

## **Executive Summary**

The Prop 47- Los Banos initiative is an intervention program (e.g. “the Hub”) for local, system-involved male youth. The initiative provides services that include mentoring, leadership development, and substance abuse treatment. The initiative aims to develop pro-social attitudes among participants, and to reduce their rate of recidivism.

The initiative is succeeding in providing consistent services to youth; providing experiential opportunities for programmatic content; fostering pro-social attitudes; and reducing recidivism among targeted youth (i.e. those assessed as “moderate” and “low” risk). The Hub made 1,066 participant outreach contacts between September 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019. During that time, Hub program facilitators held 157 sessions, for a total of 264.4 hours of programming with participants.

Program outcomes were desirable. One program outcome goal was to increase pro-social behavior. To this end, individual interviews with participants revealed that they expressed feeling a kin-like relationship with facilitators, and in some cases articulated wanting to distance themselves from their friends and “do good.” A second program outcome goal was to reduce recidivism rates. To this end, Hub participants had lower recidivism rates than non-participants (11.4% vs. 26.2%), and rates remained low when comparing targeted risk groups (“moderate” and “low”) of participant and non-participant populations.

The most significant problem faced in the implementation of the initiative has been struggles with increasing the number of participants served. Probation officers have reported doing the assessment and referring any male youth who are of an appropriate risk category (“moderate” or “low”), but the number of youth served is still much lower than originally expected. County

Probation has fewer youth on probation than in previous years, and this was an unforeseen development when the proposal for the initiative was written years ago.

### **Project Description**

The Prop 47- Los Banos initiative provides a local intervention program (e.g. “the Hub”) to local, system-involved youth. A total of forty young males (aged 13-17) from the Los Banos region (i.e. Los Banos, Dos Palos, Gustine, and Santa Nella) will receive services including mentoring, leadership development, and substance abuse treatment. The program will foster system-involved male youth’s pro-social attitudes, and reduce their recidivism rates.<sup>1</sup>

The key program strategies will include:

- 1) The development of a Youth and Family Safety Hub (the Hub), which will coordinate referrals to community-based organizations providing:
  - a. Mentoring (Students with Aspiring Goals)
  - b. Leadership development (Symple Equazion)
  - c. Substance abuse treatment (Fresno Barrios Unidos- El Joven Noble program)
- 2) Training on cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) training for local stakeholders.

### **Program Objectives**

Merced County Probation will provide eligible youth with referrals to the Hub. In turn, the Hub will administer intake, and facilitate orientation and participation in three programs. First, Students with Aspiring Goals (SWAG) will provide academic and athletic mentoring. Second, Fresno Barrios Unidos will provide substance abuse treatment through El Joven Noble (EJN), a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA)-designated evidence-based program. Third, Symple Equazion (SE) will provide civic engagement training. At the Hub, each

---

<sup>1</sup> Recidivism is defined as conviction of a new felony or misdemeanor committed within three years of release from custody or committed within three years of placement on supervision for a previous criminal conviction.

week, SWAG will provide two 1.5-hour programs, El Joven Noble will provide one 1.5-hour program, and Sympl Equazion will provide one 1-hour program.

El Joven Noble will utilize healing circles to teach curriculum that emphasizes culture and healthy healing; weekly themes will include lessons and discussions on masculinity, relationships, commitments and family. SWAG will utilize physical activity exercises (e.g. “shooting hoops”) followed by lessons and workshops, to teach about themes necessary for success in sports and school; this includes personal health, goal setting, obstacles, teamwork, respect, responsibility and honesty. Sympl Equazion will utilize lessons and workshops to teach skills necessary for engagement in the public sphere; Sympl Equazion will teach clients about “leadership” and “community service” through workshops on expectations, success, respect and discipline—as well as through lessons on language, body-language and role-playing.

The Hub will provide an incentive-system to encourage participants to behave appropriately (e.g. no disruptiveness). Participants will receive “completion” credit for each of the following benchmarks: attending twenty-four SWAG classes; twelve El Joven Noble classes; or ten Sympl Equazion classes. Participants who complete all three courses will be deemed “graduates.” The Hub will provide graduates with continuing opportunities to participate in Hub programming, as leaders, by co-facilitating some classes.

The goal of the Hub program will be to reduce recidivism among program participants, and to foster pro-social attitudes.

