

WHAT WORKS: SAN DIEGO COUNTY'S BREAKING CYCLES PROGRAM

NOVEMBER 2001

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Revised November 5, 2001

ABSTRACT

TITLE: WHAT WORKS: SAN DIEGO COUNTY'S
BREAKING CYCLES PROGRAM

AUTHOR: San Diego Association of Governments

DATE: November 2001

SOURCE OF COPIES: San Diego Association of Governments
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San Diego, CA 92101
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NUMBER OF PAGES: 25

ABSTRACT: This report describes San Diego's collaborative project Breaking Cycles. Administered by the San Diego County Probation Department, this Challenge I project was funded by the California Board of Corrections (BOC) and represents part of the County's comprehensive strategy to address juvenile delinquency. In addition to describing the project, the hypothesized outcomes are presented, as well as what worked, what did not, problems encountered, future plans for the program, and recommendations for other counties considering such a program.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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SUMMARY OF OUR APPROACH AND REASONS BEHIND OUR CHOICES

Breaking Cycles is a multi-agency, geographically diverse project designed to deter youth from becoming delinquent by focusing prevention programs on at-risk youth and their families, and by improving the juvenile justice and community response to juvenile offenders through a system of graduated sanctions. Program implementation followed a lengthy planning process. Inspired by nationally recognized research indicating that youthful offending is best addressed through prevention and programs that hold young people accountable for their actions, key community leaders developed a long-term plan: the *San Diego Comprehensive Strategy for Youth, Family, and Community*.

The comprehensive approach to juvenile crime in San Diego incorporated two primary components: 1) prevention, that identifies and targets youth at-risk with appropriate programs; and 2) improving the response to delinquent offenders through a system of graduated sanctions and a continuum of treatment alternatives. In addition, because multiple risks require multiple solutions, the strategy included targeting identified risks, strengthening known protective factors, and working collaboratively and collectively with families, communities, schools, and other agencies, such as Children's Mental Health.

Prevention Component

The Community Assessment Teams (CATs) target youth exhibiting high-risk behaviors before those juveniles become involved in the justice system. The goal of the prevention component is to reduce the number of youth entering the justice system by supporting and empowering families to access and receive community resources in a timely fashion.

Graduated Sanctions Component

The graduated sanctions component of Breaking Cycles is a critical feature of the program because it represents a new way of handling juvenile offenders that offers alternative sanctions and swift and certain consequences. The research literature on juvenile delinquency has documented that an approach that holds youthful offenders accountable for misbehavior and also addresses their problems, such as drug abuse, is likely to be effective in reducing recidivism and encouraging healthy and productive behavior.

STATEMENT OF THE HYPOTHESIZED AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Each of the following expected or hypothesized outcomes was successfully realized.

- The CATs will meet predetermined staffing levels and will perform adequate training and outreach throughout the course of the project.
- The CATs will target the intended youth population and will provide interventions to meet their needs.
- Youth and families served by the CATs will become more knowledgeable about community services and will report improvement in family functioning.
- Service providers will be knowledgeable about CATs and satisfied with their interactions with the teams.
- Youth served by the CATs will be less likely than those not served to enter the juvenile justice system and will be less likely to engage in high-risk behavior.
- Assessments of Breaking Cycles youth will reveal that noncompliance results in a higher level of supervision and treatment services on the part of probation.
- Parents of adjudicated youth committed to Breaking Cycles will be satisfied with the services received and will report positive changes in their children's behavior.
- Youth committed to the Breaking Cycles program will be less likely than other at-risk youth to engage in high risk behaviors and have continued involvement with the juvenile justice system for new offenses.
- Service providers in the community will be familiar with the Breaking Cycles program and committed to working collaboratively toward its goals.
- The Breaking Cycles program will have a positive effect in the San Diego region on such measures as substance abuse, violence, and other delinquent behavior.

