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Independent Study Projects

Title

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Independent Study Project

Investigation of Enrichment Programs at Juvenile Detention Facilities in San Diego County

Background:

Enrichment activities are known to enhance youth development, and are especially beneficial for at-risk youth who have not consistently had the social capital to receive such enrichment throughout the critical periods of their development. The National Institute of Justice has published many studies demonstrating the benefit of enrichment activities for disadvantaged youth. Enrichment activities promote self-esteem and sense of discipline and well-being, which impacts mental health and risk taking behaviors such as substance abuse. With the goal of achieving the aforementioned impact, juvenile detention centers offer enrichment programs as part of the rehabilitation process. My goal for this project was to further investigate the availability, equity and impact of such programs on mental health outcomes for at risk youth, I completed a needs assessment. The following needs assessment report summarizes my findings.

Hypotheses:

1. Youth in the juvenile justice system in San Diego county lack access to structured enrichment programming.
2. Youth in the juvenile justice system in San Diego county lack access to art programming.

Goals of the project:

Primary Goal: Complete a needs assessment to investigate the availability of enrichment activities offered in youth detention centers/rehabilitation programs in San Diego County

Secondary Goal: Should a need be identified, test a pilot art program and study its impact on mental health outcomes for the participants.

Methods:

- I created interview questions for program leaders and participants
- Through literature search, and online search I identified all of the juvenile detention facilities in San Diego, gathered background information about these facilities and identified contact information for each facility.
- Through phone calls and interviews, I identified and contacted administrative leadership who could provide background information and information about enrichment programming at each facility
- I interviewed administrative leadership and compiled my findings into a report

Interview Questions:

Questions for program Leadership:

1. Walk me through the layout of your facilities and programs?

2. How many participants are in the facility right now? How many are in your program right now?
- 3.. Is this program residential or non-residential?
4. What enrichment programs are available to participants right now?
5. How many hours of programming are available per day/week?
6. Are enrichment programs optional or mandatory for participants?
7. How many participants participate in enrichment programming?
8. Do participants choose or get randomly selected for enrichment programs?
9. How many hours per day/per week/month do participants actually spend in structured programming?
10. Who funds enrichment programming?
11. What is the budget for programming (Annual, monthly?)
12. With confidentiality in mind, is generic demographic information (such as breakdown of age/ethnicity/gender identity) available about the participants in the program?
13. Would participants be amenable to filling out surveys about basic demographic information and enrichment programs?
14. Would youth be amenable to interviews about enrichment programs?
15. Are there any programs that are not currently available that students or leadership are interested in/want to have access to? Were any programs recently cut? Why?

Questions for Participants:

Age:

Gender Identity: Cisgender Female/Cisgender Male/Transgender Female/Transgender Male/Non

Binary/Other:

Racial/Ethnic Identity:

Language/s Spoken:

Does your facility have structured/planned activities for you to do?

What activities does it offer?

What activities do you participate in?

What activities would you like to see at your facility that are not currently there?

How has participating in these activities affected your life?

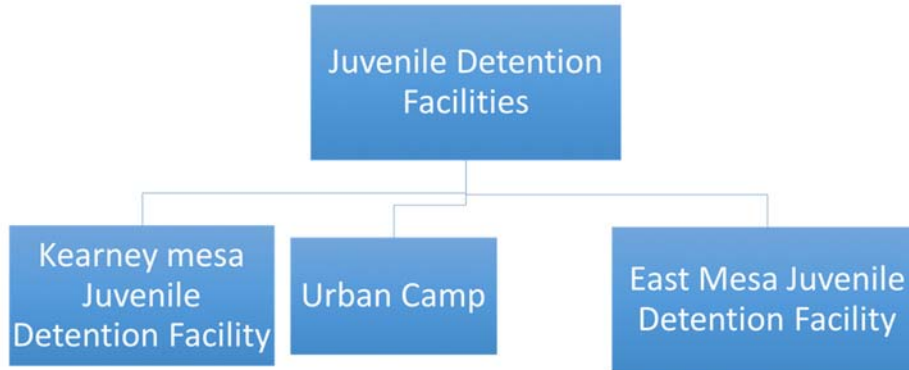
What is your favorite activity and why?

Results:

A. Overview of Facilities:



There are 3 juvenile detention facilities in San Diego county. Two are centrally located and one is located in south-east San Diego, near the US-Mexico border rejoin. All three juvenile detention facilities are residential with onsite security twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Participants who reside at the facilities cannot leave the facilities freely until a court-appointed release date. Youth and their identities are highly protected, and visitation to any of the sites requires special arrangements.