Lastly, the Los Banos initiative will also provide training for up to forty members of stakeholder organizations to provide system-involved youth with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), for substance use and mental health issues.

## **Evaluation Design**

Evaluation of the performance of the Los Banos region initiative program included the following three stages:

- 1) Assessment and monitoring of the tracking of program data.
- 2) Assessment of program fidelity.
- 3) Measurement of the program goal.

*Tracking program data.* At the outset of and during program implementation, the evaluator communicated with Hub management and County probation about the need for systematic data on clients and programming. This was necessary to ensure accuracy and reliability of data for assessing program fidelity and program outcomes.

*Assessment of program fidelity.* This preliminary report will examine the extent to which program objectives are implemented as intended. It will utilize data on the frequency of Hub activities (El Joven Noble, SWAG, or Sympl Equazion sessions) and the number of people who participated in any activity (e.g. daily sign-in sheets). It will also utilize focus group data on Hub implementation of the program initiative.

*Measurement of the program goal.* This preliminary report will also examine the long-term outcome: the effect of program activities on recidivism and pro-social attitudes. It will utilize individual-level data (e.g. intake assessment forms, data on recidivism, and individual-level interviews) to measure recidivism and the increase of pro-social attitudes.

## **Data and Methods**

The universe for the evaluation of this study consisted of male probationers, under the age of eighteen years old, who received the program treatment (e.g. referral, participation, or completion of the Hub's programming), as well a control group (e.g. male probationers under the age of eighteen years old who did not receive the treatment).

Four types of data were used for this report: weekly reports, a focus group interview, individual-level probation data, and semi-structured interviews.

Weekly reports were collected between September 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019, and were used for assessing program fidelity. These reports detailed the number of sessions each program held and the number of participants in each session. Data were entered into Microsoft Excel in order to create frequency counts of sessions and participants.

The evaluator conducted one focus group interview with the program team, on July 31, 2018, to track project changes and performance. The focus group interview questionnaire consisted of nine open-ended questions, such as “What changes need to occur to improve program effectiveness?” The focus group lasted ninety minutes, and was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes. A memo was written from this focus group and shared with County Probation.

Individual-level probation data, drawn from County Probation juvenile intake forms and data on recidivism, were drawn from the period between January 1, 2018 and May 31, 2019. This data used to assess program outcomes—specifically recidivism. Such data included demographic characteristics (i.e. race, age, etc.), socio-economic status, and risk score—from both clients and non-client probationers (for purposes of comparison). SPSS statistical software was used to create frequency tables and compare clients and non-clients’ background, risk score and outcome.

Semi-structured interviews, conducted by the evaluator, were also used to assess program outcomes—specifically the development of pro-social attitudes. The interview questionnaire was administered to probationers who had received treatment, and focused on themes such as community-based organizations, substance abuse recovery, masculinity and generativity. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-four open-ended questions, such as “What is the Hub?” or “Has

the Hub helped you change? How?” Interviews were one-on-one, lasted approximately thirty to sixty minutes, and were recorded, transcribed and analyzed for themes.

#### **IV. Research Question**

The research design will consist of three components, guided by the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent did the Hub and service provider grantees meet their own program objectives?
- 2) How effective was the program in reducing recidivism?
- 3) How effective was the program in shaping pro-social attitudes?

The first research question will analyze participant involvement in the initiative, through services that were provided and attendance in programs.

The second research question will use quantitative methods and statistical software to analyze the program’s effectiveness. It will examine recidivism rates among clients, versus non-clients. It will also examine these differences across characteristics such as risk.

The third research question will utilize qualitative methods to analyze participants’ development of pro-social attitudes. It will examine how respondents perceived central themes of Hub programming, such as culture, masculinity and change.

#### **Project Performance**

##### *Program fidelity*

Hub and service provider grantees met their own program objectives by consistently providing program services to clients. In the ten months (September 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019) of recorded program activity, SWAG provided 73 program sessions for a total of 107.8 hours of activities. In addition, Symple Equazion (SE) provided 46 program sessions for a total of 103.3 hours of activities. Lastly, El Joven Noble provided 38 sessions, for a total of 53.3 hours of activity.