PROBLEMS WE ENCOUNTERED

- Ensuring System Integration Across the Various Components of Breaking Cycles
- Identifying and Providing Services to Adjudicated Youth with Educational Disabilities
- Changing the Role of the Probation Officer
- Adequately Anticipating Infrastructure Needs

WHAT WE FOUND THAT WORKED

- Enlisting Partners and Building Collaboration in the Community
- Screening Appropriate Cases for the Graduated Sanctions Component
- Engaging and Involving Parents
- Using a Home-Based Visiting Model
- Utilizing Multi-Disciplinary Teams
- Implementing Regionalized Services
- Improving Documentation of Youth Needs and Progress
- Providing Adequate Aftercare Services
- Providing Intensive Alcohol and Other Drug-Related Treatment Services
- Utilizing Reassessments to be Responsive to a Juvenile Offender's Changing Needs
- Reducing Reliance on Youth Institutional Commitments

WHAT WE DIDN'T ANTICIPATE (WHAT DIDN'T WORK)

- Assessment of Appropriate Probation Case Load Size
- Need for Standardization Across Programs
- Amount of Time Required to Engage Clients
- Wide Range of Mental Health Needs of Adjudicated Youth

FUTURE PLANS FOR THE PROGRAM

- Expand Graduated Sanctions Services Geographically
- Improve Graduated Sanctions Services to Meet the Needs of Special Populations
- Expand the Graduated Sanctions Program Curriculum
- Find New Ways to Increase Graduated Sanctions Customer Satisfaction
- Expand the CAT Program to Serve Additional Youth, Including Juvenile Offenders

SUMMARY OF WHAT WORKS

- **Prevention:** Over 32,000 individuals in San Diego County have received prevention referrals and services from the CATs and 80 percent of eligible clients successfully exited the program.
- **Graduated Sanctions:** The Probation Department is intervening with high-risk youth earlier and these youth are receiving the services they need and are being held accountable for their actions. At the same time, fewer institutional beds are being used and recidivism is decreasing.
- **Overall Program:** The San Diego community understood the philosophy of Breaking Cycles and was committed to working together to implement it. Positive changes regionally have already been realized.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER COUNTIES

- Identify Local Service Gaps
- Have Contracts in Place Prior to Program Implementation
- Adequately Anticipate Infrastructure and Staffing Needs
- Secure Flexible Funding for all Program Components
- Place Appropriate and Early Emphasis on Computer and Database Needs
- Have Early Consensus on Definitions of Success
- Allow Enough Time for Program Start-Up
- Conduct Education and Outreach Activities
- Enlist the Assistance of Parent Advocates
- Provide Job Development Training to Youth
- Conduct On-Going Evaluations of Your Program

REPORT NARRATIVE

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SUMMARY OF OUR APPROACH AND REASONS BEHIND OUR CHOICES

The San Diego County Probation Department started the Breaking Cycles program in July 1997. Program implementation followed a lengthy planning process. Individuals representing the community (e.g., line staff, managers, and policy makers) from diverse agencies and interests worked together to identify the needs of children and families in the San Diego region, as well as develop strategies for addressing these needs. Inspired by nationally recognized research indicating that youthful offending is best addressed through prevention and programs that hold young people accountable for their actions, these key community leaders developed a long-term plan: the *San Diego Comprehensive Strategy for Youth, Family, and Community*.

The Breaking Cycles framework reflected the synthesis of research on juvenile crime, as presented in the Guide for Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders (Howell, 1995), published by the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The implications of this landmark research suggest that resources must be targeted appropriately and earlier for the juvenile justice system to be both effective and efficient in its dual mission to rehabilitate youthful offenders and protect the public. Further, the studies strongly argue for prevention programs that can intervene before the risk factors multiply and the pathways become more difficult to interrupt. For those older youth that exhibit chronic and serious offending, the system has an obligation to hold them accountable through swift and certain sanctions.

The comprehensive approach to juvenile crime that was taken in San Diego thus incorporated two primary components: 1) prevention, that identifies and targets youth at-risk with appropriate programs; and 2) improving the system response to delinquent offenders through a system of graduated sanctions and a continuum of treatment alternatives. In addition, because multiple risks require multiple solutions, the strategy included targeting identified risks, strengthening known protective factors, and working collaboratively and collectively with families, communities, schools, and other agencies, such as Children's Mental Health.

Prevention Component

The prevention component of Breaking Cycles demonstrates adherence to sound research that suggests that specific risk factors, such as poor school attendance or substance abuse, can be potential harbingers of future anti-social and delinquent behaviors. The theory is that if the risk behaviors can be reduced, the likelihood for entering the justice system will be reduced as well. Therefore, the prevention piece targets youth that have not yet entered the justice system, but who may be exhibiting some of the behaviors noted.