Although the level of security between the facility and the outside world is consistent, the level of security within the facilities varies depending on the setting. Settings may be open or closed. An open setting means that each individual room has a door but doors do not lock and individuals can come in and out of rooms at their own discretion. In this setting participants tend to stay out in the common areas for the majority of the day and are only mandated to go into their rooms for a chance of security shift. The open setting offers more free time to participants and has a structure more like a residential treatment program than a prison. In a closed setting each room has a locked door and participants cannot enter or leave a room without assistance. The participants leave their rooms for structured activities but the level of supervision is much closer than that seen in an open setting.

Each facility is subdivided into units to ensure safety and better serve the needs of the youth in residence. Within each facility, participants are separated by sex. There are male units and female units within the same facility, but there are never males and females in the same unit. Within these units there are subdivided units with individualized curriculum to meet particular needs of the youth in residence. Kearney Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility, for example, contains the Trauma Responsive Unit for youth who are survivors of violent crimes or human trafficking. A recent report based on a detailed investigation of every correctional facility in San Diego specifies that “for many reasons, there has been a decrease in the number of incarcerated juveniles” ... in San Diego for the past few years “Each juvenile detention facility has unused space” (2). Interviews revealed that of the units available at each facility, approximately half of them are occupied by youth in residence. As the rate of juvenile offenders is dropping over time, the San Diego juvenile justice system is working to rearrange its facilities to better utilize existing resources. The overall structure of facilities will soon change in the upcoming summer of 2019. There are plans to build a larger facility that will consolidate juvenile offenders from multiple facilities under one roof. Debate is ongoing about whether or not to keep the East Mesa facility open, as this facility currently provides easier access to families in east county for visitation purposes. Each setting has its own leadership who oversees all enrichment programming.

Compare and Contrast

| KMJDF | EMJDF | Urban Camp |
|---|---|---|
| (Mike Watley) (858)-541-5216 mike.watley@sdcounty.cal.gov | (Jenny Rathbun) (619)-671-4400 jennie.rathbun@sdcounty.ca.gov | (Ronaldo Restua) (858)-541-5216 Ronaldo.restua@sdcounty.ca.gov |
| Birdland | Otay Mesa | Birdland(Next to KMJDF) |
| Residential Closed Setting | Residential Closed Setting | Residential Open Setting |
| 2 female units 3 male units 5 UNITS TOTAL | 4 male units 1 female unit 5 UNITS TOTAL | 1 female unit (Girl's Rehabilitation Facility) 3 male units 4 UNITS TOTAL |
| CAPACITY:359 (10 UNITS) | CAPACITY:290 (10 UNITS) | CAPACITY: 125 (8 UNITS) |

B. Overview of Enrichment Programming and Structure:

All juvenile detention facilities are legally mandated to have enrichment programming available to youth for the duration of their residence at the facility regardless of the length of stay. Title 15 Minimum Standards for local detention facilities are set by the Board of State and Community Corrections of the state of California. This collection of 70 standards is designed to ensure humane conditions for all residents and covers every aspect of life from personal hygiene, sanitation, and access to medical care to fire safety protocols and use of restraints. All facilities are required to have a standard age-appropriate education curriculum (school on site), as well as exercise and recreation (including enrichment programs), free time and rest time. With respect to school, the title 15 requirements mandate that “schools administered by the San Diego County Office of Education exist at each facility. Enrollment in school takes place within twenty-four hours of incarceration. All teachers are credentialed, and the schools meet all standards for State of California accreditation” (1). By the same mandates, each facility must have both an exercise and recreation program and an area designed for recreation. Participants must be allowed a minimum of three hours of recreation that includes large-muscle exercise distributed over a period of seven days. Facility administrators are mandated to develop, mobilize community resources for and implement structured enrichment programming but the sources, depth and nature of such programming is at the discretion of the facility administrators. There are no hour requirements nor mandates addressing the quality of programming specified in the Title 15 requirements. A facility administrator specified that the hours of structured programming vary by participant, but reported that “many participants have a jam-packed schedule”. Individual needs assessments are conducted on intake to the facilities to determine each participant’s eligibility to participate in specific enrichment programs. Regardless of this programming, at all facilities, Juveniles attend class from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm Monday through Friday, with an hour break for lunch. Some enrichment is run through the school, and then program leadership reports that there are many extracurricular programs available to participants. With respect to art, all facilities in San Diego County have art programs which are run through

San Diego Unified School District.

