Santa Clara County Probation Department
Enhanced Ranch Program:
Rehabilitation Aftercare Program

Aishatu Yusuf and Angela Irvine
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*NCCD promotes just and equitable social systems for individuals, families, and communities through research, public policy, and practice.*
Introduction

In 2006, Santa Clara County Probation Department (SCCPD) implemented programming to improve outcomes for youth offenders detained at the William F. James Boys Ranch. The evidence-based cognitive behavior model, titled the Enhanced Ranch Program, serves some of the county’s most heavily entrenched juvenile offenders. The enhanced programming changed the way in which SCCPD provides services to juvenile offenders and incorporates innovative methods to improve outcomes for youth. Although the programming thus far has provided very positive results, SCCPD also recognized that there were limitations, particularly in regards to the aftercare component. An evaluation of the program indicated that it failed to provide youth recently released from custody the support, services, and supervision needed to successfully transition back into the community.

Youth reentering the community after incarceration often face a variety of barriers that block their success; this includes having limited access to essential services such as educational and vocational training, mental health and substance abuse treatment and prevention, individual and family therapy, housing and employment assistance, and gang intervention. SCCPD recognized the need for reentry services and understood that without this assistance, a youthful offender’s likelihood to recidivate upon release is greater. In an effort to improve the aftercare programming, address high recidivism rates, and provide reentry services to youth, SCCPD implemented the Reentry Assistance Program (RAP) through a cross-system collaboration at the William F. James Boys Ranch in 2011.

In 2012, SCCPD commissioned the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) to evaluate these changes and document the history and program development process. NCCD also examined RAP implementation and whether the reforms improved outcomes for youth participants, particularly in regard to reducing probation violations and new arrests.

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There have been a number of changes to aftercare services as a result of the RAP. Before the RAP, the reentry process was contingent upon the recommendations of the assigned probation officer. Youth exiting the ranch program attended one multidisciplinary team (MDT) meeting 30 days before their planned exit. During the MDT meeting, the probation officer would lead the team in deciding which services a youth would receive. As officers could only pick from a small number of service providers that contracted with SCCPD, their options were limited. As one interviewee noted, many services were not available to youth due to budget and contract restrictions. Each youth’s probation officer created an aftercare plan with little input from the ranch counselor, parent/guardian, or youth. Moreover, due to large caseloads, many officers were unable to provide an effective individualized supervision strategy.

The RAP was developed to improve reentry services for youth exiting the ranch, help youth maintain the positive strides made while incarcerated, and help youth develop the appropriate tools to handle conflict and challenges in the community. In support of these goals, SCCPD implemented a wraparound services model. This model is an integrated, multi-agency, community-based process grounded in the philosophy of supporting families so that they can safely and competently care for their children. To this end, the primary objective is for youth to thrive in a permanent home environment, which will be maintained by consistent community support and services.

Table 1 summarizes the difference in services before and after RAP implementation. The RAP model includes earlier and more substantive input from MDT members, and families have a more prominent role in the aftercare planning. In fact, youth and their respective family members are involved in most aspects of the RAP. Additionally, a family’s communication with the youth’s probation officer begins while the youth is still detained (i.e., at the ranch) and continues throughout the youth’s probationary period.
Upon exiting the ranch, each youth’s probation officer will conduct a Juvenile Assessment and Intervention System™ (JAIS) assessment. JAIS™ is a supervision strategy that combines validated risk and needs assessments to help coordinate care and services for youth. The system is designed as a one-on-one interview with the youth and begins with an assessment that determines whether the young person is at high, moderate, or low risk of committing another a crime. The rest of the interview focuses on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-RAP Programming</th>
<th>RAP Programming</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First contact with assigned probation officer during the MDT meeting</td>
<td>Assigned probation officer initiates contact with youth prior to first MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDT meeting held 30 days prior to planned exit of the ranch</td>
<td>First MDT meeting held 60 days prior to release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth served six to eight months on the ranch and six months in the community, including the 10-week prerelease period</td>
<td>Second MDT meeting held 30 days prior to release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After successful completion of the 10-week prerelease period, the youth’s case was transferred to the assigned probation officer for the remaining five months</td>
<td>MDT meetings include the youth and parent/guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aftercare services were decided upon by assigned probation officer</td>
<td>Aftercare services are collectively decided upon by MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service providers were limited to those contracted by SCCPD</td>
<td>Youth serves six to eight months on the ranch and six months in the community, including the 10-week prerelease period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After successful completion of the 10-week prerelease period, the youth’s case is overseen by assigned probation officer for the remaining five months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Services are available to youth during the post-probationary period (six months) for up to one year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Many youth are able to have the same counselor on the ranch and in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wraparound services are available to youth under the age of 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noncontracted service providers are available to youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nontraditional services are available as needed (e.g., clothing, yoga, school supplies, transportation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Youth enrolled in the RAP participate in two MDT meetings before exiting the ranch: one at 60 and one at 30 days prior to exit. During the meetings, the youth and team members work together to determine which services and resources will best assist the youth during the transitional period back into the community. Services recommended may include, but are not limited to: substance abuse treatment, gang intervention, educational and vocational services, family counseling and mediation, job readiness, and conflict management.

