

## Hand to Hand Collaborative Project: Building Trust with Youth and Community in Yolo County

by Angie Dillon-Shore



### CASE STUDY

Over the last five years, Yolo County's SDFSC *Hand to Hand Collaborative Project* have developed and implemented a comprehensive, collaborative, research-based AOD and violence prevention program to reach students enrolled in court/community schools, youth in juvenile hall and youth at and beyond discharge.

The *SDFSC Case Study Series* is intended to provide a snapshot of the programs implemented and lessons learned by SDFSC grantees as a service to other grantees and alcohol and drug prevention providers.

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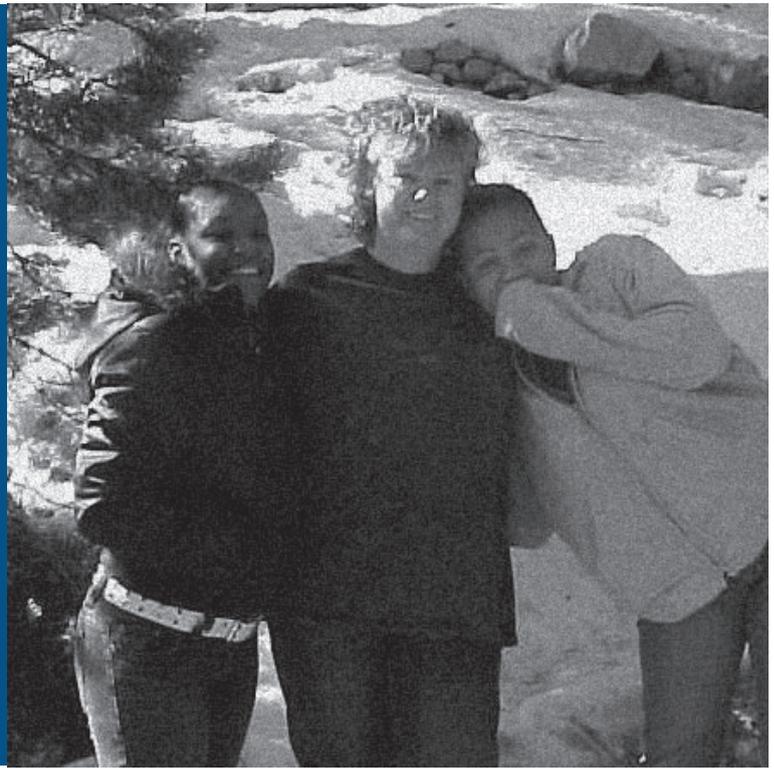
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Ms. Angela Dillon-Shore has over 16 years of experience in education and human services for at-risk children, youth and families. Her broad range of experience includes direct services to high-risk youth, community-based program management, federal and state grants management, technical assistance to child welfare services and instructional design for special needs children. She has worked in multiple settings, including transitional living programs, a private psychotherapy practice, group homes, schools and training and technical assistance agencies.

Ms. Dillon-Shore has supported a wide range of at-risk populations including, but not limited to, homeless and foster care youth, youth exposed to violence, adjudicated youth, HIV positive youth, sexually abused children, and children and families impacted by substance abuse. Committed to cultural competency and sensitivity, Ms. Dillon-Shore has worked with diverse and special needs populations in both rural and urban areas. She has also developed curriculum and provided staff training on the topic of cultural sensitivity.

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## INTRODUCTION

Several Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities programs have embraced the challenge of bringing their programs, such as Friday Night Live, into alternative settings to reach underserved populations. Although the challenges can be daunting, there are strategies that can lead to successful implementation of AOD and violence prevention in juvenile detention facilities, court schools and other community-based programs for adjudicated youth.

Many challenges to the implementation of prevention programs for juvenile offenders are due to the risk factors associated with this population<sup>1</sup>.

- **Widespread, high prevalence of drug abuse**, particularly marijuana and methamphetamine. Marijuana use has been associated with poorer grades, dropping out of school, depression, delinquency and use of harder drugs. Many offenders test positive for marijuana at the time of admission for detention<sup>2</sup>.
- **School failure** is strongly correlated with juvenile crime. Dropping out of school, suspensions and expulsions are common in the history of this population and on the average, suspensions begin before the age of 12. A high percentage experience academic failure starting as early as elementary school.
- **Violence** is a problem of great magnitude among juvenile offenders. A large percentage report carrying a weapon at some time. Almost all report fighting, and many report having hurt someone seriously. Gang violence is a serious issue in many communities and gang activity often carries into the juvenile detention setting.