Requirements for programming are being reevaluated. A facility administrator anticipates that the programs will shift so that participants will spend majority of day after school until curfew bedtime in structured programs or organized recreation rather than free time.

C. Enrichment programs Currently available to participants

Enrichment programs are mandatory for participants. Although the individual programming varies between individuals, all youth in residence participate in enrichment programming at some level. Participants neither choose nor get randomly selected for enrichment programs. Instead, during individual needs assessments, they can express needs for and interest in programs and a counsellor connects them to the appropriate programs. The interviews with facility administrators were consistent with information found in a recent report of the state of affairs in the correctional system in San Diego, which revealed the presence of numerous enrichment and vocational programs available to youth at all juvenile detention facilities in SD county. Just in 2017 a report from the superior court stated that “Several programs exist that offer training beyond educational curriculum, including culinary arts, horticultural skills, auto repair and maintenance, and barista training classes “(2,3).

Interviews reveal that enrichment programming available to youth varies with the housing unit, ages of the youth included and levels of sophistication of participants, including intellectual capacity. There are special programs for youth with intellectual disability, for example. Programs cover a wide variety of aspects that foster talent and life/vocational skills and help recovery from past trauma or ongoing mental health and substance use issues. Interviewers were not able to provide a comprehensive list, but consistently note numerous programs at each facility. Various outside providers/agencies come into the programs to provide services on a contract basis. Community partners such as Children’s Hospital work at the facility to do life skills training, including interview preparation and leadership skills training. Correctional councilors (clinicians who offer counseling services, such as clinical psychologists Marriage and Family Therapists etc.) also help provide programming. Programs like Second Chance Strides offer services like life skills job preparedness, mock interviews, anger management, and a course on transitions into life outside custody. Interviews reveal that art, specifically is provided by San Diego Unified School District and is available to participants at all three facilities. The school brings in providers from local museums in San Diego to conduct programs.

Sample (Non-Exhaustive) list of programs Reported in Interviews with Program leadership:

- Agriculture
- Wood shop
- Apprenticeship.
- Culinary Arts
- Trauma Informed Care Curriculum
- Anger Management
- Literacy
- Substance Abuse Recovery
- Narcotics Anonymous/ Alcoholics Anonymous

- Human traffic recovery
- Religious services
- Visual Art
- Yoga
- Pet Therapy
- Career Fairs

D.Need for Programming

There is clearly great availability and wide variety of enrichment programming for the youth in residence in the juvenile justice system in San Diego County. I was surprised to find that art programming is available at every site. Despite such abundance, none of the interviewees could speak definitively on the quality of such programming. According to a recent report on all correctional facilities in San Diego County, “the probation department does not evaluate the effectiveness of behavioral and vocational programs they provide” (2). Interviewees supported this statement and indicated that there is neither data being collected nor outcomes being measured for the youth involved in programming. One interviewee stated that there may be enough programming, but admits “It is hard to say...There is definitely a lot of programming, the real question is, is each the right program for each participant?”. The individual needs assessment conducted by a multidisciplinary team including correctional officers, counselors, school treatment program institutional officers and leadership sounds comprehensive in theory, but the effect of this on the youth is not well-studied. All collaborators come together to make sure all needs for each youth are being met for each youth. The multidisciplinary approach is designed to allow checks and balances within the system, but there is no accountability or transparency with the outside world. One interviewee reports that “Any struggles the youth express...any expression that they need more help, helps us connect them to the right resources. The corrections department has created a youth advisory board to ask youth for feedback on what can they improve on and what is lacking with programs. Anonymous programming request forms are periodically collected, where youth can note any observations, express concerns and can ask questions. If youth want to try something new, they have a platform to express interest in doing so. This feedback is addressed by leadership when supervisors meet with each participant.

