



Strengthening Families Behavioral Health Court INNOVATION PROJECT Expansion

Executive Summary



We are in community each time we find a place where we belong-Peter F. Block



Introduction

Youth who are involved with the juvenile justice system have substantially higher rates of mental health disorders than children in the general population, and they may have rates of disorder comparable to those among youth being treated in the mental health system. The prevalence of mental disorders among youth in the general population is estimated to be about 22 percent; the prevalence rate for youth in the juvenile justice



system is as high as 60 percent. Research indicates that from one-quarter to one-third of incarcerated youth have anxiety or mood disorder diagnoses.

Nearly half of incarcerated girls meet criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and up to 19 percent of incarcerated youth may be suicidal. In addition, up to two-thirds of children who have mental illnesses and are involved with the juvenile justice system have co-occurring substance abuse disorders, making their diagnosis and treatment needs more complex. While more research needs to be conducted, we already know that many programs are effective in treating youth who have mental health care needs in the juvenile justice system, reducing recidivism and deterring young people from future juvenile justice involvement.

Community Stakeholder Feedback

During the comprehensive needs assessment, completed as a part of the MHSA public planning process, community issues were identified by age groups: children/youth, transition age youth, adults and older adults. These are presented in Table 2.1.1. An asterisk (*) indicates those issues that will be the focus of MHSA services in Merced County over the next three years.

Table 2.1.1: Community Issues by Age Group

Priority	Children/Youth (Ages 0-13)	Transition Age Youth (Ages 16-25)	Adults (Ages 26-59)	Older Adults (Ages 60+)
1	*Peer and family problems	*Inability to manage independence	*Inability to Work	*Isolation
2	*School failure	*Inability to work	*Incarceration	*Peer and family support
3	*Involvement In child welfare or juvenile justice system	*Homelessness	*Isolation	*Inability to work
4	*Out-of-home placement	*Institutionalization/ Incarceration	*Peer and family support	*Homelessness
5	*Inability to be in a mainstream environment	*Frequent hospitalization/ emergency room care	*Homelessness	*Frequent emergency room care
6	*Hospitalization	*Involuntary care and isolation		



Key Focus Areas identified by the Stakeholders of Merced County

Involvement in Child Welfare or Juvenile Justice System

It is crucial to focus on educating parents and/or guardians with children as early as infants to prevent them from entering the juvenile justice system. A special focus should be directed to the female population that is underserved.

Isolation

Isolation hinders the development of healthy personal relationships. With isolation, mental health stigma increases. This is particularly challenging among ethnic populations, which are typically more isolated and underserved. It is important to provide services to prevent isolation, promote mental health, and offer socialization activities.

Institutionalization/Incarceration

If/when transition age youth are institutionalized or incarcerated, it affects family members and friends as isolation occurs and progress in treatment goals and care plans is halted.

Inability to be in a Mainstream Environment

Ethnic populations are at a higher risk of not being in mainstream environments. It is important to provide programs for Hispanic and Southeast Asian children to aid in cultural awareness and independent living skills before they "age out" of the foster care system.

ANALYSIS OF JUVENILE AND ADULT CRIMINAL JUSTICE POPULATION

Merced County has multiple factors leading to involvement with law enforcement. In Merced County the high rate of methamphetamine laboratories and subsequent addiction are believed to be correlated to poverty and unemployment. Gang involvement has been increasing and is of particular community concern for youth and children.

Total juvenile referrals and intake dispositions for fiscal year 2003-04 were 3,346. The gender of these cases was 86% male and 14% female. Juvenile hall admissions totals were 1,424, of which 81% were male and 19% were female. The probation total was 891. The home supervision total was 615. There is no longer a crisis home in Merced County for 601 cases of out-of-control or runaway youth. Merced County uses foster care placement for these youth.

Total juvenile hall contacts for mental health services in fiscal year 2003-04 were 223 youth. Of the 223 youth served, 141 had previous/current contacts with MCDMH. The remaining 82 youth who were provided services had no prior mental health contact.



Total jail contacts for mental health services in fiscal year 2003-04 were 288 adults. Of the 288 adults served, 141 had previous/current contacts with MCDMH. The remaining 147 who were provided services had no prior mental health contact.

