

## **REVERSING JUVENILE RECIDIVISM**

### **SUMMARY**

The Orange County Probation Department (OCPD) concluded a study in 1994 to identify the significant characteristics of delinquent juveniles. This study found that eight percent of young offenders committed fifty-five percent of juvenile crime. These 8% offenders (high-risk youth) began criminal activity at 15 ½ years of age or younger and had at least three of four problems: Dysfunctional Families, School Failure, Drug and Alcohol Abuse, and Pre-Delinquent Factors such as gang association. OCPD designed a crime prevention program called Youth and Family Resource Center (YFRC) for these high-risk youth.

YFRC is a multi-agency collaborative program developed with the intent to prevent repeat offenses by these high-risk juveniles. The program began in 1997 and typically involves 18-24 months of participation by the juveniles and their parents. Six YFRC treatment centers are located throughout the county to serve surrounding communities.

The Probation Department recently published *1996-2002 Final Report: Orange County Repeat Offender Prevention Project, 8% Early Intervention Program*. The department selected 270 high-risk youth for the study. One hundred and thirty-six youth were assigned to the YFRC program (experimental group) and the rest remained in a regular probation program (control group). The YFRC group committed fewer new crimes, earned more school credits, had better grades, improved family relations, and reduced gang affiliations.

The 2002-2003 Orange County Grand Jury conducted interviews with program staff and student participants to obtain their assessment of the program's effectiveness. Many positive comments were received from the program participants. The program has proven to be effective and deserves to be highlighted in this community.

### **INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE**

In 1996 the Orange County Probation Department (OCPD) designed a collaborative multi-agency program called Youth and Family Resource Center (YFRC) with the intention of preventing repeat offenses by high-risk youth. The first YFRC center opened in 1997. Since this comprehensive program has been running for more than five years, the 2002-2003 Orange County Grand Jury decided to evaluate its effectiveness.

### **METHOD OF STUDY**

The Grand Jury interviewed many collaborators at all YFRC centers except at the El Toro site that opened in November 2002. The Grand Jury also interviewed several youth to get their feedback on the YFRC program. This report used the county's demographic data and several OCPD publications to provide background information.

## BACKGROUND

The population in Orange County grew from 1,932,709 in 1980 to 2,846,289 in 2001.<sup>1</sup> According to Census 2000 data, 14% of the total population in Orange County was in the age range of 10 to 19. Total juvenile arrests for youth 10 to 17 years of age had risen from 14,796 in 1991 to a peak of 19,164 in 1996. Subsequently, the yearly arrests in this age group declined to 15,528 in 2000.<sup>2</sup> A high-risk juvenile delinquency pattern is a repeated cycle of committing crime, getting arrested, spending little time in a detention center, and being released.

Under the constant pressure of budgets, increased caseloads, mounting incarceration costs, and economic losses to crime, OCPD decided in the early 1990s to give youth crime prevention a high priority. Before designing a crime prevention program, OCPD completed a study, *The 8% Problem: Chronic Juvenile Offender Recidivism*,<sup>3</sup> in 1994. The study looked at probation referrals data in Orange County between 1987 and 1993 and concluded that eight percent of the young offenders committed a hefty fifty-five percent of the juvenile crimes. The study also outlined the characteristics of these 8% repeat offenders:

- I. Started crime at an early age (Age 15½ or younger)
- II. Had at least three of these four problems:
  1. Dysfunctional Families
  2. School Failure
  3. Drug and Alcohol Abuse
  4. Pre-Delinquent Factors (gangs, chronic runaways, and theft)

Using these characteristics, OCPD could identify high-risk youth early on and provide a treatment for them. The treatment plan was detailed in a book *The 8% Solution: Preventing Serious, Repeat Juvenile Crime*.<sup>4</sup> A YFRC treatment center gathers various county agencies and non-profit organizations to work in a collaborative manner. Today a team consists of the following:

