

Ventura County's DMC Initiative



In 2009, the Ventura County Probation Agency became one of the seven counties awarded the Disproportionate Minority Contact-Technical Assistance Project II (DMC-TAP II) grant by the Board of State and Community Corrections (then known as the Corrections Standards Authority). The Ventura County Probation Agency assigned a Supervising Deputy Probation Officer, Rosa Lopez, as the DMC Coordinator and formed a DMC collaborative comprised of approximately 16 government and private organizations, including courts, probation, law enforcement, juvenile justice partners, and community-based organizations. As a Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) site, it was not difficult to obtain support from existing stakeholders.

Ventura also contracted for technical support with the W. Haywood Burns Institute (BI), a leading organization in juvenile justice and the reduction of racial and ethnic disparities. In 2010, BI conducted a data analysis regarding bookings and youth of color. The analysis determined that warrants and violations of probation (VOP) were the top two offenses resulting in detention of youth of color. With Latinos representing 60% of all technical/administrative violations, this became Ventura's target population. The analysis also showed the cost to the Agency for pre-adjudication detention of youth for VOP was approximately \$736,560.

The DMC Collaborative, co-chaired by Chief Probation Officer Mark Varela and Presiding Juvenile Court Judge Manuel Covarrubias, began looking into what factors contributed to the detention of youth for VOP. The group met monthly for over a year and formed subcommittees to help with DMC efforts.

The BI conducted further analysis, which revealed that 57% of all VOP detentions were from the juvenile specialty courts and that the majority of "notice of charges" included only two violations of probation, with one of the violations being drug related.

Over a year's period, the collaborative reviewed target populations, analyzed the listed reasons for juvenile bookings, conducted several site visits to evening reporting centers (ERC) within other jurisdictions, and discussed the recommendations provide by the BI. After thoughtful discussions, the collaborative agreed an ERC was needed. Youth struggling to comply with their Court-ordered obligations and at risk of being returned to custody would be referred to the center as an alternative to incarceration. Youth would attend school during the day and report to the center during the evening hours. The ERC would serve as a graduated response to hold youth accountable, yet empower them with knowledge and skills they may need to break the cycle of recidivism.

The collaborative asked key questions:

1. What was the racial and ethnic breakdown for youth detained for VOP?
2. What was the gender breakdown?
3. Which unit was the youth assigned to at the time of the detention for VOP?
4. What was the length of stay for VOP's?
5. How many violations were attached to the booking?
6. What were the types of violations?

Juvenile field probation supervisors were also asked to rank the reasons they authorized administrative bookings.

During the summer of 2012, when existing Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) funds became available, Chief Varela successfully used the data and information previously mentioned, to convince the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) to allocate the extra funds for an ERC. The rest is history....

In April 2013, the County awarded funding to the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Oxnard and Port Hueneme (BGCOP) for the development of the ERC. The timing could not have been any better. The BGCOP had recently converted an existing site into a teen center. They began accepting referrals in early May 2013.



Judge Covarrubias strongly believes, *"Family and community engagement in supporting our youth is essential to improving the lives of our youth and their families. Connecting our youth and their family with positive pro-social activity centers that exist in their community will hopefully provide a positive outlet for our youth and their families to make and maintain the connection with the services that exist in their community."*

The ERC operates from 3-8 p.m. It serves youth between the ages of 12½-18 years old. Referrals are made by probation and not ordered by the Court. Youth are referred to participate in the program for a period of 20-45 business days, depending on their individual needs. The services include: transportation, tutoring, education and career development, cooking, leadership courses, health and life skills, sports/fitness/recreation, arts, and field trips. The ultimate goal is for these youth to develop a positive connection and continue attending the ERC even when not directed to do so by probation.

Chief Varela hopes *"youth will break the cycle of delinquency by participating in community based interventions that are designed to provide a wide range of services and approaches that encourage pro-social behavior and activities. The BGCOP creates a safe environment that surrounds each youth with caring adults, positive engagement, and clear paths to success."* Most importantly, Ventura anticipates that by referring youth to the ERC it will not only reduce the number of youth arrested for violations of probation, but also reduce the number of Latino youth incarcerated in their juvenile facility.

Youth are not the only ones who have been changed by this grant and collaborative process. Booking Officer John Doleman talks about his experience working with the BI and his own personal transformation: <http://www.burnsinstitute.org/article.php?id=324>.

