

UCSF Study: Evaluation of Two Therapeutic Programs for Juvenile Court Wards in Santa Cruz County

Reviewed by Dane Cervine, Chief of Children's Mental Health.

*A new evaluation report from the University of California San Francisco on the PARK and GROW programs has just come out, the full text of which will be posted on our H.S.A. Intra- and Internet sites. Reports such as this are important steps in bridging the gap between traditional research on single-problem issues in the private sector, and the multi-problem issues encountered in "real world" public mental health settings. **In general, this report seems to confirm that youth tend to commit fewer, and less severe, crimes when involved with intensive, flexible community-based services—as well as maintaining school progress, and self-perception of their own health.***

Much has changed since this research on the Challenge Grant, which staffed programs at LUNA (South) PARK and SEQUOIA (North) PARK sites. Due to the loss of Challenge Grant funding, the north site was closed, but the south county site has been continued in a reduced, modified form with the COE classroom that still operates there. The SB 163 Wraparound project should soon add additional resources to further sustain and develop this site. In addition, the mission of the GROW program operated by Youth Services during this study has transitioned to the county's Family Preservation Probation Team, while Youth Services has taken over the Probation Out.Pt. program mission under the title of the VISION team. However, many of the lessons and results from this research project are quite applicable to our ongoing program development and service delivery with these populations.

One of the key comparisons in this study was the strengths and weaknesses of a site-based day treatment program with an on-site school, compared to a field-based intensive treatment/case management program using other community schools. While the full report contains much more intriguing comparison information, below is a sample of the comparative strengths of each:

Site-Based Program (Park)

Strengths

One of the primary differences between the PARK and GROW programs is the site-based nature of PARK.

What are the strengths of a site-based day treatment program?

- ◆ Physical Site
- ◆ Communication with Multi-Disciplinary Team
- ◆ Safe Environment
- ◆ Structure
- ◆ Probation Contact
- ◆ School on Site
- ◆ Sharing Meals

As a day treatment program, youth check in at a site, in either North County or South County, every weekday morning. Each site is equipped with staff offices for the Program Director, Probation Officers, Clinicians and Supervisors. Both sites have recreational equipment including pool tables, bicycles, and weight room equipment. There is a designated classroom space in each facility, as well as a kitchen and dining area. The presence of a site provided a headquarters for parents, youth and staff in the PARK program. All participants and families knew where they could find a Probation Officer or Clinician when problems arose. Parents knew where their kids were during the day and then kids had a safe place to go each day to learn and play.

Communication between interagency staff from Probation, Children’s Mental Health, and the County Office of Education was made easy due to their collocation at a physical site. Staff were able to share information easily regarding the youth’s progress toward their treatment goals. Interagency meetings were easy to coordinate and facilitate because all staff worked at the PARK site and shared office space.

The physical PARK sites also provided a safe environment for the youth in these programs. The site provided a place for them to go each day where they had Probation Officers, Clinicians, and other recreation and vocational staff who invested in them and in their success. The youth in the PARK program also had a place for recreation, to hang out in a supervised environment, and were provided daily meals.

The site-based PARK program provided structure and routine for youth. Each day youth were required to check-in to the program by a certain time. School hours took place at the same time each day, and recreation and extracurricular activities were facilitated after school hours. The routine provided stability, consistency and structure for the program youth.

Each PARK site was staffed with Probation Officers, Clinicians and Supervisors at all times. This facilitated intense contact between juvenile probationers and Probation Officers. In a general supervision caseload, a P.O. might have contact with a youth one to two times per week. At PARK, probation had a presence in the everyday lives of the youth.

The site enabled the County Office of Education to set up a classroom at each PARK facility. The on-site school allowed for easy transitions from school to program activities. The location of the school also provided opportunities for the program goals to be incorporated into the classroom curriculum.

The kitchen and dining facilities located at each PARK site created an exceptional program environment. The ritual allowed staff and youth to interact on a unique level and created a family-like environment. The majority of staff interviewed agreed that the presence of a kitchen was an asset to the program. The behavior of the youth was at its best when staff and youth were preparing and eating meals together.