(Other HUB Services accounted for 4 program sessions for a total of 7 hours of activities.) These monthly averages for these three activities were 7.3 sessions per month for SWAG, 4.6 sessions per month for SE, and 3.8 sessions per month for El Joven Noble. *In sum, service provider grantees averaged 15.7 sessions and 26.4 hours per month, as well as 3.7 sessions and 6.1 hours per week.*

Program participants averaged 3.9 activity sessions per month, and 35.3 activity sessions total, during their time at the Hub. This figure was slightly higher for those participants who had not been discharged for attendance or missing classes. For participants not discharged for attendance or missing, the average number of activity sessions attended per month was 4.9, and the average total number of activity sessions attended was 45.2.

Hub outreach appeared to be correlated with client attendance. The Hub logged an average of 106.7 participant outreach contacts per month, for a total of 1,066 participant outreach contacts; the average number of contacts per participant was 6.8 per month, and 46.4 for all participants during their time at the Hub. The respective contacts for those not discharged for attendance was 7.1 per month (versus 6.3 for those discharged for attendanc), as well as a total of 48.5 (versus 43 for those discharged for attendance).

Hub management facilitated referrals promptly. The average number of weeks from program referral to intake was 1.25.

### *Modifications to the Initiative*

The major modifications that have been made to the Los Banos initiative has been the transition in Hub management and El Joven Noble facilitation. Previously, Meredith Wiley and Barrie Becker served as Hub management, but they left and were replaced by Joe and Claudia Hoffar in early July 2018. In addition, Robert Castro had facilitated the El Joven Noble program, but left and was replaced by Fresno Barrios Unidos in late August 2018. These transitions did not

disrupt programming, however. As mentioned earlier in this report (in discussion of evaluation processes), there has been much greater record-keeping and information-sharing in the period since the transition. In addition, the new Hub management (together with program facilitators) has implemented an incentive scheme to maintain program participation; this did not exist before, and has been praised by the Prop 47- Los Banos initiative advisory board, as well as team members and participants.

### *Factors that have Affected Project Goals*

The major factor that has impeded the Prop 47 Los Banos initiative's goals is a declining number of youth on probation. The initiative's goal was to serve forty youth and forty young adults. However, due to the changing nature of criminal law (i.e. California Proposition 47's redefinition of drug crimes), there are fewer youth on probation, and therefore, fewer youth are referred to the Hub. In addition, not all youth who are referred will participate, as with any program. (Note: while there are 176 male youth on probation, some are high risk and would not be appropriate for the type of social programming that the Hub is using to reduce recidivism.) As a result of the low number of participants, the quantitative methodology for evaluating project performance has shifted from sophisticated statistical analysis (i.e. propensity-score matching)—which requires large numbers of cases for validity—to analyses of basic frequencies (i.e. raw numbers and percentages).

### **Measurement of Program Goals**

A total of thirty six probationers participated in the Hub, during the reference period (January 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019). Seven participants were discharged without violations of probation (three moved off probation, two completed the program, and two moved away), while another five were



discharged due to attendance issues. The following analysis examines how probationers that participated in the Hub fared in comparison to those who were not referred.

### *A Statistical Portrait of Male, Youth Probationers in Merced County*

From January 1, 2017 to May 31, 2019, Merced County Probation referred 39 out of 176 young, male probationers, to the Hub. In terms of demographic characteristics, Hub participants and non-Hub participants were similar. Hub participants were mostly Latino (76.9%), as well as White (15.4%) and Black (7.7%); in contrast, non-Hub participants were 76.3% Latino, 14.5% White, and 9.2% Black. In terms of socio-economic characteristics, health and family, however, Hub participants were slightly more advantaged than non-Hub participants—with a few mixed results.

Table 1.1 reveals that Hub participants' parents were more likely to earn below a living wage (81.8% vs. 72.7%)—but that, at the same time, they were less likely to earn wages below the poverty line (27.3% vs 36.4%). In addition, Hub participants reported higher frequencies of father's health being less than “good” (54.5% vs. 28.4%), though similar rates of mother's health being less than “good” (33.3% versus 31.0%). Nonetheless, Hub participants were less likely to report being employed (5.1% vs. 13.9%), being on psychotropic meds (0% to 7.3%), having children of their own (0% vs 6.6%), or being affiliated with a gang (5.1% vs. 13.9%)—although they did, on average, report abusing the same number of substances “often” (2).