Upon exiting the ranch, each youth’s probation officer will conduct a Juvenile Assessment and Intervention System™ (JAIS) assessment. JAIS™ is a supervision strategy that combines validated risk and needs assessments to help coordinate care and services for youth. The system is designed as a one-on-one interview with the youth and begins with an assessment that determines whether the young person is at high, moderate, or low risk of committing another a crime. The rest of the interview focuses on:
the underlying motivation for illegal behavior. This allows the probation officer to provide services and supervision based on need and enables officers to focus their supervision time and resources on the specific strategies that will best help youth to succeed in aftercare. For example, if a youth is determined to be at moderate risk without a drug dependency, the probation officer can focus less time on drug treatment and testing and more time on other needs identified by the assessment.

Probation officers who supervise RAP youth operate under a different paradigm than their peer officers. When an RAP youth is released from the ranch, the assigned probation officer begins what is called the “high-touch” model for probation staff. The model allows probation officers to have small intensive caseloads (15 cases maximum). Probation officers and the MDT spend evening and weekend hours with youth and families, developing a myriad of capabilities, including employment searches; modeling pro-social behavior by taking the youth to community activities; and providing counseling in a variety of areas, including cognitive behavioral therapy and substance abuse assistance. The strengths-based relationship between the youth and probation officer allows the youth to experience setbacks such as probation violations without the traditional, overly punitive response of court intervention. In addition, as the youth’s behavior improves, the level of supervision from the probation officer will decrease. Conversely, when the youth is struggling to comply with court-ordered terms of probation, the probation officer will increase supervision and services.

RAP incorporates a team-based approach to providing services for each youth. The first step in determining necessary services for the youth is through MDT collaboration. The goal of the MDT members is to create and deliver a transition plan that is responsive to the specific needs of youth and their respective families.

This team is comprised of the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involved Throughout the MDT Process</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural members (extended family and community members)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service provider facilitator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involved in MDT While Youth Is on the Ranch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranch drug and alcohol counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranch school counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigned probation counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranch probation counselor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involved in Initial MDT Meeting and Periodically, Based on Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family parent partner</td>
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</table>
There are two phases to this evaluation. Phase I began in the fall of 2012. NCCD conducted preliminary interviews with key staff members designated by SCCPD. Phase II took place in the summer of 2013, during which NCCD conducted follow-up interviews with Phase I participants. Finally, NCCD conducted an analysis of system data to assess how the program impacted youth outcomes, such as probation violations and new arrests.

Phase I

During Phase I, NCCD interviewed eight SCCPD staff members who were most central to the RAP’s development and implementation (see Appendix A for interview questions). These respondents included three probation managers and five deputy probation officers currently or previously assigned to the ranch. The participants varied in gender, age, race, probation experience, and tenure level. With regard to gender, three of the respondents were female and five were male. With regard to race and ethnicity, three of the respondents were White, one was Black, two were Asian, and two were Latino(a).

Phase II

NCCD interviewed five of the eight SCCPD staff members who previously participated in Phase I. These interviews were conducted nine months after Phase I, with the intention of documenting changes in perspective over time as related to program implementation (see Appendix A for interview questions). The respondents included two probation managers and three deputy probation officers who were assigned to the ranch at the time of the interviews. Participants varied in gender, age, race, probation experience, and tenure level. With regard to gender, three of the respondents were female and two male. With regard to race and ethnicity, two of the respondents were White, one was Asian, and two were Latino(a).

Due to rotations and changes in staff duties, three staff members who participated in Phase I were excluded from Phase II. The interview protocol for Phase II was parallel to Phase I with the exception of those questions that pertain to aftercare procedures prior to the RAP.