Community-based Program (GROW)

Strengths

The GROW program is a collaborative, community-based program between Juvenile Probation, Children’s Mental health and Youth Services. The goal of the GROW program is to maintain and re-connect youth who are receiving probation services with their families or caretakers. GROW provides services to these youth and family, including individual and family counseling, probation services, substance abuse, job, educational and recreational services. All services are out-patient and are provided within the community and with community partners.

What are the strengths of a community-based, family preservation program?

- ◆ Multi-Disciplinary Team
- ◆ Real-Life Setting
- ◆ Level System
- ◆ School Partner
- ◆ One-on-One
- ◆ Flexibility
- ◆ Transition to After Care

One strength of the GROW program is its interagency nature. Probation, Children's Mental Health and Youth Services staff all work at one location. Although services are provided in the community, staff are concentrated at one office, which facilitates communication between the agencies regarding program participants. In addition, youth and family receive multiple services upon entry into a single probation program.

The community-based model provides a real-world setting where youth have to make choices to abide by program requirements. Unlike the site-based program, which provides a great deal of structure for youth, GROW participants must learn to manage the program, contacting their Probation Officer, meeting with their Clinician, attending school, and manage their free time. As participants must learn how to manage their time in order to succeed in the program, these skills carry over once the program is complete and are able to transition easily out of the program.

The structure of GROW is such that a level system is in place for participants who consistently meet probation goals. As a participant meets program milestones, they are awarded more free time, providing them with motivation to move through and complete the program.

Although the GROW program does not have on-site education, the Probation Officers and Clinicians have developed very strong ties with local schools. Teachers and Administrators at the schools are extremely cooperative in sharing information with GROW staff and in working together to support the youth.

As GROW staff delivers services within the community, services are delivered to youth one-on-one. The contact between Probation and the youth and Mental Health and the youth is highly individualized. Staff members were able to focus on the needs of a particular youth and devote the time they spend to that youth alone.

The structure of GROW offers flexibility in designing treatment plans for each youth. Because it is a community-based program, youth can access the services that are appropriate to their specific needs and the relationships they form with community partners can continue after the program completion.

Transition to aftercare is easy because the program takes place in a real-world setting and because services are community-based. Whilst a day treatment milieu is more intense during the program, the separation from a day treatment program is more severe. The nature of GROW allows for the youth to transition easily to other community services or out of treatment all together.

Summary and Conclusions

Summary of Findings

This study produced a multitude of results from a variety of perspectives, creating a complex set of findings. The findings can, however, be sorted into three key domains: 1) Descriptions of the youth served; 2) The outcomes of the services provided; and 3) Descriptions of the services provided.

It is essential, however, to understand that these findings derive from two creative and innovative programs, neither of which represents “services as usual” approaches. For many of the outcomes, there is congruence between PARK and GROW. This could mistakenly be viewed as meaning that PARK is producing outcomes equivalent to a services as usual approach. This is not necessarily the case. GROW, an established and valued program in Santa Cruz County, could easily be viewed as the standard or benchmark to which the PARK program would aspire.

Characteristics of the Youth Served:

Randomization was highly effective in equally distributing the characteristics of the youth served to PARK and GROW. There are extremely few differences between the two programs with regard to the characteristics of the youth served at intake. In both programs, the youth served face an extremely wide and deep range of challenges across all domains of their lives. Youth in both groups were exposed to a wide range of risk factors, including exposure to violence (over 80% of the youth), being a member of a gang (over 40%), having a family history of mental health (over 25%), a family history of substance abuse (60%), being a victim of physical or sexual abuse (over 25%), having a parent with a criminal history (close to 60%), and a history of risk seeking behavior (close to 80%).