Five Community Assessment Teams (CATs) address the prevention goal of Breaking Cycles through the provision of direct services and by linking clients to social supports in the community. Youth may be referred to the CATs if they are at-risk of referral to the justice system due to chronic disobedience, curfew violations, repeated truancy, incidents of running away from home, experimentation with drugs and alcohol, or other serious behavior problems. A juvenile may also self-refer due to parental neglect or abuse or because they are having conflicts at home. Each prevention team is comprised of a coordinator, probation officer, case managers, and other experts. After an initial assessment with the youth and family, a case plan for addressing the presenting strengths and issues is mutually developed (long-term clients) or the family is referred to other resources in the community (short-term clients).

Graduated Sanctions Component

The graduated sanctions component of Breaking Cycles provides a fluid, seamless continuum of services from placement at home to incarceration that weaves the threads of substance abuse treatment and family intervention throughout each level of response. The theory is that this program will prevent further involvement in delinquency of program participants by providing a direct link between behavior and consequences, while also promoting intensive therapeutic intervention. The graduated sanctions component, defined, is a system of treatment and rehabilitation of delinquent offenders that combines accountability and sanctions with increasing treatment and rehabilitative services. This philosophy reflects a departure from the traditional processing of youth in which less serious violations may be overlooked or ignored until a future, more serious action results in a reaction from the system. This component of Breaking Cycles also reduces the “delinquency intervention response” of incarceration as a sole mode of response by increasing community-based intervention options and providing more intensive in-home support and addressing youth and family treatment needs from a comprehensive and integrated approach.

The graduated sanctions aspect of the Breaking Cycles program is accessed only through a valid Juvenile Court order. Length of program participation is currently approved for commitment tracks of 90, 150, 240, or 365 days. All youth committed for a period of more than 90 days undergo an individualized assessment conducted by a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary team. The goal of the assessment process is to evaluate youth/family risk and resiliency and to develop a Breaking Cycles case plan that is family-centered, strength-based, and designed to promote accountability and rehabilitation, as well as community protection. The Breaking Cycles continuum of responses consists of an array of placements and intervention services under the umbrella of one commitment program. Placement programs include institutional, day treatment, community-based, and own home. Use of the continuum of Breaking Cycles responses and interventions is linked to specific issues of public safety, rehabilitation, and subsequent compliance with the case plan developed in the assessment phase. Most youth begin their rehabilitative process in highly structured institutional settings and, through goal attainment, become eligible to step down to lower levels of program structure and supervision. Likewise, poor compliance with program expectations can result in return to higher levels of program structure and supervision.

The implementation of the Breaking Cycles program in San Diego County represents a significant change in addressing youth at risk for juvenile crime. It involves several agencies in collaboration willing to share information and case management. It requires acknowledgement that all agencies have a role and responsibility in caring for our youth. It represents a new way of doing business in the San Diego County juvenile justice system.

STATEMENT OF THE HYPOTHESIZED AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The evaluation of Breaking Cycles reflects the comprehensiveness of the project by addressing both the prevention component and the graduated sanctions portion of the program, as well as the impact of the project over time on systemwide indicators that reflect the well being of youth. In addition, the process aspect of the evaluation describes the evolution of the collaborative effort.

The CATs Will Meet Predetermined Staffing Levels and Will Perform Adequate Training and Outreach Throughout the Course of the Project

- ✓ The CATs were staffed with highly trained individuals since the program began.
- ✓ As a result of CAT outreach, over 30,000 individuals learned about the Breaking Cycles prevention component.

The CATs Will Target the Intended Youth Population and Will Provide Interventions to Meet Their Needs

- ✓ Between March 1998 and June 2001, 7,844 primary clients were referred to the five CAT sites. When one considers that the average family size was estimated to be 4.1 individuals, this translates to approximately 32,000 potential clients overall.
- ✓ Variation across the five CAT sites in the types of referrals and services that were provided are indicative of the level of responsiveness of each site to the specific needs of the populations they serve.
- ✓ The vast majority of eligible clients successfully exited the CAT program and demonstrated positive behavior in such areas as attending school and refraining from delinquency.

Youth and Families Served by the CATs Will Become More Knowledgeable About Community Services and Will Report Improvement in Family Functioning

- ✓ Juvenile clients, as well as their parents/guardians, were more aware of specific resources available to them at program exit, compared to when they entered the program.
- ✓ After CAT participation, more parents/guardians of CAT clients reported that they had better communication with their children and that their children were interacting with peers who are positive influences.
- ✓ More than nine out of ten clients reported being satisfied with the services received through the CAT program.