### *Quantitative Measures of Hub Programming Outcomes*

In terms of program completion, 11 of 39 Hub participants (28.2%) completed the El Joven Noble program (see Table 1.2). Only three completed Sympl Equazion and one completed Students with Aspiring Goals (SWAG). During the time of programming, one youth exited the program by being released from probation, while another two attended fewer classes due to gaining

employment. In other words, very few participants graduated from Hub programs, but many participated nonetheless. An important question might be, how did Hub participants fare, in terms of recidivism?

Only 11.4% of Hub participants experienced recidivism—as defined by a new conviction following entry into the Hub—whereas 26.2% of non-Hub participants experienced recidivism (see Table 1.3). These figures are aggregates for Hub participants and non-Hub participants, however. One may ask, “how do the differences between Hub participants and non-participants influence recidivism rates?”

Table 1.4 suggests that Hub participants had slightly more favorable risk scores (in line with the profiles of Hub participants and non-participants in Table 1.1). Hub participants were less likely to be assessed as “high” risk (35.3% vs. 49.2%) by Merced County Probation’s risk assessment tool, but more likely to be rated as “moderate” risk (41.2% vs. 28.5%). Hub participants and non-participants were similar in frequency of low-risk (23.5% vs. 22.3%).

Table 1.5 reveals that, even when taking risk scores into account, Hub participants were less likely to experience recidivism than non-Hub participants. Hub participants with a risk-level of “high” experienced 33.3%, slightly higher than that of non-participants (28.3%). However, Hub participants with “moderate” and “low” risk scores had lower rates of recidivism: a recidivism rate of 16.7% vs. 27.0% for “moderate” risk participants, and 0% vs. 18.5% for “low” risk participants. Most strikingly, for those whose risk assessment was missing, only 5.3% (1 of 19) of Hub participants experienced recidivism versus 33.3% (2 of 6) of non-participants. (Risk data and recidivism data was missing for an additional 4/39 Hub participants and 7/137 non-participants. These cases are not represented in the risk/recidivism figures above.)

#### *Qualitative Measures of Hub Programming Outcomes*

Seven individual interviews were conducted with six Hub participants between January 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019. Six interviews were single interviews, while one interview was a follow-up with a participant who had been at the Hub for over a year. The interview was focused on how respondents got involved with the Hub, how they experienced the Hub, whether the Hub was a part of their life, and how it helped them change their behavior. The interview also asked questions about challenges that participants faced in desisting from crime, as well as how the Hub helped them face these challenges, and where participants saw themselves in the future. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded for themes, and analyzed.

In interviews, participants claimed that they had not heard of the Hub until their probation officer had referred them. They claimed that they did not know what to expect from the Hub, but that once they were there they began to build relationships with program facilitators (EJN, SWAG and Sympl Equazion). Almost all participants struggled to articulate any of the key themes of lessons and workshops, such as what the terms “culture,” “manhood,” “stuck mindset,” “changed mindset,” or “leader” mean. At the same time, they had experiential learning experiences with compassion and empathy, through their interactions in the programs.

One participant (“Benjamin”) recounted how he first arrived at the Hub. He said of the Hub, “I was referred by my probation officer... at first I... I didn’t really talk a lot. And I didn’t really like to talk to them about me.” Benjamin, however, had a court date, and received help from Hub staff. Ben said,

“And they really helped me out. [Hub management staff person] and [one program facilitator] and [another program facilitator], they made like a letter for me, talking about like how the program was really helping me and how I’m doing good. And that’s when I knew. That’s when I knew the type of people they were.”

Ben continued to explain that the reason he continued attending the Hub, was because he thought highly of, and felt close to, the adults in the Hub. Ben said, “That’s kind of like what’s driving me to continue going with them. Because I know that they care about me and they want to see me do good. So that’s the type of people I want around.”

Ben finished the El Joven Noble class, and began to do leadership training. It added a sense of purpose to his life. Ben explained that he was talking with city officials about the Hub, about what the Hub is capable of doing but also the type of needs that they have. Ben also wrote letters to local restaurants, soliciting donations or gift cards that could be used as incentives for Hub program activities. Ben also seemed proud of his status within the Hub; he laughed when he remarked that he felt like a “counselor” to new participants.