- A **Supervising Probation Officer** acts as a site manager and a team facilitator.
- Four **Deputy Probation Officers** (DPO) have the ultimate responsibility for the youth. Each of these DPOs carries a caseload of 15-20 instead of a normal probation caseload of 75.
- **In-Home Counselors** from a non-profit organization help the families in locating assistance for shelter, food, medical care, etc. They also provide behavioral counseling to the youth and their families.
- Six **Deputy Probation Counselors** transport the youth to and from the center, perform drug tests, handle disruptive behaviors, and supervise extracurricular activities. They also supervise the youth in restorative justice programs (tree

planting, beach clean-ups, graffiti removal, etc.), community services (senior center visits, walking dogs at the animal shelter, etc.) and other extracurricular activities on evenings or weekends.

- **Therapists** from Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services provide on-site substance abuse counseling and education.
- A part time **psychiatrist**, a full time **clinical psychologist**, and a full time **therapist** provide mental health services.
- A **nurse** administers prescribed medication, provides health education, and teaches personal hygiene.
- **Principal, teachers and teachers' aides** from Orange County Department of Education provide year-round schooling. Some students complete requirements for the General Educational Development (GED) and others receive credits toward high school graduation.
- **Job counselors** from counseling agencies assist youth in career counseling, interviewing skills, résumé preparation, job placement, and job retention skills.

Because the 8% problem youth and their families have broad-based and deep-rooted problems, the YFRC comprehensive treatment plan includes both the youth and their families. This model requires youth and their parents to make an 18-24 month commitment in order to make the treatment meaningful. Each YFRC treatment center has an average of 50 annual enrollments and an approximate annual budget of \$2.1 million, a portion of which comes from a state grant. Six YFRC treatment centers are located throughout the county to serve surrounding communities.

Based on the Grand Jury interviews with the youth, anecdotal evidence shows that the YFRC program has made positive impacts. For instance, one male student now wants to get a college degree and become a probation officer so that he can help other kids. A female student told us that the collaborators have *“every answer for you here. They taught me about life, how to deal with my family, a support system to depend on, a second and third family here.”* A former student who has completed the program and successfully transferred to a community high school wrote, *“Attending the YFRC was hard on me. I will admit that but I changed those bad things in my life into good ones. I know I still had one mistake in my life after I graduated, but you called me all the time and I really thank you for that.... You have made a good impact on my life and I won't forget that....”*

To statistically assess the effectiveness of the YFRC program, OCPD conducted a study as a part of statewide project and published *1996-2002 Final Report: Orange County Repeat Offender Prevention Project, 8% Early Intervention Program* in September 2002. Between June 1997 and December 2001, OCPD randomly selected 270 juvenile offenders who were 15½ or younger and met at least three of the four 8% risk factors for the study. These youth were assigned to either the experimental group (136 in YFRC) or the control group (134 in regular probation). The study showed that the experimental group made significant improvement in two key measures:

- Recidivism Rate: The experimental group committed fewer new crimes.
- School Accomplishments: The experimental group earned more school credits and had better grades.

The five tables<sup>5</sup> listed below illustrate the results:

#### AVERAGE ACCUMULATIVE NEW CRIMES/DAYS IN CUSTODY

After Entry	Experimental Group	Control Group
6 months	0.6 / 82 days	0.7 / 97 days
12 months	0.8 / 126 days	1.2 / 140 days
18 months	1.0 / 169 days	1.5 / 214 days
24 months	1.3 / 212 days	1.8 / 269 days

#### AVERAGE NEW LAW VIOLATIONS

Period	Experimental Group	Control Group
1 <sup>st</sup> 6 months	0.32	0.43
2 <sup>nd</sup> 6 months	0.29	0.37
3 <sup>rd</sup> 6 months	0.27	0.36
4 <sup>th</sup> 6 months	0.40	0.29

