

Stanislaus County's Girls Juvenile Justice Initiative

In December 2009, the Stanislaus County Probation Department began collaborating with the Prison Law Office, the National Center for Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and the Youth Justice Institute to implement what would become known as the Girls Juvenile Justice Initiative (GJJI) in an effort to evaluate the unmet needs of justice involved girls. The goal of the GJJI was two-fold:

1. to better serve at-risk and detained young women in Stanislaus County by providing evidence-based gender-responsive programming and services to those diverted from detention and to those in detention to prevent further involvement in the delinquency system, and
2. to develop and document the process to assist other counties and states to identify the most effective ways to meet the needs of their at-risk and detained young women.



Strategic Plan Core Interventions

- >Convening of Girls Task Force
- >Providing Gender Responsive Training
- >Implementation of Gender-Responsive Assessment System
- >Implementation of Gender-Responsive Alternatives Program (GRAD)
- >Implementation of a Mentoring Program

A strategic plan was developed in December 2010 with the mission: "To promote public safety by creating a gender-responsive, culturally competent continuum of services that provides opportunities for girls and young women to lead safe, healthy and productive lives." As a part of the plan, a task force was created to prioritize and oversee the plan's implementation. However, they did not have adequate funding to meet their needs and the county actively pursued additional funding to implement much needed programming.

In February 2011, the Stanislaus County Probation Department was awarded the Probation Court Based Alternatives (PCBA) grant, aimed at reducing the number of violations of probation, bench warrants and failures to appear by probation youth and utilized these funds to address justice involved girls. The grant enabled the department to implement the Gender Responsive Alternatives to Detention (GRAD) program, which introduced a specialized caseload, gender responsive training and assessment tool, and enhanced services for the under-served population of justice involved girls.

In September of 2011, Stanislaus County was awarded the Evidence Based Practices (EBP) grant, allowing for an extension of the GRAD project through September 2013, as well as enhancement of the program through additional evidence based interventions.

The EBP grant also enabled the county to contract with NCCD to conduct both a process and outcome evaluation of the GJJI. NCCD's evaluation indicates development and implementation of the initiative's five core interventions in improving outcomes for girls. Compared to a historical control group (CG) of girls,¹ in the six months since program entry there was significant decreases in:

The percentage of GRAD girls who received a new law violation	13.6% CG; 12.3% GRAD
The percentage receiving a bench warrant	31.8% CG; 29.8% GRAD
The average number of days in detention	37.7 CG; 26.2 GRAD
The average number of probation violations issued	1.6 CG; 1.3 GRAD

¹ The control group represents 22 girls who had similar demographics and juvenile justice histories to GRAD girls and who received traditional probation services (prior to GRAD implementation).

Although the outcomes in these core areas were not as strong as initially predicted, the county recognized that the intensive supervision activities of GRAD participants brought to light many issues and violations that would not otherwise have been detected under traditional supervision services. Other positive program outcomes include – through implementation of a range of gender-responsive alternative sanctions for technical violations of probation – use of non-custodial options for 70% of instances of noncompliance with probation terms.

Using JAIS risk/assessment data to inform placement, treatment planning, and transition goals is a hallmark of the GRAD program. At the time of the initial JAIS assessment, girls in GRAD represented a variety of risk levels (55.4% were at moderate risk of reoffending, 33.8% were high risk, and 10.8% were low risk) and supervision strategies. At reassessment, risk level decreased for nearly half (43.6%) of participants, indicating GRAD has a positive impact on reducing girls' risk.

At GRAD exit, participants reported numerous positive outcomes including an increase in knowledge and skills, improvement in family relationships, and satisfaction with GRAD staff and referrals. For example, girls learned more about community resources that could help them (61.8% of respondents), understand the court process better (74.9%), and have skills to make better decisions (82.4%). Girls also reported improved school attendance (76.4%) and improved family relationships (61.8%). Additionally, girls felt their probation officer/case manager listened and communicated well (82.4%), understood their personal background (67.6%), and provided referrals to helpful services and resources (81.8%).

As part of the EBP grant, the department also implemented the use of Aggression Replacement Training (ART) and key components of an evidence based alcohol and drug treatment program called EMPACT. Both programs had strong outcomes when girls participated and/or completed the programs

compared to the girls who did not participate in the interventions. For example, 8% of the GRAD girls who completed EMPACT had a new arrest during the six months after their participation in the program, compared to 24% of the GRAD girls who received no EMPACT. None of the girls who completed ART had an arrest during the six months after their participation, whereas 26% of the GRAD girls who did not receive the intervention had an arrest.

Being on probation this time, they really helped me a lot by putting me in services and helping me stay on the path and make better choices. I've learned so much and I want to continue being the way I am now.

GRAD Participant

According to Chief Probation Officer Jill Silva, "Implementing cultural change in the way we address girls in the juvenile justice system has been challenging to say the least. It has required constant energy and effort to avoid falling into our old ways of doing business. So many lessons have been learned during this project, including the importance of gaining buy-in from all involved parties at the onset of a new venture rather than in the middle, the need for strong leadership at multiple levels of the organization, as well as the need for on-going training when staff turnover occurs. Despite our challenges, we have seen many successes with our GJJI. Our department and stakeholders are committed to continuing the progress we have made and are optimistic about keeping gender-responsive practices at the forefront of planning and decision making. Due to the success of the project, the Probation Department is proud to say that we will sustain all core interventions of the GJJI beyond the grant funding."

NCCD Key Findings

-The planning and implementation of the Stanislaus County GJJI has resulted in multiple changes in programming, policies and practices that positively impact at-risk and justice-involved girls in the county.

-The GRAD program demonstrated success in meeting the goals of reducing new law violations, reducing bench warrants, decreasing time spent in juvenile hall, and decreasing the number of probation violations issued while also showing promise in other key areas including the use of alternative sanctions.