- **A family history of violence and AOD abuse and a lack of parental involvement** are common and have a profound effect on youth's likelihood of substance abuse and propensity to violence<sup>3</sup>.

Other challenges are related to a lack of detention alternatives such as court/community schools, case management and community supervision, evening reporting centers, non-secure shelters and home confinement programs. Lack of such alternatives can cause overcrowding, increased lockdowns and facility staff stress and burnout. Community-based alternatives have shown high success rates in some communities in California but are not yet widespread. The lack of alternatives to detention facilities are considered to be a factor in the recidivism of the juvenile crime, due to the lack of long-term commitment of support from providers. Without community support from collaborating partner agencies, statistics show that juvenile offenders are likely to re-offend, often committing more serious crimes and continuing their criminal history into adulthood. Additionally, without prevention services after and beyond discharge from detention, high-risk youth begin to re-engage in AOD abuse, violence, criminal and gang activity and opportunities are missed for positive youth development<sup>4</sup>.

AOD prevention programming can also be challenging due to the lack of evidence-based programs specifically designed to reach this population in either detention or community school settings. Programs may not address the specific needs of this high-risk population and may not be designed to be delivered in alternative settings. Modifications to prevention programming may become necessary, in which case attention to the balance between fidelity and adaptation is crucial.

In spite of these challenges, a number of strategies can be employed to increase success when delivering prevention services to this high risk, challenging population. Researchers and juvenile justice experts recommend the following best practices to increase the likelihood of AOD and violence prevention for adjudicated youth:

- **Trained clinical staff** to help target the needs of high-risk youth who have special behavioral and/or emotional needs.
- **Referrals to parent training** that increases their involvement in the lives of their children, thus developing respectful and trusting relationships<sup>1</sup> to increase protective factors such as resiliency.
- **Services that are specifically designed or modified to target high-risk youth** to meet the particular needs of this population.

- **A strengths-based approach** is essential to working with youth that have experienced numerous failures, adverse life circumstances and have a lack of trust in adults.
- **Research-based life skills training curriculum** that teaches skills related to social resistance, enhancing social and personal competence and management of emotions.
- **A broad array of community-based programs and service options** that are sequenced and combined to create a range of prevention and intervention options. These ensure the appropriate prevention, treatment, education, training and care that are compatible with the youth's specific needs<sup>4</sup>.
- **Community-based prevention services** impact the youth's total environment by addressing problems in the community where they develop and by establishing the long-term support necessary to develop life skills. AOD prevention outreach workers can approach youth by teaching life skills in the juvenile justice system as case managers work in partnership with probation, mental health, social services and schools.<sup>5</sup>

Although integrating AOD prevention programming to adjudicated youth in alternative settings may have its overwhelming challenges, there are projects that have been able to demonstrate significant success. Yolo County's Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Hand to Hand Collaborative Project is a fine example. Over the last five years, they have developed and implemented a comprehensive, collaborative, research-based AOD and violence prevention program to reach students enrolled in court/community schools, youth in Juvenile hall and youth at and beyond discharge.

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<sup>1</sup>Piton Foundation, Colorado Division of Criminal Justice, (1999). Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Research

<sup>2</sup>The Wolfe Center, (2007).

<sup>3</sup>J. David Hawkins, et.al.,(2000). Predictors of Youth Violence

<sup>4</sup>California Youth Authority, (2007).

<sup>5</sup>Duane C. McBride, Ph.D., et al., (1999), Breaking the Cycle of Drug Use Among Juvenile Offenders.

**Hand to Hand Collaborative School Sites:**

*Dan Jacobs School (Juvenile Hall)*

*Midtown School (Court/Community School)*

*Westside School (Court/Community School)*

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Hand to Hand Collaborative Project, administered by the Yolo County Department of Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health services (ADMHS), was funded at \$586K, in September, 2002 and then augmented at \$188K in 2005 through the SDFSC Governor's Program. These funds have allowed community partners to collaboratively plan and implement alcohol, drug and violence prevention services to target students involved in the juvenile justice system and who are enrolled in the Yolo County Office of Education Court/Community schools and school within Juvenile Hall. This partnership includes Yolo County ADMHS, Yolo County Office of Education, Yolo County Probation Department, Yolo Family Resource Center, Hands Together (a community-based organization) and Creative School Resources and Research (CSRR).