#### AVERAGE SCHOOL CREDITS EARNED

Period	Experimental Group	Control Group
1 <sup>st</sup> 6 months	21.83	12.33
2 <sup>nd</sup> 6 months	23.26	15.60
3 <sup>rd</sup> 6 months	20.91	17.34
4 <sup>th</sup> 6 months	17.86	16.00

## GRADE POINT AVERAGE

Period	Experimental Group	Control Group
Pre-entry 6 months	1.09	1.15
1 <sup>st</sup> 6 months	2.40	2.10
2 <sup>nd</sup> 6 months	2.70	2.30
3 <sup>rd</sup> 6 months	2.40	2.40
4 <sup>th</sup> 6 months	2.40	2.60

Forty-two students from the experimental group successfully completed the YFRC program during this period. These students not only improved in the two key measures above, but also significantly reduced their 8% risk factors.

## RISK FACTOR COMPARISON

Risk Factor	At Enrollment	At Completion
Dysfunctional Family	100.0%	63.4%
School Failure	95.2%	51.2%
Substance Abuse	66.7%	41.5%
Pre-Delinquency	97.6%	56.1%
(Gang Affiliation)	42.9%	22.0%

According to the 8% Problem study, an 8% high-risk youth had had an average of eight referrals (six as a juvenile and two as an adult) within six years from his first arrest and served an average of 19.6 months in custody.<sup>6</sup> In his research paper *Measuring the Costs and Benefits of Crime and Justice*, Dr. Mark Cohen, a renowned criminal justice economist, estimated the value to society in 1997 dollars for each high-risk youth diverted from a life of crime to be \$1.3 to \$1.5 million.<sup>7</sup> This figure takes into account incarceration costs, victim losses, and productivity gained from converting a juvenile offender to a law-abiding citizen. The cost to run the YFRC program is well justified.

The Grand Jury concluded that YFRC program is an effective crime prevention program. From the interviews with the program staff and some of the YFRC students and after an analysis of the Probation Department's *1996-2002 Final Report*, the Grand Jury found several minor areas need to be addressed in order to make YFRC an even better program. These areas are reflected in our findings and recommendations.

## **FINDINGS**

Under California Penal Code 933 and 933.05, responses are required to all findings. The 2002-2003 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at the following findings.

1. Forty-two out of 136 in the experimental group youth have successfully completed the YFRC program.
2. The experimental group had a better GPA than the control group during the first year but the trend was reversed in the fourth six-month period.
3. The recidivism in the experimental group was significantly reduced during the second and the third six-month period while the fourth six-month result was less impressive.
4. Youth at South and Central centers are participating in a program offered by the Orange County Community Council called the Philanthropist which teaches the importance of sharing and giving. The Council matches money raised by the youth on an 8:1 basis. The maximum Council match is \$4,500. The youth have a direct positive impact on their community by distributing this money to their selected local charities.
5. YFRC students' community services, restorative justice, and sharing and giving programs help to create clean, healthy, safe, and desirable neighborhood environments. YFRC treatment centers make good neighbors. However, some communities still perceive the treatment centers as a threat.
6. Discipline is a key to the program. The balance between a treatment (counseling and intervention) and probation (sanction and consequence) is an art. Deputy Probation Officers need more immediate discipline options for timely consequences.
7. Some students feel isolated because the probation rules prohibit them from contacting their YFRC friends outside of the program.
8. Because county departments are experiencing a budget crunch, OCPD has had to freeze two open Deputy Probation Officer positions at YFRC treatment centers.
9. Female students at South Center watch a video-taped program during the time the male students are off campus involved in outdoor sports.
10. Orange County Superintendent of Schools provides free or reduced rate lunch for qualified youth. Parents who are not qualified for the free lunch programs are assessed \$30 a month, but the collection of this money is extremely difficult.
11. Parent participation is an important part of the program.
12. In-Home services for the six centers collectively cost the county about \$840,000 a year. The service provider submits a quarterly report to detail its services.
13. A nurse is a strong collaborative partner at the North - Early Intervention Program and El Toro sites. The other four centers do not have this advantage.

