

24 Hour Assessment Center

Definition of Problem: Lack of coordinated service delivery across private and public funded organizations for at-risk youth to include: runaway, homeless, sexually exploited, and low level delinquency youth. There are numerous private service providers and public agencies committed to resolving these individual issues, but without a coordinated, collaborative system of care with a “no wrong door” approach to service delivery, these organizations will continue to operate in vacuums and disadvantaged youth will continue to fall into the cracks and/or escalate within our systems with no plan for self efficacy or ability to achieve it.

Proposal: The creation of a 24 hour assessment center (Center) located centrally in our valley would be advantageous in numerous ways:

- 1) Referring agencies, i.e. law enforcement would have one location to drop youth off at to receive services;
- 2) Service delivery would begin immediately for a youth;
- 3) Service providers and county agencies would be able to identify strengths and weaknesses within the current system of care and begin to seek resources to fill those necessary gaps;
- 4) Youth connected to evidence based interventions immediately are less likely to escalate within the system;
- 5) Resources can be pooled to create operational efficiencies, expand existing resources to identified needs, etc.

The Center would be able to triage many of the low level issues that not only clog our systems, but encourage youth and families to escalate within our individual systems. The Center could immediately identify problem areas within the family group, make referrals to partner agencies that specialize in that area, and begin resolving the issue that brought them into contact with the Center. Currently our systems are designed around some form of adjudication, where resources cannot be shared until the youth and/or family is in crisis. Often times forcing officers to choose between the lesser of two evils; adjudicating a youth to gain them access to resources knowing that it is more likely they will escalate, or decline the charge knowing the youth is in crisis where services could potentially stop the cycle of behaviors.

Challenges: The Center would serve our most vulnerable youth populations often referred to as “crossover” youth that are receiving services from a multitude of governmental agencies

primarily the Department of Juvenile Justice Services (DJJS) and the Department of Family Services (DFS).

- “No wrong door” approach in dealing with youth and families across multiple systems can be a challenge for youth who lack the fortitude to persevere, and for system stakeholders who are attempting to provide seamless service to a youth and family.
- Funding. Cost estimates vary greatly on this point. To accurately pinpoint costs, an extensive survey of current resources and partnership capacity will have to be done.

Conclusion: Studies have shown that youth who enter the juvenile justice system for low level crime are more likely to escalate within the criminal justice system. Conversely studies have shown that youth connected to resources faster and informally result in better long term outcomes. A systematic, collaborative approach between DJJS and DFS that specifically addresses low level behaviors that often signify deeper familial issues would be beneficial to both systems, allow for a more streamlined approach to service delivery to youth entering our systems formally, and diverting youth from the system(s) wrapped in meaningful services.