In reviewing and building on the overall feedback received from the Merced County Community Stakeholder Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews, it was determined that Merced County wants healthy children and families. This project will be developed to build community capacity for the current Strengthening Families Project. This project will include developing a learning model to assist the Behavioral Health Court in assisting with fostering healthy children and families. The Merced County learning Model will include training in the following (Dr. Bruce Perry):

- Attachments-making relationships: A special form of emotional relationship.
 Attachment involves mutuality, comfort, safety and pleasure for both individuals in the relationship.
- **Self Regulation-Containing impulses:** Developing and maintaining the ability to notice and control primary urges such as hunger and sleep-as well as feelings of frustration, anger and fear-is a lifelong process. Its roots begin with the external regulation provided by parents or significant caregivers. Its healthy growth depends on a child's experience and the maturation of the brain.
- Affiliation-Being part of a group: The capacity to join others and contribute to a
 group springs from our ability to form attachments. Affiliation is the glue for
 healthy human functioning: It allows us to form and maintain relationships with
 others-and to create something stronger, more adaptive and more creative than
 the individual.
- Attunement-Being Aware of others: The ability to read and respond to the communicated needs of another. This involves synchronous and responsive attention to the verbal and non-verbal cues of another.
- Awareness-Thinking of Others: Awareness is the ability to recognize the needs, interests, strengths and values of others. Infants begin life self-absorbed and slowly develop awareness-the ability to see beyond themselves and to sense and categorize the other people in their world. At first this process is simplistic: "I am a boy and she is a girl. Her skin is brown and mine is white." As children grow, their awareness of differences and similarities becomes more complex.
- **Tolerance-Accept differences:** Tolerance is the capacity to understand and accept how others are different from you. This core strength builds upon another-awareness (Once aware, what do you do with the differences you observe?).
- Respect-Finding value in differences: Appreciating your own self-worth and the value of others grows from the foundation of the preceding five strengths. An aware, tolerant child with good affiliation, attachment and self-regulation strengths gains respect naturally. The development of respect is a lifelong process, yet its roots are in childhood.



Mental Health First Aid One in four Americans lives with a mental health problem each year. Yet, far too many – up to two-thirds – go without treatment. Just as CPR training helps a layperson without medical training assist an individual following a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid training helps a layperson assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis.

El Joven Noble (The Noble Young Man) is a comprehensive indigenous based, youth leadership development program that supports and guides young men through their manhood "rites of passage" process while focusing on the prevention of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, relationship violence, gang violence and school failure.

Xinachtli

Xinachtli is a comprehensive indigenous based, youth leadership development program that supports and guides young women through their female "rites of passage" process while focusing on the prevention of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, relationship violence, gang violence and school failure.

The project is being developed to decrease risk factors and build upon protective factors.

- 1) Nurturing and attachment
- 2) Knowledge of parenting and or child, youth and adolescent development
- 3) Parental resilience
- 4) Social connections
- 5) Concrete supports for parents

Learning/Change Goal

The Strengthening Families Behavioral Health Court Project Expansion will be an adopted program from the ideal of drug courts, domestic violence courts and community courts. It will contribute to learning by developing a Learning Model for the Behavioral Health Team which includes the Stages of Development, Mental Health First Aid, El Joven Noble (The Noble Young Man), and Xinachtli (for females). It will be an adopted approach to increase learning and awareness to improve the quality of life. It will test out the benefits of seeking to address the underlying problems that contribute to criminal behavior and reduce the overrepresentation of people with mental illness in the criminal justice system.



Purpose of proposed Innovation Project

The purpose of the proposed Innovation Project will be to: Promote interagency collaboration and to increase the quality of services for better outcomes for youth in Merced County. To unite the community with a shared vision for strengthening families that will lead to healthy children and families and the community.

Reason for selecting the purpose (s)

The purpose(s) were selected to provide a shared vision to increase health, well being and public safety increase collaboration efforts among treatment providers, improve the continuum of care for juvenile offenders who are at risk of and who suffer from serious mental illness. To provide linkage for juvenile offenders and their families to appropriate community treatment programs that are culturally responsive and improve the quality of life. To provide education in developmental milestones, life transitions, trauma informed care and rites of passage.

Describe the Project

The Strengthening Families Expansion Project Juvenile Behavioral Health Court will provide intensive case management to up 20 wards, who have been primarily diagnosed with a mental illness and at risk of a mental illness. Once the youth is accepted into the court, he or she will appear before the court for regular reviews and provide an update on progress to the Behavioral Health Team. The program will be implemented in several phases over the course of 9 to 12 months. The participants will participate in individual counseling sessions, group sessions, family counseling sessions, probation meetings, court appearances and random drug screenings. Individuals will receive incentives for compliant behavior and sanctions for non-



compliance. The participant will learn cognitive behavioral techniques, gain insight into developmental milestones and life transitions, Mental Health First Aid, El Joven Noble (The Noble Young Man) and Xinachtli (For Females). The project will infuse the critical transformational elements of the Mental Health Services Act by adopting a wraparound learning model in which the Behavioral Health Team, families and youth will receive development to promote wellness, recovery and resiliency. The approach will be that families are viewed as the experts, treated as partners, and viewed as having strengths and resources. Moreover, the families will be linked to the Strengthening Families Project in the community.