Outcomes over time

The outcomes of the youth served include outcomes pertaining to Juvenile Justice, Mental Health, Education, and Satisfaction. In addition to comparisons between PARK and GROW, comparisons were also made between the North Park Program (Sequoia PARK), the South PARK Program (Luna PARK) and GROW. Highlights of these findings are presented below:

Juvenile Justice

The recidivism rates were generally comparable between PARK and GROW. Overall recidivism rates for all sustained changes, including technical violations, ran at approximately 80% at six months post-intake, at 60-66% at 12 months, and with an overall rate of 87% from intake to 12 months. It is, however, critical to exclude technical violations from the rates as these violations are direct consequences of the intense monitoring the youth receive from probation while in these programs. When

technical violations are excluded, the recidivism rates drop to 44% for PARK and 51% for GROW at 6 months post-intake, 40% for PARK and 34% for GROW at 12 months, and right at 61 to 62% from intake to 12 months for both programs. GROW showed slightly more sustained Felony counts at 6 months, PARK had slightly more sustained Misdemeanor counts. In addition, the mean number of sustained counts dropped dramatically over time for both programs, from five to six at intake to fewer than one at six and twelve months.

The results from out-of-home placements show differences between PARK and GROW, with fewer youth residing out-of-home in PARK compared to GROW at six and twelve months. At six months the number of youth living in a parent's home dipped for both PARK and GROW, with 63% and 41% respectfully. By the twelve-month evaluation 18% of PARK youth and 26% of GROW youth were living in Group Homes (Level 1-12), and 11% of PARK youth and 19% of GROW youth living in the Juvenile Detention Center.

Alcohol and Drug

Substance use was a significant problem for the youth served in both GROW and PARK. Approximately 90% of the youth in GROW and PARK used one or more substances at intake. The majority of the youth used more than one substance, and between 10 to 20% of the youth reported using four or more substances. Substance use rates did not drop significantly overtime in PARK, remaining in the high 80% range. The rate did, however, drop in GROW to 54% during the six to 12 month post-intake period and 63% from zero to 12 months.

Education

Standardized educational tests show little change in grade level equivalence for both PARK and GROW. The youth in both programs performed essentially equally, maintaining their grade level over the course of six and 12-month follow-ups.

Mental Health

The patterns of results for mental health related outcomes were complex. On the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), which assesses caregiver perspectives on the youth served, the youth in GROW showed a decrease in externalizing symptoms from intake to six months, whereas the youth in PARK did not show a similar decrease. This was not statistically significant, however. There were no differences on the internalizing sub-scale or on the total problems scale where both programs showed decreases at six months. On the Youth Self Report, a measure taken from the perspective of the youth enrolled in the programs, there were small or few changes from intake to six months in both programs. At 12 months, however, the youth in GROW perceived themselves as doing worse whereas the youth in PARK perceived themselves as doing better on the internalizing, externalizing, and total problem scales. On a clinician rating scale (the CAFAS), youth in PARK were rated as having more problems at intake, and improving to roughly the same level as the

youth at six months in GROW. However, the magnitude of positive change in PARK was greater because of the higher scores at intake. Client satisfaction was rated as high to moderate in both programs at six and twelve months, with no differences between the two programs.

North (Sequoia) PArk and South (Luna PArk) Comparisons

In this study, youth were randomly assigned to either PArk or GROW. However, youth were assigned to one of two PArk programs based largely on whether the youth resided in the southern or northern portion of Santa Cruz County. When Sequoia PArk is compared to Luna PArk, important differences emerge. Sequoia PArk has a much higher recidivism rate for sustained counts (excluding technical violations) than Luna PArk. The lack of differences on recidivism indicators between PArk and GROW is due to relatively higher recidivism rates in Sequoia PArk combined with relatively lower rates in Luna PArk.

The youth in Luna PArk are, however, not comparable to the youth in Sequoia PArk. With regard to ethnicity, Luna Park served a primarily Latino population whereas Sequoia PArk served a primarily Anglo population. Analyses indicated, however, that ethnicity does not seem to determine the differences between the two PArk programs. Additional analyses revealed that youth enrolled in Sequoia PArk had substantially higher levels of mental health related needs as measured on caregiver and youth rating scales than Luna PArk or than GROW. It is possible that the higher recidivism rate for Sequoia PArk is linked to these higher rates of mental health needs.

