

BSCC - CALVIP Local Evaluation Report

California Conference for Equality and Justice (CCEJ)
Project: Restorative Justice Youth Diversion
Grant Activities between: September 1, 2018 – December 15, 2021
Submitted: October 29, 2021

Executive Summary

Between 2018-2021, grant funds from BSCC grant funds supported CCEJ to expand its Restorative Justice Youth Diversion (RJYD) program, which serves youth, the people they have harmed, and their families and community members. CCEJ's RJYD program included restorative case conferencing, case management, and education for youth, persons harmed, and their families. During the grant period, CCEJ received referrals for violations ranging from physical assault, burglary, low-level drug offenses, property vandalism, school truancy, sexual assault, and trespassing. The long-term outcomes of the RJYD project were to divert youth away from correctional institutions, promote safety by preventing recidivism, and reintegrate the youth into school and the community. Grant funds from the CALVIP program enabled CCEJ to build partnerships across Los Angeles County with local law enforcement entities to increase referrals to the diversion program at a time of heightened interest in alternatives to incarceration. CCEJ remains just one of two service providers in Los Angeles County with expertise and experience with providing Restorative Justice as a tool for youth diversion and development. CCEJ's project served 835 unduplicated participants, with 167 youth participating in its diversion program.

Project Goals & Objectives

GOAL 1) Youth who have committed a crime will acknowledge responsibility and make repairs for harm within 6 months of referral to CCEJ. **Objectives:** a) to build youth's skills for empathy, accountability, and self-advocacy, and b) to support youth to identify steps to repair the harm they have caused.

GOAL 2) By the end of their participation in the program, parents/caregivers will improve their relationship with their child and support them to avoid recidivism. **Objectives:** a) to build parents/caregivers' skills to advocate for resources for the child, and b) to help parents/caregivers understand and practice using restorative parenting tools to support their child.

GOAL 3) By the end of their participation in the RJYD process, victims of a crime can pursue justice in a way that feels meaningful to them. **Objectives:** a) to create safe opportunities for victims to ask for and receive meaningful restitution for harms committed against them, and b) to offer support for victims and other impacted parties in their healing process.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

1) Restorative Justice Diversion: CCEJ used the Restorative Case Conferencing (RCC) model in its Restorative Justice Diversion pathway to divert youth away from the criminal justice system and towards more meaningful and appropriate methods of accountability. CCEJ's RCC methodology features a

facilitated conference (“Circle” dialogue) to address harm caused between a youth and their victim(s), with the presence and support of family members or other support people. The RCC process is focused on accountability and meeting the needs of the victim and the community, rather than on punishment. The process requires the voluntary participation of the youth who committed the crime, the youth’s family, the person harmed by the crime and that person’s supporters. Youth who choose to participate are diverted from court/juvenile hall, avoiding a juvenile criminal record that would harm their ability to enroll in school or obtain a job.

To share an example of a full diversion process, CCEJ received a referral from the Los Angeles Police Department regarding a battery of young person in the community. CCEJ offered the young person who had been responsible for the assault a process which included a Restorative Justice (RJ) Circle dialogue and REAL Resiliency workshops. CCEJ reached out to the person harmed, but unfortunately was not able to establish contact. During sessions with the CCEJ RJ facilitator, the responsible youth engaged in dialogues to understand the roots and impacts of her actions, and what she could do to address the impacts. The RJ facilitator also met with the youth’s parents to understand the accountability steps they wanted to ask from their daughter. During Circle, the family and youth engaged in dialogue about her actions, the consequences for herself, her family, her community and the person harmed, and named specific steps she could take to demonstrate accountability. The responsible youth worked to complete her agreements, addressing the harm caused and the needs that the harm created within herself and her family. She successfully completed the program.

CCEJ staff and volunteers held 146 Circle dialogues with participants during the grant period.

Effectiveness: This project component was highly effective. In Los Angeles County, CCEJ has been at the forefront of using Circle dialogue for its youth diversion program. Circle is rooted in Restorative Justice principles and indigenous practices, used as a method to address conflict and repair relationships in a way that honors the needs and feelings of all individuals involved.