All of the interviews were recorded, summarized, and coded for common themes.
Findings

Phase I Findings

The interviews from Phase I showed that RAP led to five important improvements:

- Enhanced team collaboration;
- Increased family and youth involvement;
- Increased services and resources for youth;
- Implementation of a validated risk and needs assessment for youth; and
- Completion of evidence-based practice (EBP) training.

A detailed description of each finding is presented below.

Enhanced Team Collaboration

Respondents felt that the team-based approach to aftercare allows youth to receive more comprehensive services. Before the RAP, probation officers unilaterally determined the service needs and supervision strategy for each youth. The probation officer had autonomy in these decisions, with very little input from the youth, family, or ranch counselors. In the RAP, however, the MDT collectively determines the needs, services, and supervision strategy for each youth. MDT members rely on the JAIS assessment as well as input from team members to determine the individual aftercare plan. This approach brings together experts, those who worked with the youth while detained, and the probation officer to assess and determine an aftercare action plan. One interview respondent stated, “Having a team in this process allows the best possible continuum of care for the youth.” Respondents also stated that the MDT meetings can be challenging and overwhelming, as they require probation officers to set aside their autonomy as the sole decision makers in the aftercare process and become part of a team.

Increased Family and Youth Involvement

Respondents stated that family involvement has always been part of the ranch aftercare program; however, it is a more critical component through the RAP. The family now participates in MDT meetings before a youth exits, and they have subsequent meetings throughout the six- to nine-month aftercare duration. One interview respondent stated, “Having regular communication with the family and involving them early in the aftercare process establishes trust and sets the foundation for a successful rehabilitation plan.”

Another aspect to providing a more successful aftercare program, according to respondents, is youth inclusion in the decision-making process. Youth attend MDT meetings, in which they have the opportunity to discuss any perceived transitional barriers. During those meetings, families also have the opportunity to voice concerns, fears, and thoughts on the youth’s aftercare plan. This process allows the MDT to coordinate supervision and provide services that will meet expressed needs. One respondent stated, “In the
previous aftercare program, the family was more like our [probation] subordinate. Probation officers laid out the rules and boundaries and expected the family to follow accordingly, without much input." However, in the RAP, the family helps the MDT to establish rules and boundaries that match SCCPD requirements and include the family’s "house" rules.

Respondents mentioned that the family also plays a more essential role in the youth’s rehabilitation. They are seen as partners and team members in the aftercare process. Before RAP, probation officers outlined and designated rules and standards for the families to abide by during the youth’s transitional phase. Now, with a focus on rehabilitation and inclusion, probation officers rely on the family to support the youth and to help implement the rules and standards agreed upon by all MDT members. As one respondent stated, “We tell families it is not our goal to lock their child back up, but to help rehabilitate them, and in order to make the transition back into the community successful, we all need to work together.” Relying on families to be responsive and communicative throughout the aftercare process supports youth while also holding them accountable.

**Increased Services and Resources for Youth**

A beneficial component of the RAP is the increased access to services and service providers. Interview respondents said that before the RAP, youth were limited to the service providers contracted with SCCPD. Relying on such a narrow set of service providers crippled the ability of probation officers to adequately provide the needed referrals for youth during their reentry periods. For example, one interviewee stated, “There were times families had to find their own services because [SCCPD] did not have a referral or contracted provider to meet their need.” In the RAP, SCCPD has an expanded pool of service providers and others not contracted with the county to choose from. Additionally, youth are able to take part in nontraditional aftercare services, such as yoga and meditation services, job-readiness clothing, school supplies, transportation, home necessities, and others.

**Implementation of a Validated Risk and Needs Assessment for Youth**

As mentioned above, SCCPD implemented the use of JAIS, which is designed to help probation officers determine each youth’s strengths, needs, and risk before exiting the ranch. Those interviewed expressed mixed feelings regarding the utility of and need for JAIS. Some felt it hindered their ability to effectively do their jobs. Others thought it was helpful, as it assisted probation officers to assign the appropriate supervision level during the reentry process. One respondent referring to the system as a guide, stating, “Using the JAIS system helps break the cycle of routine supervision and allows the probation officer to supervise each youth individually.” Again, although this respondent was complimentary, other respondents referred to the system as unnecessary, as experienced probation officers were able to determine a strategy without using a predetermined system.
Enhanced Team Collaboration