Process evaluation

A process evaluation described both the GROW and PArk programs and a well respected measure of organizational culture and climate was administered to the staff of both programs. Strengths of the PArk approach included: a physical site, communication with a multi-disciplinary team, a safe environment, structure, probation contact, an on-site school, and sharing of meals. Challenges for PArk included: motivation of staff, networking, appropriate staffing patterns, the changing role definitions of staff, family involvement, and appropriate programming. Strengths of GROW included: a multi-disciplinary team, a real life setting, a level system in place, school partners, one-on-one contact, flexibility and the transition to after care. The challenges for GROW included: Structure, contact with youth, coordinating the multi-disciplinary team, and resources. Both PArk and GROW scored comparably on measures of organizational culture and climate.

A consolidated summary of the results:

The results from this evaluation are quite complex and can be difficult to navigate. Tables 28-31 presents an overall summary of the results across PArk and GROW.

Table 1 Profile of Demographic Findings

Basic	PARK	GROW
Length of stay	Slightly longer (M = 197)	(M = 174)
Gender	Similar	Similar
Ethnicity	Similar	Similar
Current Living Situation		More youth in detention centers and group homes at 6 and 12 months

The tables demonstrate overall trends in the results. Both PARK and GROW generally show positive results across domains, with youth improving on all most if not all major indicators. PARK demonstrates more positive findings on out-of-home placements over time (fewer than GROW), on educational achievement, and on the Youth and Caseworker reports of mental health and functional status. GROW demonstrates more positive findings on re-arrests for non-technical violations (slightly lower recidivism than PARK), on the Parent report of mental health and functional status (The CBCL, more positive change over time than PARK). Other results were more mixed, with one program appearing more positive at the six or 12-month intervals.

Table 2 Profile of Juvenile Justice Findings

Juvenile Justice	PARK	GROW
Recidivism INTAKE: All Sustained Counts Excluding Technical Violations		Higher
Recidivism 6 MONTHS: All Sustained Count Excluding Technical Violations	Higher	Much larger relative decrease in counts over time at 6 months
Recidivism INTAKE: Sustained Misdemeanors Counts		Higher
Recidivism 6 MONTHS: Sustained Misdemeanors Counts	Higher	Larger relative decrease in counts over time
Recidivism INTAKE: Sustained Felonies Counts		Higher
Recidivism 6 MONTHS: Sustained Felonies Counts		Slightly Higher
Recidivism 12 MONTHS: Sustained Felonies		Higher
INTAKE Sustained Counts	Higher	

excluding techs		
INTAKE Misdemeanors	Higher	

Table 3 Profile of Alcohol and Drug Findings

Alcohol and Drug	PARK	GROW
Drug Use: Intake	Report more drug use overall. Greater % use 3 or more drugs	Greater % reported using 2 drugs
Drug Use: 6 months	Trend toward slightly less drug use	
Drug Use: 12 months		Trend toward less drug use over time

Table 4 Profile of Education and Mental Health Findings

Education and Mental Health	PARK	GROW
Education	Better TABE grade equivalent scores at all time points	
CBCL Externalizing	Larger decrease from 0 to 12 months. Greater % of negative change over time	Larger decrease from 0 to 6 months. Greater % of positive change over time
CBCL Total Problem		Better at 0 and 6 months
YSR	Better scores over time	Worse scores over time
CAFAS	Higher clinician ratings	

The strengths of PARK appear to be around out-of-home placement reductions, educational status, and youth and clinician reports of functional status. The strengths of GROW appear to center on recidivism (though only slightly) and parent

reports of functional status. There were, in short, differential outcomes depending on the program.