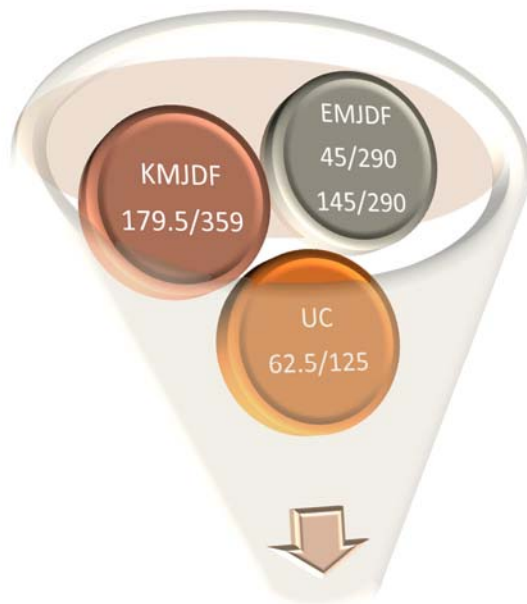
One interviewee stated that “there will always be a need for programming for the youth. Because there is always room for improvement”. Another interviewee avidly reports that “the department has been thinking outside of the box and trying to add programs”. Many programs have been added recently and leadership has asked people in the community to come into the facilities and introduce new types of programming “.

Although an interest in improving and adding programs remains, the amount of youth has dropped significantly. Interviews confirm that each facility is housing less youth each year. Unless youth have committed a serious crime or pose safety risk to self and others, the system tries every alternative to avoid detaining youth. Alternatives like home supervision or rehabilitation in an alternate setting are more widely sought-after each year. Laws are changing. An interviewer reflects, “It takes a lot to have a youth stay in custody these days”.

E. Participant Census

Although the actual census of youth currently at each facility (thus enrolled in programming) could not be provided, the capacity of each facility provides a fair estimate. 100% of the youth in each facility are involved in enrichment programming in some capacity.

In total, 629 youth are involved in enrichment programs in the San Diego County Juvenile Justice system.



F. Funding for Enrichment Programming

Programs are sustained by a conglomerate of funding sources. Youth do not pay to participate in any enrichment programs. Government grants, community partners provide the majority of the funding. Some agencies bid to be part of services offered in the juvenile justice system. The outside providers are volunteers or contracted through community based organizations, some agencies and individuals volunteer to provide services free of charge to the facilities. As a result of such variation, the annual budget for programming fluctuates.

Limitations to the Study:

The quantitative aspect of the study was compromised due to confidentiality regulations. This ultimately became a purely qualitative report. Questions about the participant census (for example, how many participants are in the facility right now?) could not be answered in the interviews for protection of highly vulnerable youth. Demographic information (such as breakdown of age/ethnicity/gender Identity) was not available about the participants in the program due to similar considerations. I was not allowed to arrange visits to sites to conduct surveys about basic demographic information /enrichment programs from participants or even conduct qualitative interviews about enrichment programs with youth over the phone. The information obtained is from information previously published online and from information I obtained during interviews with program leadership, who are more likely to present an optimistically biased report of programs they oversee.

Conclusions:

1. A wide variety of enrichment programming is available to youth in juvenile detention facilities in San Diego County.
2. With support from San Diego Unified School District, **art programs are available to all youth in all facilities.**
3. The **quality of enrichment programming** is evaluated internally via participant feedback but **has not been definitively evaluated** using outcome measures.
4. There are no legal requirements to enforce the quality of programming, just available hours and requirements for structured programming to exist.
5. The need for more programming is difficult to establish.
6. Programming would likely benefit from a detailed investigation and definitive evaluation using outcome measures.
7. The **leadership are open to** innovation including **new programming regardless of a** tangible need.

8. UCSD Students interested in working with the youth population at any of the facilities can and are encouraged to contact the program administrators to discuss possibilities and ideas.

Sources:

Literature Search:

1. San Diego Board of State and Community Corrections. (May 3, 2017). Juvenile Titles 15 and 24 Regulations Revision, <http://www.bscc.ca.gov>

2. San Diego Grand Jury. (June 1, 2016). 2015-2016 Detention Facilities Report. <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/grandjury/reports/2015-2016/DetentionFacilitiesReport.pdf>

3. San Diego Grand Jury (May 30, 2017) Juvenile Detention Facilities Report. <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/grandjury/reports/2016-2017/JuvenileDetentionFacilitiesReport.pdf>

Phone Interviews:

A. Jenny Rathbun

Senior Probation Officer/Assistant Director
East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility
Interview, February 22, 2019

Anonymous

Supervising Probation Officer
East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility
Interview, March 6th, 2019

C. Maritza Rordriguez

Chief Deputy Regional Parole Administrator /Program Manager
Probation Training Center Community Engagement Unit
Kearney Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility /Urban Camp
Interview, March 21, 2019