The Project will introduce an adopted mental health practice/approach brought into mental health. Merced County plans to test out the benefits of providing a learning model which includes several curriculums for the Behavioral Health Team, youth and family by creating a diverse and non-traditional plan in order to increase the quality and outcome of services and to improve access to services.

This Project will be developed to strengthen families and build on their all ready in place resiliency factors. The Project will focus on decreasing risk factors and build upon protective factors.

- Nurturing and attachment-A child's early experience of being nurtured and developing a bond with a caring adult affects all aspects of behavior and development. When parents and children have strong, warm feelings for one another, children develop trust that their parents will provide what they need to thrive, including love, acceptance, positive guidance and protection.
- Knowledge of parenting and or child, youth and adolescent
 development-Children thrive when parents provide not only affection,
 but also respectful communication and listening, consistent rules and
 expectations and safe opportunities that promote independence.
 Successful parenting fosters psychological adjustment, helps children
 succeed in school, encourages curiosity about the world and motivates
 children to achieve.



- Parental resilience-Parents, who can cope with the stresses of
 everyday life, as well an occasional crisis, have resilience; they have
 the flexibility and inner strength necessary to bounce back when things
 are not going well. Multiple life stressors, such as a family history of
 abuse or neglect, health problems, marital conflict, domestic or
 community violence—and financial stressors such as unemployment,
 poverty and homelessness—may reduce a parent's capacity to cope
 effectively with the typical day-to-day stresses of raising children.
- Social connections-Parents with a social network of emotionally supportive friends, family and neighbors often find that it is easier to care for their children and themselves. Most parents need people they can call on once in a while when they need a sympathetic listener, advice or concrete support. Research has shown that parents who are isolated, with few social connections, are at higher risk for child abuse and neglect.
- Concrete supports for parents-Many factors affect a family's ability
 to care for their children. Families who can meet their own basic needs
 for food, clothing, housing and transportation—and who know how to
 access essential services such as childcare, health care and mental
 health services to address family-specific needs—are better able to
 ensure the safety and well-being of their children. Partnering with
 parents to identify and access resources in the community may help
 prevent the stress that sometimes precipitates child maltreatment.
 Providing concrete supports may also help prevent the unintended
 neglect that sometimes occurs when parents are unable to provide for
 their children.

Age groups:

The Strengthening Families Expansion will serve youth from age 12 to age 17 in the juvenile justice system.



Expert trainer

The Strengthening Families Project Expansion will utilize Jerry Tello of the National Compadres Network as an expert trainer to provide oversight to the New Learning Model developed for the Behavioral Health Team a comprehensive array of services will include community forums, workshops, and conferences and one to one consultation designed for the collaborative Behavioral Health Team, youth and families.

MHSA General Standards

The project supports the General Standards of the Mental Health Services Act (as set forth in CCR, Title 9, section 3320) and supports following the guiding principles of Innovation.

Wellness, Recovery and Resilience

The Strengthening Families Project Expansion will be the catalyst and a transforming agent in increasing community collaboration and improving the quality of life and providing better culturally responsive outcomes looking at wellness and recovery of the community, identifying protective factors, risk factors, developmental milestones as prevention and early intervention.

Individual/Family Driven

The project will focus on families and youth in the community in need of a mental health benefit the focal point of the project with is a Learning Model developed to improve the quality of the lives of families living in the community. The families in the community will be the expert driving force in the project. The project will enhance the quality of life and inspire families and the community with recovery and hope.

Community Collaboration

It is the goal of this project that collaboration will occur throughout Merced County especially with partners under the Merced County Prevention and Early Intervention Plan and contract providers throughout Merced that provide services, schools, juvenile system and child welfare.

Cultural Competence

The highest priority of this project is cultural competence, to begin and avalanche of the importance of cultural responsiveness by reaching out to individuals who care about their community and the families. The goal is to reach those isolated and in need of assistance, to embrace youth and families with dignity and respect letting them know that they are important and valued in society.



Outcome Based

The expectation of this project is to engage, inspire and equip the community with knowledge and a toolkit/learning model to build on resiliency and protective factors. The project will identify results and positive outcomes, the impact on the community and the assets that have been built as a result of the Behavioral Health Court in the community. It will include measuring improvement, quality of services, increase access and cultural competence transforming lives and the system

Relationships matter, Relationships heal.

Mary Claire Heffron, PhD Children's Hospital, Oakland Ca



One generation plants the trees; another gets the shade-Chinese proverb