

Re-Entry ADA and Programming (RAP) Unit- Juvenile Justice
(Kern County Probation Department)

Overview: Re-Entry, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Programming (RAP) Units are innovative programs designed to better meet the individualized needs of the youth in our treatment facilities by increasing programming, reinforcing positive behaviors, improving staff/youth interactions, de-escalating tense situations, reducing use of force incidents, and changing the facility culture.

Challenge: The Kern County Probation Department is tasked with providing youth in custody with rehabilitative services that address their identified criminogenic needs in a way that redirects behavior and reduces the incidence and impact of criminally delinquent behavior. One way that is done is through the operation of custodial treatment programs for youth. Many of the youth housed within our facilities suffer from mental health issues, past trauma, substance abuse, behavioral disorders and family and personal issues. Being away from their families and familiar environments often enhance their existing conditions, and the youth manifest their feelings through displays of anger, aggression, defiance, sadness, depression, anxiety, and withdrawal. The challenge was finding the resources to properly identify each youth's individual needs and ensure they are being met to promote success both within the program and after their release.

Solution: The Department was able to secure additional resources from the County and re-assign existing staff to create a RAP Unit at each of the three facilities. The staff assigned to the RAP Teams are separate from the required supervision staffing ratios and serve as coordinators for the Re-Entry, Programming, Volunteer Services, Case Planning, School and ADA. The RAP Units are comprised of Deputy Probation Officers and Juvenile Corrections Officers who work collaboratively with the Kern County Superintendent of Schools (KCSOS), mental health providers, and various community-based organizations.

Innovation: This unique model provides much needed support to the existing custodial treatment programs. The RAP Units begin working with youth upon their arrival to help them adjust in the program. The ADA Coordinators collaborate with medical, behavioral health and school staff to ensure each youth's individual needs are being met. The Case Planning Coordinators ensure each youth has a case plan targeted at increasing personal accountability and empowering the youths to

make positive changes in their attitudes and behaviors. The Programming Coordinators continually seek industry leading trends in programming to identify and deliver effective structured activities to the youth with the hope of being a catalyst for positive redirection in their lives. The Volunteer Coordinators seek out and arrange for community volunteers to bring their personal experiences and passion for helping troubled youth into the facilities. The Re-entry Coordinators actively identify and strengthen existing community support through collaboration with local partners and link youth with appropriate services to facilitate successful re-entry into the community. Additional RAP Unit staff support these coordinators and act as Crisis Awareness Response (CARE) Team members, designated to respond to youth in crisis to de-escalate potentially violent situations before they deteriorate further. The RAP staff also receive specialized training to deliver evidence-based curriculum, such as Thinking 4 Change and Seeking Safety, and engage in regular prosocial activities with the youths to promote healthy lifestyle choices.

Results: Since the implementation of the RAP Units, their presence has become an integral part of the program and is relied upon by both staff and youth alike. There has been a noticeable improvement in youth/staff relations across all three facilities and the de-escalation tactics used by RAP staff are being mirrored by supervision staff. The efforts of the CARE Teams, averaging nearly 100 call outs per month, have resulted in a decrease in the number and intrusiveness of uses of force within the facilities. For the first quarter of 2021, RAP staff across all three facilities conducted 1,111 call outs for a total of 23,859 minutes of direct interaction with youth in need of assistance. The youths develop significant rapport with RAP staff, giving them a sense of having a true advocate on site and prompting them to stay in communication after release to share their successes and seek guidance.

Replicability: While a dedication of resources was needed from the County, the success of the RAP Units is, in large part, due to the restructuring of staffing patterns and reimagining of existing resources. The program will be presented as national model at the request of the Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators (CJJA) and can be replicated in varying degrees by other Probation Departments. The Kern County Probation Department can be a resource to anyone seeking additional information or guidance.

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