Service Providers Will Be Knowledgeable about CATs and Satisfied With Their Interactions With the Teams

- ✓ More than nine out of ten service providers have heard about the CATs and many are familiar with the characteristics of the target population.
- ✓ Over three-quarters of service providers reported they refer clients to the CATs and the vast majority of these agencies had received feedback on these clients.

Youth Served by the CATs Will Be Less Likely Than Those Not Served to Enter the Juvenile Justice System and Will Be Less Likely to Engage in High-Risk Behavior

- ✓ Ninety-three percent (93%) of long-term CAT clients did not receive a referral to probation resulting in a true finding up to 18 months after they exited the program.
- ✓ Long-term CAT clients are less likely to use alcohol and other drugs after program participation.
- ✓ Compared to other at-risk juveniles, long-term CAT clients are more likely to perform better in school in the one year following program participation.

Assessments of Breaking Cycles Youth Will Reveal That Noncompliance Results in a Higher Level of Supervision on the Part of Probation

- ✓ Since July 1997, 4,778 juveniles have been committed to Breaking Cycles. Based upon an estimated family size of 4.1, this means that over 19,000 individuals in the county have been reached through the graduated sanctions component.
- ✓ Since the inception of the program, more youth began Breaking Cycles having had prior contact with the juvenile justice system and were at greater risk on a number of dimensions. In addition, a greater proportion was committed to Breaking Cycles for less serious offenses and probation violations. This shows that the Probation Department is intervening with youth at an earlier point in their criminal activity and that these individuals are being held accountable for their actions.

Parents of Adjudicated Youth Committed to Breaking Cycles Will Be Satisfied With the Services Received and Will Report Positive Changes in Their Children's Behavior

- ✓ Three-quarters or more of parents surveyed report satisfaction with the program overall, as well as with staff and particular components.
- ✓ Many parents described positive changes in their children's behavior that included better attitudes, improved school performance, better family communication, decreased use of alcohol and other drugs, and interaction with positive peers.

Youth Committed to the Breaking Cycles Program Will Be Less Likely Than Other At-Risk Youth to Engage in High Risk Behaviors and Have Continued Involvement With the Juvenile Justice System for New Offenses

- ✓ Regardless of commitment length, youth adjudicated in 1999 were less likely to have a referral to probation for a felony offense during the 18-month follow-up period. They were also less likely to have any true finding or a felony true finding during follow-up.
- ✓ Youth committed to Breaking Cycles successfully completed probation more quickly than adjudicated youth previously.
- ✓ Completing a Breaking Cycles commitment is related to less alcohol and drug use in follow-up.
- ✓ Breaking Cycles youth are more likely to be enrolled in school during follow-up.
- ✓ Youth committed to Breaking Cycles for 240 days or more are less likely to be committed to the California Youth Authority (CYA).

Service Providers in the Community Will Be Familiar with the Breaking Cycles Program and Committed to Working Collaboratively Toward Its Goals

- ✓ Almost nine out of ten service providers surveyed in 2000 knew about the Breaking Cycles philosophy.
- ✓ A majority of service providers surveyed share goals and case management, provide and receive referrals, share a common Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and have frequent contact with Probation Department staff.

The Breaking Cycles Program Will Have a Positive Effect in the San Diego Region on Such Measures as Institutional Commitments, as Well as Substance Abuse, Violence, and Other Delinquent Behavior

- ✓ Systemwide indicators suggest that the Breaking Cycles philosophy may already have had a positive impact on the community.
- ✓ Regional indicators suggest that there are fewer first-time youthful drug users and those with serious problems are seeking and obtaining the treatment assistance they need.
- ✓ The Probation Department has received fewer referrals since the program's implementation and fewer of these referrals are for more serious offenses.

PROBLEMS WE ENCOUNTERED

Ensuring System Integration Across the Various Components of Breaking Cycles

Building an integrated and seamless system of treatment and accountability throughout all components of Breaking Cycles was imperfect. Ensuring system integration across all CAT sites and program components was challenging, in part because they serve such diverse communities. For the graduated sanctions component, while reassessment served as a focal point for system integration and offender accountability, problems arose in communication between services. Breaking Cycles program components such as institutions, day treatment, and community supervision often struggled with the concept of Breaking Cycles and sometimes did not feel a part of the bigger picture.

Identifying and Providing Services to Adjudicated Youth with Educational Disabilities

The graduated sanctions component of Breaking Cycles did not fully develop a strategy for accurately identifying and following-up on youth with educational disabilities or special needs.