Adjudicated youth in Yolo County, the target population of the Hand to Hand Collaborative Project, are at high risk for juvenile crime recidivism, high rates of gang involvement and high rates of alcohol and drug abuse. Many of the youth targeted by the project have been expelled from their original school districts for drug use, violence or truancy. To address these risk factors, the Collaborative developed a continuum of prevention services at multiple sites. Components of the project include:

### Friday Night Live

- Implemented monthly at Court/Community schools & Juvenile Hall
- Adapted to comply with regulations at Juvenile Hall
- Builds on natural leadership skills and positively redirecting high-risk youth behavior.
- Job readiness skills, sexual health, budgeting, driver's licenses & Social Security cards, GED preparation, guest speakers
- Traditional FNL activities (i.e., Red Ribbon Week)

### Life-skills courses

- Implemented daily by YCOE teachers at Court/Community schools
- Too Good for Drugs and Too Good for Violence (Research-Based)

### Probation Counseling/Support

- Full-time Probation Officer at Court/Community schools through collaborative funding
- Individual and Group Counseling

### **Targeted Case Management**

- Two Alcohol, Drug & Mental Health Specialists
- Outreach Specialist
- Prevention Coordinator
- Additional Support Staff
- Short and long-term support; family counseling; assessments; assist students to develop goals and create plans to overcome barriers and prevent recidivism, meet probation requirements, violence and drug/alcohol abuse; referrals and linkages to community services; services for transitional youth

### **Parent & Family Services**

- Referrals for parents of students are made to parenting classes provided by Hands Together, particularly for parents of students receiving case management services.

### **Conferences & Trainings**

- Youth Conferences: adjudicated and traditional FNL participants attend together
- Training for community partners



The overarching goals of these components are to reduce school violent behavior (battery, assaults and threats), reduce alcohol and drug use, decrease alcohol and drug related arrests and school suspensions, develop student leadership potential and increase students' connections to peers and community. Each component of the project targets at least three risk factors (e.g., school failure, gang violence, alcohol abuse), while also increasing two protective factors (e.g., cooperation, participation).

- The Hand-to-Hand Project has achieved great success in reaching the adjudicated youth in these alternative settings. Some of the outcomes they have achieved in the last five years are:
- Nearly 600 students have been served across the three Court/Community and Juvenile Hall sites during the five-year period.
- Over 60 students have received intensive, long-term case management services over the five-year period.
- Since the beginning of the project, none of the youth who have received case management have sustained alcohol violations.
- Youth participating in case-management have demonstrated a significant increase in successfully completing court-ordered community service.
- There were significant increases in pro-social activities and volunteerism for all students across project sites.
- Youth reported a decrease in their alcohol and drug use.
- Youth perceptions of the program gradually became so positive that by Year 3, many students were self-referring to case-management.



## BEST PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES

There are four primary key strategies that the Hand-to-Hand Collaborative uses in developing, maintaining and enhancing services to adjudicated youth in Court/community schools and Juvenile Hall in Yolo County.

### 1. Building a Committed Collaborative Partnership

A solid partnership of key providers was a critical element in the implementation and ongoing enhancement of the Hand-to-Hand project. Not all collaborative partners were committed and active since the inception of the project, but gradually, relationships were built and partners invested in the value and impact of the program. Since the inception of the program, the Hand-to-Hand Collaborative has met monthly to discuss programming issues, update planning and review cases. Ongoing communication and demonstrating effectiveness with students is a crucial aspect of a transformative process of collaborative partnership building.

- Coordinated, multi-disciplinary services address the many risk factors of underserved populations, but must be careful to avoid duplication of services in order to preserve resources
- Well-established provider partnerships can assist in supporting client goals because partners are more amenable and flexible regarding logistics, schedules, class room space and security issues. This flexibility is essential to delivery of limited services in Juvenile Hall
- Partnerships facilitate and share the implementation of innovative techniques and approaches to prevention
- Prevention is a component of each provider's mission, strategic plan, Local Education Area Plan
- Partners work together to secure additional funds for needed ancillary prevention services

*"Building a rapport with partners was harder than I thought...I assumed everybody would be on board. It's amazing to see how things can transform in five years, in terms of how people see the value of our program."*

*"We have a way of bringing a young person up to be an outstanding citizen in the community, but it takes a lot of people to make that happen."*

*Angela Angel  
Program Coordinator*

## 2. Targeting the Needs of High-Risk Youth While Balancing Program Fidelity & Adaptation

Although modifications to programs and practices can reduce effectiveness and should be made thoughtfully, programs must be tailored to address high-risk populations being targeted in alternative settings where programs are being delivered. Changes that make the program more relevant to this student culture, risk factors and the setting can help create a better fit within the community.

Adaptations to the implementation of life skills curriculum and the Friday Night Live program include modifications to content, setting and staffing and how the outcomes are evaluated. Neither was designed to be implemented in juvenile detention, where the turnover in population can be very unstable. Both were augmented and enriched with content that addressed the many needs of high-risk youth such as job search skills, information about STDs, assistance with getting a driver's license and social security card and other transitional living skills. However, striking a balance that addresses both the need for fidelity to the original program models and the demonstrates need for adaptation is essential.