2) Case Management: During intake, case managers meet separately with the youth offender and victim(s) to assess their readiness to participate in diversion. If the case was accepted, staff created an individualized service plan that included at least two preparatory meetings to ensure that all parties are ready to engage in the diversion process. Case Managers actively supported youth to fulfill the “agreement” or action plan that results from the conference.

CCEJ provided case management to 167 youth and their families during the grant period.

Effectiveness: This project component was highly effective. Each participant received tailored support from staff and volunteers who have received extensive training on Restorative Justice tools, needs-based practices and trauma-informed care.

3) REAL Resiliency Diversion: Support from the CalVIP grant enabled CCEJ to expand its program to include REAL Resiliency, a diversion pathway for low-level cases and enrichment component for higher-level cases moving through the Restorative Justice Diversion pathway. The curriculum is an adaptation of

CCEJ's existing positive youth development program, "Conscious Classrooms," which builds self-awareness and life skills for young people in middle and high schools. By participating in workshops on socio-emotional skills, nonviolent communication, self-advocacy, positive identity formation, understanding the harms created by community violence, and planning for future success, youth developed self-awareness that can prevent future conflicts and violent behavior. During the grant period, 218 youth participated in REAL workshops. From March 2020, all workshops have been conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

After finishing REAL workshops and participating in Circle with family members, a CCEJ participant shared: "I feel like I'm taking a lot of ownership of what I'm doing – I know if I do something wrong, I have to admit it. I do look at myself differently now because I feel more mature, more honest with who I am and who I should be, than I was before [coming to CCEJ]. I was lucky, I'm about to be 18 – if I were to do what I did [after turning 18], I could literally be behind bars. But I'm not, because of this program – it's given me a chance to make up for what I did."

Effectiveness: This component was effective as an alternative to a more in-depth case conferencing process. For youth with arrests/citations which did not harm another person, the REAL pathway allowed them with space to reflect on their actions and determine goals for themselves that would keep them out of the justice system in future.

4) Raising FUTURES: Parents/caregivers participated in similar workshops to REAL Resiliency to learn restorative parenting skills and nonviolent communication. During the grant period, the Raising FUTURES program proved to be one of the more logistically challenging components of the program. Parents have busy schedules and it was difficult to schedule workshops at times which are convenient to a group. Scheduling became even more challenging during the COVID pandemic, when all workshops were moved online – not all parents had reliable access to the internet. Nevertheless, 361 parents participated in FUTURES workshops during the grant period.

Effectiveness: This project component was effective when participants were able to attend workshops. Since the grant period ended, CCEJ continues to offer parent education on a more personalized 1-on-1 level, through case management services, rather than in workshop form.

Evaluation Design

CCEJ's evaluation model included monitoring and oversight of the program through monthly case management meetings; bi-weekly individual supervision meetings for staff with their direct supervisor; technical assistance and/or professional development trainings from partner agencies in L.A. County or state-wide; and quarterly professional development trainings for program staff and volunteers to ensure they have necessary skills and knowledge to support participants.

Process Evaluation: Participant progress was tracked throughout the project in CCEJ's online database CaseLoad Manager, with key data entered into their case file including: achievement of key milestones, workshop attendance, completion of program or dropout of program. Data collection tools include: 1)

intake survey and case plan; 2) participant evaluation; 3) Case Manager/Circle Keeper evaluations; 4) post-program follow-up survey; 5) REAL Resiliency/ Raising FUTURES pre- & post- surveys. Key achievement indicators that were tracked during the project were: number of cases accepted for diversion, creation of module curricula, number of volunteer facilitators trained, number of workshops completed, and number of youth/parent participants.

Outcome Evaluation: Outcome variables collected during the project:

- % of youth reporting that they remain arrest or citation-free at follow up check ins;
- % of youth reporting increased resiliency skills for avoiding arrest/ incarceration/probation;
- % of parents/caregivers reporting increased confidence to keep youth out of juvenile justice system; and
- % of participants reporting satisfaction with restorative justice process.