Changing the Role of the Probation Officer

Because Breaking Cycles changed the way that the system deals with juvenile offenders, it was necessary for the role of the probation officer to change as well. Changes include transitioning from monitoring offenders to intervening with families, from being an enforcer to a facilitator, from having a confrontational role to a relational role, from being controlling to reinforcing and motivating, and from exerting power to problem solving. These types of role changes were easier for some Probation Department staff and more difficult for others.

Adequately Anticipating Infrastructure Needs

As a result of underestimating the infrastructure needs required to implement a program of this size and scope, logistical hurdles were encountered that hampered operations to some degree. These needs included having adequate office space, modes of transportation, computers, and trained staff.

WHAT WE FOUND THAT WORKED

"It helped me a lot as a mother and it has also helped him. He is now more open to receive help and is closer to family. The program should be better known and be made more public."

- Parent of a Breaking Cycles Youth

Enlisting Partners and Building Collaboration in the Community

Effective implementation of a comprehensive strategy that incorporates both prevention and accountability requires the whole community, a sense of ownership, reaching diverse groups in the community, including elected officials and grassroots community leaders, and giving priority to risk factors that cause the most problems in the community.

Screening Appropriate Cases for the Graduated Sanctions Component

While a judge can theoretically sentence any juvenile to Breaking Cycles who is at-risk for out-of-home placement, this decision is based, at least in part, upon the recommendations of the Placement Screening Committee, which was reinstated in September 1998 to help ensure that appropriate cases are referred. This committee consists of subject matter experts on juvenile institutions, residential treatment facility placement, the Breaking Cycles program, and mental health evaluators. The group meets prior to the disposition hearing with case management probation officers that are considering recommending to the Juvenile Court placement of a juvenile offender in an out-of-home program or in custody. The review process includes assessment of the juvenile's current offense, prior criminal history, and other personal, social, and family characteristics.

Engaging and Involving Parents

Moving from an individual to a family-focused perspective played an important part in both the prevention and graduated sanctions components. For the CATs, the entire family unit is seen as the client and each member's needs are assessed and addressed by program staff. Parent and other family member involvement is also critical to the success of the graduated sanctions component. Parents are initially notified of the assessment process at court disposition through an informational letter and are personally contacted by a parent advocate. Orientations are held weekly and parents are invited to attend their child's assessment and help develop the case plan. A Parent Advisory Board provides parents with a forum for program input and solutions to problems. Additionally, Parent Workshops provide on-going program involvement and prepare parents for their child's return home. The key to success is soliciting and including parent input in all aspects of the Breaking Cycles program and tailoring service provision to their needs.

Using a Home-Based Visiting Model

Program staff members feel that the success of both components of the Breaking Cycles program is due in part to the use of a home-based visiting model. Through these efforts, a greater percentage of families have become engaged in their children's treatment plan and their changing needs have been better addressed. Breaking Cycles staff found that services need to be taken to the family rather than relying upon the more traditional office or clinic visit.

Utilizing Multi-Disciplinary Teams

A multi-disciplinary team approach is the essence of the Breaking Cycles experience. At each of the CATs, a probation officer works in conjunction with treatment staff, which has proven to be a highly successful partnership. This approach is also present in all facets of the graduated sanctions component, from the assessment process to case plan development and subsequent service provision and linkages to the community. This concept recognizes that multiple problems require multiple solutions from multiple disciplines and agencies.

Implementing Regionalized Services

With the expansion of the CAT program to the current five sites, prevention services became available to all areas of the County. Because each CAT site serves different populations, regionalization of services allows for the provision of community-based and school-based services to all clients in their own neighborhoods.

The graduated sanctions component implemented regionalized services in February 1999 to increase the program's ability to provide consistent, community-based services throughout a commitment. Under this plan, one officer serves as a case manager and is assigned a case from commitment until the maximum release date, based upon where in the county the family and youth reside. The case manager works with a regionally assigned team that includes a youth and family counselor, an alcohol and drug counselor, as well as a Correctional Deputy Probation Officer. These teams are experts on available services in the region and provide families with linkages to the community for their service needs and aftercare. In addition, this regional effort was taken one step further in 2000 by stationing team members directly in the communities so that integrated services can be provided directly to clients where they reside.