As noted during Phase I, respondents felt that the team-based approach to aftercare allows youth to receive more and better comprehensive services. Respondents also indicated that since the Phase I interviews, SCCPD staff have become increasingly comfortable with the team-based approach, which has led to more productive MDT meetings and relationship building between SCCPD staff and service providers. One respondent stated, “The team is able to work better together. Now that we have had time to work through the kinks, the MDT is more cohesive.” The increase in cohesiveness allows the team to produce the best outcomes for the youth exiting the ranch program. Respondents also indicated that learning to lead the MDT meeting took time. The nine months between Phase I and Phase II gave officers time to learn and become more comfortable in their respective roles.

Enhanced Satisfaction in RAP Implementation and Process

SCCPD staff respondents noted that their satisfaction with the RAP implementation and process increased over time. As previously expressed during Phase I, some respondents noted that MDT meetings could be

Phase II Findings

Interviews conducted during Phase II provided information on how probation officers’ perspectives changed over time. The four primary themes that emerged from the interviews were:

- Enhanced team collaboration;
- Enhanced satisfaction in RAP implementation and process;
- JAIS implementation; and
- EBP training completion.

Completion of EBP Training

As part of the ongoing training curricula, SCCPD also implemented an EBP training series. These trainings are designed to help probation officers understand and implement best practice models and to help shift supervision strategies from punitive to rehabilitative. Some interview respondents said that the trainings help to critically analyze issues, focus energy on the individual issues of each youth, and assess why a youth is behaving a certain way. It was also noted that many officers have not completed the EBP training.
challenging and even overwhelming. Phase II showed that these respondents had a change in perception and now described the meetings as collaborative, easier to manage, organized, and a normalized practice. For example, one respondent stated, “I was relatively new to the ranch during our first interview, so MDT(s) were a lot for me to handle. Now, they have become routine: we all know each other, I have a better handle on the process, and everyone at the MDT [meeting] brings different, necessary skills and knowledge to the table.”

Respondents also noted that much has changed in SCCPD’s management since the first cycle of interviews. RAP probation staff now have a dedicated manager on the ranch, which allows for staff to have a designated person who is usually on site and available when needed. This management shift has allowed SCCPD ranch probation staff to pinpoint questions and feedback, and staff feel more secure knowing a singular person can provide the necessary responses in a timely manner. This has also helped staff become more comfortable and reliant on management during the RAP’s transitional and implementation phases.

JAIS™ Implementation

As mentioned in Phase I, SCCPD implemented JAIS to help probation officers determine each youth’s strengths, needs, and risk before exiting the ranch. During Phase I, the respondents expressed mixed feelings on JAIS’s utility; this sentiment has had little fluctuation. Among those interviewed, veteran probation officers showed more apprehension toward the JAIS system. As stated by one of these respondents, “The JAIS is not beneficial and I do not refer to the findings; I think in practice what we observe in a home with a family is better than a set of questions we answer. I rely on my own experiences.” In contrast to that opinion, respondents with less time in the probation field (e.g., those with less than 10 years of probation experience) appeared to find the JAIS system more helpful. A respondent stated, “I use the JAIS to focus on the needs of the youth. I am able to see the youth’s history, so I know where my area of focus should be.” Probation managers also felt that JAIS was very essential to probation officers’ work and associated the trepidation of many long-standing officers to the difficulty in the transitional phase of JAIS implementation.

EBP Training Completion

SCCPD offers EBP training as part of the ongoing training curricula. These trainings are designed to help probation officers understand and implement best-practice models and particularly to shift supervision strategies from punitive to rehabilitative. The trainings are focused on four core competencies: practice skills, motivational interviewing, case planning, and rewards and sanctions. All but one interviewee had completed all the required EBP trainings. In general, respondents felt the training was beneficial. One respondent stated, “The EBP trainings have opened my eyes to a different way of doing things. The traditional way of supervision does not work with all youth, and EBP has taught me other, more effective ways to supervise.”

