal activity, physical and mental health issues, poor peer and family relationships, early sexual activity, and teen pregnancy.

Adolescents who enter into activities that involve alcohol and drugs jeopardize, and even damage, their psychological and social development, as well as their physical growth. Generally, only those youth who cause serious problems tend to be identified and receive services, usually in the most restrictive settings (e.g., group homes, juvenile hall or correctional institutions). This lack of intervention and treatment results in a huge cost to society, which escalates over time as these youth reach adulthood and enter into the criminal justice system or require more serious and costly services.

The Grand Jury conducted an inquiry into prevention programs for “at-risk” youth as well as treatment and relapse reduction services for those juveniles already in the Juvenile Justice System. Unfortunately, there is no single program that works for all situations because of the multitude of cultural and social issues that must be addressed. Therefore, a wide array of programs has been developed to assist youth in abstaining from the use of drugs and alcohol, and also to help with both treatment and relapse for those who already have problems with drug and alcohol use. Youth enter into a program in various ways, through social activities and/or counselors at school, through parental concern and through law enforcement avenues (e.g., public intoxication, using, or selling at athletic events, or informants).

ORIGIN

This report originated within the Grand Jury.

METHOD

Grand Jury members obtained information for this report from meetings with and presentations by program directors and clients, as well as from tours of and visits to a number of juvenile treatment and prevention facilities throughout the County. Those included:

Program director interviews and presentations:

- Juvenile Probation Department
- Friday Night Live (FNL) Prevention and Outreach Division of the Behavioral Health Department
- Treatment Center Division of the Behavioral Health Department
- Youth In Action (Gang Prevention)
- Bakari Project Mentoring Program

Facility Tours of:

- Grizzly Youth Academy
- Juvenile Court Proceedings
- Juvenile Hall

NARRATIVE

Prevention, diversion, intervention, and treatment programs for minors in San Luis Obispo County are funded by government agencies, grants, and donations. San Luis Obispo County Drug and Alcohol Services (DAS) offers counseling and sponsors prevention and treatment programs. If juveniles are already in the Juvenile Justice System (i.e., they have already had legal problems associated with drug or alcohol use), Probation Officers prepare social history reports and case plans for the Juvenile Court. They work closely with DAS, with youth and their families to target significant issues that assist the minor in transitioning out of the Juvenile Court system.

Deputy Probation Officers investigate and prepare reports on youthful offenders detained at Juvenile Hall. The officers make assessments and recommendations with an emphasis on public safety and the needs of the minor and family. Juveniles may be assigned to home supervision, electronic monitoring, foster homes or group homes.

As previously stated, there is no single program that works in all situations. There are numerous factors to determine which program, depending upon evaluation, circumstance and recommendation, can provide an individual the most potential for success. Those factors include:

- Nature of abuse, addiction or criminal act
- Prevention, diversion, intervention, or treatment
- Cultural/peer influences and environment
- Age group
- Family support and/or participation
- Emotional maturity and state of mind

Many programs receive candidates from the Juvenile Justice System; others receive voluntary participants with parental support under advisement from DAS. Case plans are developed under these programs to encourage reuniting the minor with his/her family as soon as possible. Subsequent objectives include participation in community-based programs, such as drug/alcohol counseling, family counseling, parental support, and mentoring programs.

THE PROGRAMS

Juveniles make a choice whether or not to use alcohol or other drugs, or to join a gang. Peers, role models, experimentation or other factors may influence them. Their decision impacts their social and academic interests, interaction with family members, personal health, and potential to make positive contributions to the community. Social programs that identify and address these issues can educate, inform, encourage, inspire, and redirect these individuals into productive lives. In San Luis Obispo County, such programs are coordinated through school districts, law enforcement agencies, Cal Poly, and the Probation Department, and provide an array of options for “at-risk” youth and family members coping with addiction and behavioral issues.

There are multiple programs available for most age groups. Below, some of the programs are described in detail:

Friday Night Live (13-18 Years)

Friday Night Live (FNL) is a school-based youth development, Drug and Alcohol Prevention and Early Intervention Program, which is sponsored by the Prevention and Outreach Division of the San Luis Obispo County Behavioral Health Department. The program serves students in grades 6-12. There are FNL Chapters at 9 high schools and 12 chapters (called Club Live) at middle schools in SLO County. There are also FNL Mentoring Chapters at Atascadero High School and Atascadero Middle School, as well as at Nipomo High School and Mesa Middle School.

FNL's focus is on peer substance abuse education and leadership development. Club Live emphasizes substance education, school bonding, and leadership. The focus of the mentoring program is on curriculum-based substance abuse education and pro-social development. Mentoring matches selected high school students with at-risk middle school students. They meet weekly to discuss issues and to focus on transition into high school.

The students plan all programs and activities with their adult advisor, and all students are invited to be involved in the program. Their programs include fun activities such as Mock Rock, Relay Challenges, movie nights, beach clean-ups, tournaments, and other positive activities as alternatives to unsafe drug, alcohol and tobacco activities. Activities also include educational projects, such as Driving Under the Influence prevention, seat belt safety, and EVERY 15 MINUTES, a staged mock auto accident resulting in student fatalities.

Youth Treatment

Adult treatment programs have proven ineffective for youth treatment. Until recently, there were few programs designed to treat youth with Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) abuse problems. However, San Luis Obispo County now has a full range of services available through the Drug and Alcohol Services Division of the State Behavioral Health Department to serve youth. Treatment options available include those for youth with a less severe problem, such as experimental use, for those with a greater abuse and dependence severity requiring treatment that is more intensive, and for those severe cases requiring medically managed hospital care.