Improving Documentation of Youth Needs and Progress

A new graduated sanctions case plan and progress report were developed and implemented in September 1998 to provide consistency across programs. The case plan is strength-based and focuses on issues, objectives, and actions to meet identified needs. The progress report is completed when the minor exits a program and provides information about the status of the juvenile in areas of education, training/employment, peer relations, substance use, family, staff/authority relations, medical and mental health issues, objectives, behavior adjustment, and probation compliance. The implementation of these forms resulted in improved documentation over time, providing useful information to both practitioners and researchers.

Providing Adequate Aftercare Services

An integral part of the graduated sanctions component is providing aftercare services to juvenile offenders after they have completed an institutional commitment. These services are provided in the community, at day treatment centers, and in the youth's own home. Results of the evaluation effort revealed that youth committed to Breaking Cycles for 150 days did not do as well on almost all of the outcome measures for follow-up, compared to those committed for 240 or 365 days. Because these groups were eligible for the same number of institutional commitment days, the only thing that varied in terms of their case plans was the amount of aftercare services they received.

Providing Intensive Alcohol and Other Drug-Related Treatment Services

With an unexpectedly large percentage of adjudicated youth assessed as having problems with alcohol and other drug use, it became apparent that providing treatment services throughout the continuum of graduated sanctions was of utmost importance. Alcohol and other drug specialists (AOD) perform comprehensive substance abuse assessments, assist in case plan development, and provide crisis intervention and referrals to appropriate community-based treatment services.

Utilizing Reassessments to be Responsive to a Juvenile Offender's Changing Needs

Reassessment is an integral activity of the graduated sanctions component. It is the dynamic process of collaborative, multi-disciplinary intervention that allows Breaking Cycles to be responsive to changes in a juvenile's/family's social and/or behavioral environment. Reassessments are held weekly in response to transitions within Breaking Cycles programs, program status, legal status, youth behavior, and program change requests. The process allows the Probation Department to move adjudicated youth between and through its graduated sanctions without returning to court.

Reducing Reliance on Youth Institutional Commitments

An indication of successful achievement of the goal of reducing reliance on custody bed usage was the lowering of the number of beds utilized at Juvenile Hall and the Juvenile Ranch Facility (JRF). Since 1998, bed usage decreased at these facilities by 16 percent and 39 percent, respectively. The current average daily cost for housing a youth at Juvenile Hall is approximately \$79 and it is approximately \$89 at JRF. Positive impacts of reducing out-of-home placements include improved outcomes for youth and their families, cost savings to the community, as well as increased public safety. As a result, Breaking Cycles is often described as an effective institutional bed management system.

WHAT WE DIDN'T ANTICIPATE (WHAT DIDN'T WORK)

Assessment of Appropriate Probation Case Load Size

When the graduated sanctions concept was first implemented in January 1998, four Deputy Probation Officers (DPOs) were assigned to supervise the anticipated caseload. The underlying assumptions at the time were that the majority of juveniles would be in custody, that juveniles in custody require little contact, and that the appropriate caseload was one probation officer to 150 juveniles. However, with a large number of cases transferred immediately to Breaking Cycles supervision, program staff quickly learned that many of the youth were high-risk, not in custody, and required a higher level of supervision. Another unanticipated factor was the added responsibility of communicating with parents, especially when youth are in custody.

An additional DPO was assigned to the unit in July 1998, and two more came on board in January 1999. These additions, which were possible through realignment of department funding and resulted in an approximate probation officer caseload of 1:75 or 100, were deemed more manageable. In 2000, a consultant hired by the Probation Department offered additional feedback regarding caseload size and suggested that they were still too large to provide the appropriate level of supervision and service delivery. As a result, the number of DPO positions increased again to ten, which allowed for a 1:50 probation officer to youth ratio as of August 2000. While this still did not meet the consultant recommendation of 1:25, it did allow all Breaking Cycles juveniles in an institution to be seen by their probation officer once per month, on average, while those in the community or day treatment are seen approximately twice per month.

Need for Standardization Across Programs

At the beginning of the prevention component, a deliberate decision was made by the Probation Department, in concert with the CATs, to allow each of the sites to develop many of its own procedures in order to give each of the teams the opportunity to best reflect the needs of their particular community. However, in hindsight, one disadvantage of this flexibility, according to CAT staff, was dealing with these different procedures during the start-up and early operational phases of the program. As a consequence, there were a number of ambiguities regarding which procedures were standardized and which were not. Other programs are encouraged to resolve these issues as they become apparent, as the San Diego County Probation Department did, and to initiate a greater standard of program uniformity from the beginning.