- A true understanding of the target population will lead to creative and insightful enhancements and modifications of curriculum.
- Understand the theoretical foundation behind the program, providing insight into the core values of the program and the risk and protective factors it is designed to address. This understanding will also lead to sound decision-making about adaptations to programming.
- Identify program outcomes, essential core elements and associated teaching/delivery strategies
- Adaptations should not be made if they take away from the core elements

**“We understand the needs of this population. It took six months just to get a young person to show up. It takes the effort to build trust...but once the kids saw that we were here to help, and that we really let the kids run the program, their friends came asking for case-management services.”**

**Blair McAnelly, Outreach Specialist**

### 3. Case Management Model

The high rates of alcohol and substance abuse, exposure to family violence and lack of life skills that are common to adjudicated youth should be addressed in a more intensive manner by prevention providers. The Hand-to-Hand Collaborative utilizes a *targeted case management approach* utilizing the skills of multi-disciplinary providers to enhance life skills curriculum and Friday Night Live programming. Case management supports youth in planning, goal-setting, decision-making, meeting probation requirements, developing insight and family counseling.

- Utilize the clinical expertise of mental health specialists in collaborative consultation with outreach specialists and the AOD prevention coordinator to deliver case management that better addresses behavioral/emotional needs and co-occurring disorders of high-risk youth.
- Assist youth preparing to “age out” of services by getting community-based services in place before they are eighteen and no longer eligible for case-management through SDFSC.
- Provide long-term case-management for youth who are at higher risk for recidivism, violence, gang behavior and AOD use. Continue service after discharge from detention and involve family members, particularly if family members have been recently released from incarceration.

### 4. Building Trust

Developing a positive, trusting rapport with participants is the overarching key strategy that makes the Hand-to-Hand program effective with adjudicated youth. Life skills instruction, Friday Night Live and case-management are all approached from a strengths-based perspective by Outreach Specialists, Mental Health Specialists and the Prevention Coordinator. This approach is essential when working with this population because of their typical history of dysfunctional and/or absent adults in their lives as well as possible experiences in foster care and the juvenile justice system.

- Rather than focus on the many risk factors of a student, recognize and acknowledge aloud often their internal resources, strengths and interests, in spite of their past histories
- Allow students to take the lead on their own personal planning and goal-setting in case-management
- Involve students in planning programming, guest speakers, field trips and events.
- Rely on the support of co-workers, supervisors and collaborative team members to remain strengths-based when challenges arise
- Modeling the essential component of a trusting relationship with students will help build a culture of a strengths-based approach in partner settings, creating an expanded positive environment and network of trustworthy adults/service providers.

## PROGRAM REPLICABILITY

The key strategies employed by the Hand-to-Hand Collaborative Project are all sound best practices that would apply to all programs that bring AOD and violence prevention into schools for adjudicated youth. Community agencies, the Probation Department and the school district working together to case-manage students, coordinate programming and deliver services is a key factor to this program's success. However, even if not a community collaborative, any program that would attempt to address the needs of this high-risk population may prove ineffective if the service providers work from a deficit model and fail to build trust with students.

Yolo County is rural and relatively sparse in population, compared to some counties such as Los Angeles. Although juvenile crime is a serious issue in Yolo County, more urban centers in California are far more impacted by gang violence and serious juvenile crime activity. Such differences in population and geography would impact the implementation of curriculum and would most likely require adaptations. However, there are some particular considerations for prevention programming that would be implemented in alternative settings with adjudicated youth:

- **Collaborative relationships are essential**, particularly with the juvenile justice system where many institutional obstacles may exist. Begin building a relationship with juvenile justice early in the project by attending regular community meetings and sharing materials and information about the project. Direct partnership-building efforts with the supervisory, decision-making level in the system first, and line staff later when providing services. Be persistent.
- **Consider the need to transport youth** to conferences, field trips, community-based service appointments, DMV, Social Security office, etc. Ancillary funding to purchase vans or arrangements with collaborative partners can enhance the ability to support programming.
- **Tap into what is already happening** at school sites and juvenile hall, such as a group counseling session provided by one of the project partners. Perhaps one of the weekly sessions can be utilized to present AOD prevention curriculum.
- **Address sustainability issues** so that services remain in place for youth. Potentially partner with mental health and/or public health as it may be possible to continue funding services for some youth under EPSDT or MediCal. Work with collaborative partners to develop a sustainability plan that engages the community, utilizes partner resources and finds available funding.

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