Importantly, the two PARK programs (Luna and Sequoia) varied significantly with respect to juvenile justice related outcomes such as sustained counts for non-technical violations. Luna PARK had substantially lower rates of recidivism than Sequoia PARK or than GROW. In addition, youth Sequoia PARK had significantly higher levels of mental health need than youth in Luna PARK or in GROW.

It seems clear that the differences in PARK North and South are not fully explained by a greater number of Latino youth with lower recidivism rates at PARK South. There is however evidence gathered in interviews with the staff at PARK that lends credence to why Latino youth at PARK south might have better outcomes:

- The north county site had a more ethnically balanced population, while the south county population was overwhelmingly Latino.
- Latino youth in Watsonville were more receptive to day treatment than were the Anglo youth in North County.
- The cultural emphasis on relationships, families and respect for authority contributed to the Latino youth bonding with the Luna PARK site and staff.

Staffing at the Luna PARK site included several individuals who were bi-cultural and competent in working with Latino families. The similarity in culture and language facilitated trust, genuine rapport building and a general sense of ease among clients assigned to the PARK program.

The following table is used to further explore the effect of program and ethnicity on recidivism. The recidivism rates on sustained counts with technical violations removed for Latino and White youth are presented for youth within each of the programs. Recidivism rates are consistently lower for youth at PARK South with the exception of Latino youth at GROW having a slightly better rate at 6 to 12 months (30% vs. 28%). A small number of Latino youth at PARK north are clearly showing much higher rates of recidivism and a group of Anglo youth are showing similar high rates at GROW, however youth at PARK South are showing low rates regardless of ethnicity.

Table 5 Recidivism on Sustained Counts by Program and Ethnicity

Recidivism Rates	0 to 6 Months		6 to 12 Months		0 to 12 Months	
	White (n =29)	Latino (n =20)	White (n =29)	Latino (n =20)	White (n =29)	Latino (n =20)
Programs	%	%	%	%	%	%
PARK South	16.7 (n=6)	33.3 (n=27)	33.3 (n=6)	29.6 (n=27)	50.0 (n=6)	48.15 (n=27)
PARK North	44.0 (n=25)	87.5 (n=8)	44.0 (n=25)	62.5 (n=8)	68.0 (n=25)	87.5 (n=8)
GROW	60.0 (n=29)	41.4 (n=20)	45.0 (n=29)	27.6 (n=20)	75.0 (n=29)	51.7 (n=20)

An examination of the CBCL, YSR, and CAFAS scores by PARK South and PARK North reveals interesting differences by site (See Table 25). The mean differences suggests that youth enrolled in the PARK North program exhibited more mental health problems as measured by the CBCL and YSR, particularly on the Externalizing Scales.

Table 6 CBCL, YSR, and CAFAS by Park Site

T Scores	Park North			Park South		
	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
CBCL						
Total Problem	34	65.4	8.4	28	56.7	9.3
Internal	34	60.0	10.6	28	53.4	10.1
External	34	69.3	8.9	28	59.7	10.0
YSR						
Total Problem	35	59.1	11.4	30	50.6	11.0
Internal	35	53.2	10.3	30	46.5	11.0
External	35	63.9	12.6	30	56.0	11.0
CAFAS						
Total	36	123.1	38.0	32	120.9	37.1

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine if significant differences existed between the PARK South and PARK North youth on the CBCL, YSR, and CAFAS. MANOVA results revealed significant main effects for group on the CBCL ($F(3, 58) = 5.34, p < .05$) and YSR ($F(3, 61) = 3.10, p < .05$). Examining the univariate analyses, caregivers of youth enrolled in PARK North reported significantly higher Internalizing, Externalizing, and Total Problem Scale scores compared to caregivers of youth from the PARK South site. Similarly, youth in the PARK North site rated themselves as significantly higher on the Internalizing, Externalizing, and Total Problem Scales compared to youth enrolled in PARK South. Despite significant differences on the caregiver and youth self-reports, clinician ratings on the CAFAS did not vary by PARK site.

Again, look for the full report on H.S.A.'s Intra- and Internet sites for some informative and interesting reading, particularly the summary detail at the end.