Amount of Time Required to Engage Clients

The CATs had a number of goals regarding service provision to long-term clients, such as completing a risk assessment with 45 percent of clients within three days of intake. However, the CATs found that many of these timelines were not realistic. For instance, case managers found that, despite extensive outreach, some families do not respond or do not show up for scheduled appointments. In other situations, phone numbers are disconnected, making communication even more difficult. Finally, the flow of referrals fluctuates and an influx of new ones could put a large burden on case management staff who are then unable to deal with all referrals in a timely fashion.

Wide Range of Mental Health Needs of Adjudicated Youth

Due to an underestimation of youth and family treatment needs, full integration of mental health and youth and family counselor services was not achieved for the graduated sanctions component. Needs outstripped resources, causing them to be delivered in a somewhat fractured manner. This impeded the program's ability to fully sustain service connection from the front end to the back. In addition, delivery of mental health services on demand was not fully developed as an integrated system option, with transitional services (e.g., psychiatric services, medical evaluations) difficult to secure and monitor for youth in the community.

FUTURE PLANS FOR THE PROGRAM

Expand Graduated Sanctions Services Geographically

Current plans are underway to expand day treatment services to the South Bay area of the region. Breaking Cycles staff members also see a need to secure a day reporting center/school in the central area for adjudicated youth in the Community Unit awaiting transition to public school.

Improve Graduated Sanctions Services to Meet the Needs of Special Populations

Future plans for the graduated sanctions component also include strengthening service delivery to individuals with educational disabilities, as well as those with mental health needs. The services of a psychiatrist have already been added and staff members see a need to bring in an educator to develop a program strategy for intervention on behalf of the youth and their families. In addition, program staff members also hope to develop a short-term, community-based residential program for juvenile offenders with mental health/family management issues and to review and expand the services provided by youth and family counselors in order to enhance mental health services.

Expand Graduated Sanctions Program Curriculum

To further address areas of risk and resiliency, a number of programmatic changes are underway that would expand the types of services available through the graduated sanctions continuum. These include developing a strong job development program, improving the life skills training programs, improving and mandating parent training programs, and expanding community service options to include work projects as a resource.

Find New Ways to Increase Graduated Sanctions Customer Satisfaction

Because program staff realize the importance of customer satisfaction, they are investigating further ways to increase customer satisfaction, including developing a customer service unit led by parent advocates and volunteers, improving transportation options for families to the Juvenile Ranch Facility, and adding parent advocates to all day treatment sites.

Expand the CAT Program to Serve Additional Youth, Including Juvenile Offenders

With funds made available through the Crime Prevention Act of 2000, the CAT program capacity was recently doubled. In addition, juvenile offenders, who were previously excluded, are now eligible for services. Funding from the same source also will be used to provide specific services (e.g., parenting, mentoring, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, and competency-based services) for youth that are referred by the Juvenile Court. In addition, in response to recent school-related violence, the CATs are expanding their outreach and services to schools.

BREAKING CYCLES WORKS

PREVENTION

Over 32,000 individuals in San Diego County have potentially received prevention referrals and services from the CATs and 80 percent of eligible clients successfully exited the program.

- *High level of client satisfaction with services received*
- *Improved parent-child communication*
- *Positive changes in peer groups*
- *Less likely to use alcohol and other drugs*
- *More likely to be enrolled in school*
- *More likely to be at the appropriate grade level*
- *Very small percentage involved with the juvenile justice system up to 18 months later*

GRADUATED SANCTIONS

The Probation Department is intervening with high-risk youth earlier and these youth are receiving the services they need and are being held accountable for their actions.

- *Less likely to have a true finding up to 18 months later*
- *Less likely to have a true finding for a felony up to 18 months later*
- *More likely to successfully complete probation sooner*
- *Less likely to use alcohol and other drugs*
- *More likely to be enrolled in school*
- *Less likely to receive a commitment to the California Youth Authority*

OVERALL PROGRAM

The San Diego community understood the philosophy of Breaking Cycles and was committed to working together to implement it. Positive changes regionally have already been realized.