Also noted by respondents was the need to implement EBP trainings earlier in the probation officer onboarding process. One respondent felt that the implementation would have been more beneficial and useful if probation officers received EBP prior to having a caseload.
Findings From the System Data Analysis

Despite the number of positive comments by staff who participated in the interviews, it is also important to examine the effects of the program on youth behavior. As noted previously, improving outcomes and decreasing recidivism for youth transitioning back into the community is a goal of the RAP. To examine these issues, an analysis of systems data comparing outcomes for youth who participated in the RAP aftercare program was completed. For this analysis, the following variables were examined:

- New arrest while on ranch
- Parole violations while on ranch
- New arrest within six months of program exit
- New arrest within 12 months of program exit

Analysis of data indicates that the two groups had different outcomes. Data show that RAP participants had more disciplinary issues while in their program but significantly better outcomes (i.e., fewer violations) over time. As shown in Figure 1, almost two out of three RAP participants (64%) had probation violations and arrests while in the program, compared with less than half of aftercare participants (48%, p<.01). However, fewer RAP participants had these types of incidents upon exiting their programs. For example, within six months of exiting, only 20% of RAP participants had probation violations and arrests, compared with 42% of those exiting aftercare (p<.01). A similar trend presents within 12 months of program exit: 7% of former RAP participants had probation violations and arrests, compared with 28% of those exiting aftercare (p<.01) (see Appendix B for more detailed outcome measures).

Figure 1: Percent of Participants With Probation Violations and Arrests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Enhanced Ranch Program (Aftercare)</th>
<th>RAP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>While in Aftercare</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Six Months of Program Exit</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within 12 Months of Program Exit</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

RAP implementation has provided youth with a more cohesive, family-centered, evidence-based approach to reentry. Contingent upon the collaboration of stakeholders, the RAP has provided youth and their families with resources and services to assist with the transition back into the community.

The first phase of this evaluation provided initial insight into the RAP’s implementation, and the second phase allowed SCCPD staff to offer additional information and thoughts on the RAP and subsequent time spent in the new programming. During both phases of the evaluation, it was clear that family input and team collaboration have become essential components of the RAP’s success. Interview respondents noted the positive change in relationships and communication with youth and their families. These relationships establish a foundation for a more successful transition back into the community and allow probation officers to more effectively supervise youth and focus on their needs.

According to those interviewed, JAIS continues to remain less conclusive in its effectiveness. Although seen as a valuable tool, some staff preferred to rely on a personal assessment of each case.

As indicated above, the RAP program has profoundly influenced the outcomes for youth exiting the ranch. Although participants in the RAP program were found to have more difficulties while on the ranch, they had significantly better outcomes upon release. This indicates the wraparound services provided to youth and their families create a systemic effect on their behavior choices. It is important to note that many of the probation officers interviewed said the new wave of youth on the ranch entered with a higher level of criminality, which may be indicative of the increase of violations while on the ranch, while signifying the necessary increase of intense services.

As anticipated, implementation has been met with challenges requiring system and operational changes; however, probation officers seem to be adapting to the RAP successfully. Most importantly, the positive changes in youth behavior and lower recidivism rates reflect the much-needed reforms to aftercare.
Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Phase I and II

The interview protocol for both phases included the following questions.

• What services did the department provide through aftercare before this program started?
• Before this program started, did the probation department have any relationships with other agencies or organizations to assist with aftercare/reentry?
• What types of youth were served before this program started?
• Before this program started, how long were youth served at the ranch? How long were youth served in the community?
• What was the relationship between ranch staff and families/parents before this program?
• What does this grant pay for?
• What reentry services are provided under the RAP program?
  » Mental health services?
  » Substance abuse services?
  » Education linkages?
  » Job development services?
• What types of youth are served under the RAP program?
• How long are youth served at the ranch under the RAP program? How long are they served in the community?
• Are there any relationships with other agencies or organizations that help support youth reentry that did not exist before?
• Has JAIS changed how you provide aftercare/reentry services?
• Have MDTs changed how reentry services are provided?
• Has EBP training made a difference in how youth are supervised?
  » Has EBP training changed how probation staff work with one another?
  » Has EBP training changed how probation staff work with other agencies/organizations?
• What has the relationship been between ranch staff and families/parents since the RAP program started?
## Appendix B: Outcome Measures

### Table B: Percent of Participants With Probation Violations and Arrests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>While in Program</th>
<th>Within Six Months</th>
<th>Within 12 Months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>While in Aftercare</td>
<td>While in RAP</td>
<td>Within Six Months of Aftercare Exit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation Violations</td>
<td>25%*</td>
<td>36%*</td>
<td>22%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrests</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>33%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Probation Violations and Arrests</td>
<td>48%**</td>
<td>64%**</td>
<td>42%**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P<.05  **P<.01