Each youth is assigned a primary counselor. Group counseling sessions are held twice a week and individual and family counseling sessions are held as appropriate. Whenever possible, parents/caregivers can participate in the youth's treatment, and the program can assist each juvenile in developing a support system to prevent relapse.

The Early Recovery phase (12 weeks) addresses issues of peer pressure, decision-making and information relative to the program. The next phase focuses on building skills (12 weeks). This phase includes identifying emotions, anger management, depression, relationships, and thinking errors related to drug use. The next phase (16 weeks) is the Recovery Motivation program

during which the youth identifies personal reasons to change. Family participation is mandatory during this period. The last phase is the Relapse Prevention program. At this point, ideally, each youth will have made a firm decision to remain abstinent and work to build a positive community support system.

Celebrating Families

This treatment program is the newest intervention model to address the needs of children and parents in families who have serious drug and alcohol problems. It is provided by the Treatment Center and includes all family members above the age of three. Each 16-week cycle serves 6 to 15 families and focuses on breaking the cycle of addiction. The program also emphasizes community service and individual spirituality.

Youth in Action (10-14 Years)

This 18-week voluntary program is for youth between 10 and 14 years of age who demonstrate they are at risk for membership or association with a criminal street gang. This program is provided by the Juvenile Probation Department. It is a school-based intervention and education curriculum where students engage in bi-weekly sessions focused on consequences of gang involvement, drug, and alcohol abuse, and the role of violence in our community. The dynamics and myths of gang membership and affiliation are explored. Participants learn interpersonal skills, some of which include refusal strategies to confront negative peer pressure effectively, conflict resolution, anger management, goal setting, and taking responsibility for their actions. Parents agree to participate in the program and, as a result, learn about societal costs and the impact on, and legal consequences for, their children who take part in gang activities. Youth in Action serves 60 students attending Oceano and Nipomo Elementary Schools, and Judkins and Mesa Middle Schools.

Intensive Community Diversion Program (12-17 Years)

The Intensive Community Diversion (ICD) program assists minors from reoffending. This program is provided by the Juvenile Probation Department. All of the ICD program minors have a drug or alcohol charge as their primary offense and are typically not in custody at the time the referral is made. ICD is a voluntary six-month early intervention program for minors who are first-time offenders. It is a lower level of accountability than formal probation, when minors are required to appear in court and follow court orders. This program involves meeting with a probation officer, who makes assessments on strengths and risk factors of the minor and family. If the minor is willing to take responsibility for the offense, a contract is established. The contract may include the minor or minor's and parent's participation in a counseling program, community work service by the minor, paying restitution if there is a victim, or other agreed upon assignments.

Bakari Project Mentoring Program (14-17 Years)

The Bakari Project is a grant program funded by State Juvenile Justice realignment funds. It is a Cal Poly mentoring program that serves high-risk adolescent males and females between the ages of 14 to 17 already in the Juvenile Justice system. One to one mentoring is included and provided by Cal Poly undergraduate or graduate students. The structure consists of three-hour weekly sessions addressing substance abuse, employment readiness, and pro-social behavior. In addition, it requires participants to volunteer five hours per week to community service. Individuals commit to the program for 12 months. The program is in its second year and is modeled after a successful program in Irvine, CA. Currently, it is capable of accommodating up to 18 individuals.

Grizzly Youth Academy (16-18 Years)

The Grizzly Youth Academy Pre-ChalleNGe program is a charter school (chartered through the SLO County Office of Education as an alternative high school) for high-risk juveniles 16-18 years of age. The California National Guard sponsors the program and its structure is quasi-military. This all-volunteer program has three phases, including living both on base in military barracks and in a post-barracks, mentored situation in the cadet's community. Structure and

discipline are integral parts of this program. About seventy-percent of the students are male and thirty-percent female.

Phase one Pre-ChalleNGe is a “two-week” evaluation period to determine if prospective cadets are prepared for the rigorous requirements of the school. Phase two ChalleNGe is a 20-week residential period of academics, physical fitness, counseling, life skills training, and team building. Phase three is a one-year mentorship assisted period in the cadet’s community to help guide the cadet in his/her new life.

Students are supplied exceptional learning aids, including ‘notebooks,’ to develop computer skills to prepare them for work opportunities. They earn high school credits for work completed and have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma or GED.

Minor Accountability Program (MAP)

This program is a service provided by the county’s Drug and Alcohol Services to help youth (up to age 19) meet their legal obligations for drug and alcohol offenses. In the process, they and their family receive education and counseling designed to help them make positive lifestyle changes. The participants pay the costs associated with this program.

Juvenile Division

The Juvenile Division of the Probation Department provides prevention, intervention and supervision services. This Division supervises approximately 500 minors who require court-ordered intervention and rehabilitative services. These services range from home supervision, electronic monitoring, foster home or group home placement to Juvenile Hall incarceration, which includes classes for youth to continue their education toward a high school diploma or a GED.

CONCLUSION

With the wide array of services available to County youth, San Luis Obispo County offers every juvenile the opportunity to overcome drug and alcohol problems and become successful in life.

OBSERVATIONS

- In each of the programs it visited, the Grand Jury found the directors and staff dedicated, supportive, and caring. They encourage each juvenile to become the best he/she can be and achieve his/her dreams. Every juvenile the Grand Jury observed was treated with ultimate respect.
- County officials developed the 5-year Strategic Prevention Framework Plan. There appears to be no direct relationship between the County's accomplishments and the Plan's expected outcomes and measurement indicators.
- Juveniles facing court actions do not appear to recognize, respect or acknowledge the seriousness of the court proceedings.

RECOMMENDATION

The 2010-2011 Grand Jury recommends a follow-up investigation by the 2011-2012 Grand Jury to measure the progress of San Luis Obispo County programs against the 5-year Strategic Prevention Framework Plan.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

No responses are required.