- *San Diego service providers share goals and case management responsibilities and fewer barriers to collaboration now exist*
- *Fewer youth are experimenting with alcohol and other drugs and those with serious problems are seeking treatment*
- *Fewer youth are being referred to probation*
- *Fewer adjudicated youth are receiving out-of-home placements*

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER COUNTIES

Identify Local Service Gaps

At the beginning of the implementation of the comprehensive strategy planning, key leaders in the community were brought together as the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) to identify strengths and weaknesses in the community and to identify local service gaps. These gaps were prioritized, allowing the program to target specific areas of greatest need. Other programs are encouraged to spend adequate time prior to program implementation identifying and prioritizing gaps in service so that limited resources can be most appropriately allocated.

Have Contracts in Place Prior to Program Implementation

All Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and contracts should be negotiated, signed, and in place at the time of program implementation. Contracts should be realistic, provide competitive salaries for professionals, and build in cost-of-living increases. If contract staff are underpaid, turnover will be high, creating a disruption of services. Information-sharing requirements (e.g., schools) must be addressed early on.

Adequately Anticipate Infrastructure and Staffing Needs

Anticipate staffing needs to ensure the infrastructure necessary to support a large grant project. In addition, be realistic about the level of resources (e.g., space, computers, cars) necessary to adequately run the program. Establish and prioritize support needs in advance of program implementation. Plan for contract monitoring. Create a team composed of an analyst dedicated to the program, and staff for fiscal support, operations support, and case management. Provide a full-time educator to develop program strategy for intervention on behalf of youth with educational disabilities. Plan for employee turnover, keeping in mind that permanent employees with strong skills will promote out quickly.

Secure Flexible Funding for All Program Components

Set aside a flexible funding account, also known as wraparound funds, which consists of a dedicated funding source for meeting the needs of all program participants. These funds can be used to provide concrete services for families in need. The services may include emergency food, transportation, and housing to help stabilize families and facilitate their participation.

Place Appropriate and Early Emphasis on Computer and Database Needs

During start-up, appropriate emphasis should be placed on the long-term computer and database needs of a program. The prevention component of Breaking Cycles began using a database to track client-related statistics that was sufficient to meet the minimum requirements for the research-based project, but was not designed to manage the high number of cases as the program grew. As a result, all sites sporadically lost data, which resulted in wasted staff time as well as incorrect

reporting. In hindsight, program managers realized the importance of making a greater investment initially in the area of information management. Information needs should take into account that data needed for case management is often different from data needed to assess outcomes.

Have Early Consensus on Definitions of Success

Program staff and evaluators should meet early on to come to a consensus regarding what constitutes success and how it will be measured. A successful client in a prevention program might have different outcomes from an adjudicated youth that successfully completes a commitment. Whenever possible, multiple measures of success should be used.

Allow Enough Time for Program Start-Up

According to Probation Department staff members, the greatest barrier to the implementation of the graduated sanctions component was the extended period of time necessary to firmly establish the program. Because of the size of the project, staff reported that additional time should have been allocated to implement the program and that the evaluation period should have been for a longer period of time to allow for “start-up” and stabilization of services during the first two years of the program. Closely related, it is also important that enough time is allocated at the beginning of a project for cross-training of staff across different agencies.

Conduct Education and Outreach Activities

Make outreach activities a priority with outside agencies and probation staff. Staff from the prevention component conducted a great deal of outreach that was related to numerous referrals they received from law enforcement and schools. Graduated sanctions component staff successfully distributed a professionally produced program brochure and a regularly published newsletter and conducted program training of juvenile court judges, district attorneys, public defenders, community agency staff, and Probation Department staff. They also held community events to promote community awareness and facilitate cooperation among youth, parents, and program staff.

Enlist the Assistance of Parent Advocates

The successes experienced by Breaking Cycles staff in engaging parents throughout their child’s commitment to the program was only fully realized after they contracted with specific people responsible for this task. The parent advocate can contact parents/guardians to further educate them about the program’s operations, encourage their active participation in the assessment process, and provide other forms of assistance.

Provide Job Development Training to Youth

Develop a strong job development program so that youth in the program develop marketable skills and graduates are better prepared for employment upon exit from the program.

Conduct On-Going Evaluations of Your Program

Because programs are dynamic, it is important to continue to monitor outcome measures to determine what is working and who it is working for.

CONCLUSION

The San Diego County Probation Department carried out an enormous task with respect to changing the way that juveniles are handled by the juvenile justice system. Administering the Breaking Cycles program with so many collaborative partners is a feat in itself. Program staff remained attuned to the nuances of program development and made course corrections along the way. The full benefit of the Breaking Cycles program may be realized when the youth become productive and caring adults.