DISCUSSION OF FINAL OUTCOMES

Per the below chart, CCEJ achieved or exceeded goals stated in the initial application, even with disruptions to operations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in March 2020. Until that point, momentum in Los Angeles County had been steadily building towards an increase in referrals and requests from law enforcement partners for CCEJ’s services. During the pandemic, CCEJ’s programs continued fully online, but referrals slowed due to a lack of opportunities to conduct in-person outreach with partners.

| <i>Process variables</i> | <i>Goal</i> | <i>Actual</i> |
|--|----------------------------------|---|
| Number of cases accepted for diversion | 165 cases | 167 out of 281 referrals 146 case conferences/Circle dialogues |
| Volunteer facilitators trained | 100 | 110 volunteers trained |
| Number of workshops completed | 24 REAL workshops per year | 73 REAL Resiliency workshops 44 FUTURES workshops |
| Number of youth participants trained | 150 REAL Resiliency participants | 218 youth |
| Number of parents trained | 100 parents | 361 parents |

| <i>Outcome variables</i> | <i>Goal</i> | <i>Actual (over 2-year grant period)</i> |
|---|--|--|
| 1. % youth reporting that they remain arrest or citation-free at follow up check ins | 80% report remaining arrest-free at 6-month check-in. | 92.3% report remaining arrest-free at 6-month check-in. |
| 2. % youth reporting increased resiliency skills for avoiding arrest/incarceration/probation; | 80% report increased resiliency skills to avoid arrest/probation | 78.6% report increased resiliency skills to avoid arrest/probation |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| 3. % parents/caregivers reporting increased confidence to keep youth out of juvenile justice system; | 70% parents report increased confidence to keep youth out of justice system | 73.3% parents report increased confidence to keep youth out of justice system |
| 4. % participants report satisfaction with restorative justice process. | 85% participants report satisfaction with RJ process | 92.5% participants report satisfaction with RJ process |

Overall observations:

1) *Effectiveness of Restorative Justice Youth Diversion processes and Case Management:* Participants’ satisfaction with CCEJ’s Restorative Youth Diversion process is high. The diversion program provides a resolution that enables a young person to avoid the harmful impacts of probation or detention, and connects them to networks of support and care to build resiliency and prevent recidivism. When people harmed choose to participate, they also report satisfaction with the process. These results have led to increased attention paid to CCEJ’s program from additional partners across LA County, and increased referrals.

2) *Effectiveness of Restorative Justice Youth Diversion as an approach to violence prevention:* In anecdotal evidence collected by staff, participants report that they do not come into further contact with the justice system after the program. CCEJ continues to work with law enforcement partners to create systems of data collection and data sharing that can help analyze recidivism rates. CCEJ makes many efforts to reach out to the young people and their families in order to conduct follow-up check-ins at 6 months and 12 months, but many participants choose not to engage further with CCEJ staff after the program ends, preferring to move forward in their lives. In the instances when youth have stayed in contact, CCEJ has engaged them in youth development and leadership activities through CCEJ’s Building Bridges for Youth Program.

3) *Effectiveness of Parent Education:* Parents of youth in the diversion program displayed significant interest in education on using Restorative Justice practices in their family life, despite barriers to accessing it such as limited time, child care, and internet access. In response, CCEJ’s training team is currently developing specialized curriculum to engage parents and caregivers in future Restorative Justice workshops.

Conclusion

At a time when communities continue to call for the justice system to provide alternatives to incarceration & detention for youth, particularly for youth from Black and brown communities, CCEJ’s Restorative Justice Youth Diversion program is an evidence-based practice which holds youth accountable for harm and supports their personal development, reducing the likelihood they will commit harm in the future. CCEJ’s holistic approach to diversion promotes individual transformation and culture shifts in families and schools. The RJYD process is most effective when other systems in a young person’s life also take a Restorative approach to discipline and accountability (e.g. parents/families and schools). CCEJ will continue to take a macro & micro-level approach to preventing violence in schools and communities

through Restorative Justice principles and practices, and will train other organizations and schools to infuse communities with a new paradigm in Restorative intervention and prevention.