14. The 2000-2001 Orange County Grand Jury reported on the State of Education in the Juvenile Justice System. Many of their recommendations were implemented or are in progress at the YFRC treatment centers. While the accumulative student information system, AERIES, is installed and operating at all centers, some teachers still experience delays in receiving and interpreting student information.
15. School libraries and recreational reading materials are almost nonexistent. Both the 1993-1994 Grand Jury and 2000-2001 Grand Jury defined in detail the need for library and recreational reading materials in the juvenile justice facilities.

Responses to Findings 1-13 are requested from the Orange County Probation Department.

Response to Finding 8 is required from the Orange County Board of Supervisors.

A response to Finding 13 is requested from the Orange County Health Care Agency.

Responses to Findings 14-15 are required from the Orange County Superintendent of Schools.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In accordance with California Penal Code 933 and 933.05, each recommendation requires a response from the government entity to which it is addressed. These responses are submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. Based upon the findings, the 2002-2003 Orange County Grand Jury makes the following recommendations:

1. Continue to follow-up these graduates for at least 10 more years to validate whether they are still law-abiding citizens. (Finding 1)
2. Investigate why the youth become less responsive to the treatment after 18 months and make modifications to the programs as indicated. (Finding 2 & 3)
3. Approach the Orange County Community Council about expanding the youth empowerment program, Philanthropist, to the other four centers. (Finding 4)
4. Solicit community's involvement in the treatment center's activities. (Finding 5)
5. Give Deputy Probation Officers more options to hand troublesome youth timely consequences. (Finding 6)
6. Create a mentor program that addresses the issue of isolation. Students at the local colleges and universities are good source for role models. (Finding 7)
7. Recruit and train volunteers to fill some of the voids caused by the countywide budget cuts. (Finding 8)
8. Create more program opportunities for female students. (Finding 9)

9. Include lunch money in the YFRC budget for the students whose parents fail to pay. (Finding 10)
10. Use parent participation as one measure to rate the performance of the In-Home service counselors. (Finding 11)
11. Examine In-Home Services performance reports in a detailed manner to insure the program's cost effectiveness. (Finding 12)
12. Add a part-time nurse to the collaborative team at the four centers that are without or find a more affordable alternative. (Finding 13)
13. Provide all teachers direct access to AERIES and give them training to interpret the information. (Finding 14)
14. Provide library and recreational reading material for the YFRC schools. (Finding 15)

Responses to Recommendations 1-12 are requested from the Orange County Probation Department.

A response to Recommendation 12 is requested from the Orange County Health Care Agency.

Responses to Recommendations 13-14 are required from the Orange County Superintendent of Schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Finance [www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEGMOGRAP/E4call.htm](http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEGMOGRAP/E4call.htm)



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<sup>2</sup> Juvenile Arrests (2002). *The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Report on the Conditions of Children in Orange County* Santa Ana, CA.

<sup>3</sup> Kurz, G. A. and Moore, L. E. (1994). *The 8% problem: Chronic Juvenile Offender Recidivism*, Santa Ana, CA. Orange County Probation Department.

<sup>4</sup> Schumacher, M. A. & Kurz, G. A. (2000). *The 8% Solution Preventing Serious, Repeat Juvenile Crime* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>5</sup> 1996-2002 Final Report (2002) *Orange County Repeat Offender Prevention Project, 8% Early Intervention Program*, Santa Ana, CA. Orange County Probation Department.

<sup>6</sup> Schumacher, M. A. & Kurz, G. A. (2000). *The 8% Solution Preventing Serious, Repeat Juvenile Crime* (p. 42) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>7</sup> "Measuring the Costs and Benefits of Crime and Justice." Chapter in Volume 4 (p. 302): *Measurement and Analysis of Crime and Justice*, Criminal Justice 2000. National Institute of Justice, July 2000, NCJ 182411.