Ben’s biggest challenges were with the same peer networks that had influenced him into committing crime. When asked about obstacles preventing him from changing, Ben said, “Staying away from some of my friends... I’m kind of like, I want to stop, but then I’m like dang, like, you know, I’m kind of in the middle, but I’m gonna stop.” Ben felt that the Hub staff/ program facilitators were like “family,” and relied on them to distance himself from his old friends. He hoped to attend a UC for college, and get a good job at a hospital, or to attend community college and get hands-on experience in a trade.

Interview data suggested that Hub participants attended the Hub for different reasons, but that their experiences with the program were very similar. One participant attended the Hub shortly because he made one “mistake” hanging out with friends, and vowed never to do it again. Another participant, similar to Ben, understood that he needed to stop hanging out with his friends before ending up physically hurt or in jail, but found difficulty in distancing himself from his friends; he had no parents and had known his friends his entire life. Another participant had very close

relationships with friends who were a bad influence, but struggled to articulate to his parents that he simply could not “fit in” with high achieving students at school. Another was very aloof, and cared very little for speaking during Hub activities or during my interview with him. Yet two more participants welcomed engagement with Hub staff/facilitators; one was eager about learning new ways to present himself in public, and another enjoyed seeing the adults work together as a team and being able to learn from them.

In sum, the interviews suggest that Hub participants are not learning from Hub lessons and workshop in an academic manner, but rather in an experiential manner. They are being actively mentored with lessons about how one should relate with others, at the same time that they are engaging in such relationships. These new ways of relating with others involve speaking differently, and being more empathetic and compassionate.

**Table 1.1 Probationer Characteristics, by Hub Affiliation**

		<b>All</b>		<b>Non-Hub</b>		<b>Hub</b>	
		Pct	N=	Pct	N=	Pct	N=
<i>Race</i>	Latino	76.5%	102	76.3%	76	76.9%	26
	White	14.7%	102	14.5%	76	15.4%	26
	Black	8.8%	102	9.2%	76	7.7%	26
<i>Socio-economic indicators</i>	Parental Income below Living Wage	73.9%	88	72.7%	77	81.8%	11
	Parental Income below Poverty	35.2%	88	36.4%	77	27.3%	11
	Employed	11.9%	176	13.9%	137	5.1%	39
<i>Health</i>	Psychotropic Meds	5.7%	176	7.3%	137	0.0%	39
	Father's Health < Good	31.5%	92	28.4%	81	54.5%	11
	Mother's Health < Good	31.2%	125	31.0%	113	33.3%	12
<i>Family</i>	Own Children	5.1%	176	6.6%	137	0.0%	39
	Median number of siblings	3	176	3	137	**	13
<i>Risk</i>	Gang Affiliation	11.9%	176	13.9%	137	5.1%	39
	Median # of substances often abused	1	176	2	137	2	28
<i>Hub Referral</i>	Referred to previous Hub management	66.7%	39				
	Referred to current Hub management	33.3%	39				
<i>Age</i>	Median Age at Intake	16	37				

**Table 1.2 Hub Program Completion and Outcomes**

		Frequency	Pct
<i>Graduated</i>	El Joven Noble	11	28.2%
	Sympl Equazion	3	7.7%
	Students with Aspiring Goals	1	2.6%
<i>Employment</i>		2	5.1%
<i>Exited Program</i>		1	2.6%

**Table 1.3 Recidivism, by Hub Affiliation**

		Frequency	Pct
<i>Hub</i>	Recidivism	4	11.4%
	Desistance	31	88.6%
<i>Non-Hub</i>	Recidivism	34	26.2%
	Desistance	96	73.8%

**Table 1.4 Distribution of Risk Level, by Hub Affiliation**

		Non-Hub	Hub
<i>Risk Level</i>	High	49.2%	35.3%
	Moderate	28.5%	41.2%
	Low	22.3%	23.5%
<i>N=</i>		130	17

**Table 1.5 Rate of Recidivism, by Hub Affiliation and Risk Level**

		Non-Hub		Hub	
		Recidivism	N=	Recidivism	N=
<i>Risk Level</i>	High	28.3%	60	33.3%	6
	Moderate	27.0%	37	16.7%	6
	Low	18.5%	27	0.0%	4
	Missing	33.3%	6	5.3%	19

Note: N refers to size of total population (i.e. There were six Hub participants with a high risk level, and 33.3% of those experienced recidivism.)