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is a better
safeguard
of liberty
than a
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Serving as a sub-committee to the
Student Programs and Services Steering
Committee



Gateway

San Bernardino County's Program for Senate Bill 81 Non-707(b) Juvenile Offenders

by Don Nute

The implementation of Senate Bill 81 changed the services for youthful offenders in California. SB 81 returned a substantial portion of wards previously served by the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) to County programs, significantly altering the options for placement of non-violent youthful 707(a) offenders. County programs will now be the 'placement of last resort' for youth who may previously have been sent to DJJ facilities.

SB 81 challenged the resources of counties which previously did not have programs designed to serve juveniles who had committed serious crimes. San Bernardino County, a large county with a substantial adjudicated population, was an example of this dilemma. San Bernardino had previously operated a very limited camp and ranch program. Youth were placed in external programs and DJJ was used in a very limited manner to serve those were unable to be successful in those programs. As a result, San Bernardino County had a relatively small population effected by SB 81, but that population had already been unsuccessful in all other available options. Consequently, the County was faced with the decision whether to include these minors in their high security detention program or attempt to create an innovative approach to programming for this population. Out of this challenge the Gateway Program was born.

The County Probation Department called upon all stakeholders to participate in the creation of this program. Not only were the service provid-

ers (Probation, School, Behavioral Health, etc.) included in the planning but also the agencies and interests representing the program's clients. The planning committee also included representation from the Court, the District Attorney, the Public Defender and private defense attorneys. All stakeholders gathered to identify desired outcomes, define appropriate program strategies, develop placement criteria and measures of success. The result was a two stage program serving wards for a period of up to eighteen months.

Gateway Central would be located within the walls of a secure traditional detention facility while Gateway at RYEF (Regional Youth Education Facility) would be a locked, external facility offering opportunities for community interaction and re-integration. Promotion to Gateway at RYEF, as in the case of all advancement

in the program, is based upon an objective leveling system. Level advancement requires the achievement of specific benchmark activities and is dependent upon a positive behavior record. In essence, youth could enter the program in a detained secure institutional setting and progress to a residential program that afforded opportunities for productive work, education and family contact in the community.

Gateway Central is located within the walls of the San Bernardino Central Juvenile Detention and Assessment Center. On the surface it resembles one of the facility's high security living units. The program, however, is much more. The first indication is that the wards wear uniforms that are designed to instill a sense of identity and



Photo by Don Nute

pride in the program. The minors participate in an enriched program of rehabilitative and educational opportunities. Unit life provides intensive cognitive therapeutic rehabilitative programming designed to confront negative and criminalistic behavior and to provide pro-social alternatives. A program that includes drug and alcohol counseling, anger reduction programming and Aggression Replacement Training is supported by a comprehensive clinical therapy component.

The classroom component of Gateway Central includes a standards-based academic program offering a full spectrum of services. All high school graduation requirements are offered as well as the opportunity to earn a California High School Equivalency Certificate through the Test of General Educational Development.

The school program is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). It participates in all mandated accountability systems and administers all mandated State tests including the California High School Exit Exam and the State Testing and Reporting (STAR) tests. All special education and English learner services are available.

In addition, students begin a program of career technical education in preparation for employment. Career interest inventories are completed and employment skills are developed. As the student progresses in the program, the first Regional Occupation Program class is available in Gateway Central. Students may commence ROP programming by participating in a Residential and Commercial Painting class. This program is linked to academic skills and provides practical workplace experience both in the specifics of painting and the more general soft employment skills.

Through the leveling system, wards can earn promotion from Gateway Central into Gateway



at RYEF. This involves a move from within the wall of the detention facility to a locked external building. Gateway at RYEF is a natural evolution of the former Regional Youth Education Facility which was designed to serve older delinquent youth. The program of rehabilitative programming continues at Gateway at RYEF, but it moves more toward community interaction. Through the level system youth may earn the opportunity to re-enter the community. This is done first through supervised community activities such as ROP classes in the community, field trips and public service activities, then through independent structured activities such as post-secondary education and employment. Youth may also earn the opportunity to re-integrate into their family in a structured weekend furlough program.

The school program at Gateway at RYEF focuses upon completion of a secondary school academic program and transition to post-secondary education and employment. The academic classroom continues to offer a full standards-based curriculum including special education and ELL support. In this setting, however, the goal is clearly identified as completion and transition. The student's academic standing is thoroughly assessed and the choices are examined. For many who are

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approaching adulthood but are significantly credit deficient, traditional graduation is not a viable option. Both the GED and the California High School Proficiency Exam are available as alternatives to attaining a diploma. For those who may reasonably earn a diploma, the school staff works with the student's home school district to assure that he meets all graduation requirements and can be awarded a diploma from his home school.

While the student is progressing toward completion, employment skills are being enhanced. Classroom activities such as resume preparation, application completion, interview skills and workplace behavior training are incorporated into the classroom routines. The academic day is also enhanced with further ROP offerings. The ROP Office Operations class allows the students to learn to use the technology skills required to function in the office workplace. This can be done on-site and is available to students who may not have earned the privilege of community access. Once community access has been earned, an ROP Landscape Maintenance and Design class is available. Instruction in this class is delivered in a setting adjacent to the locked facility and offers real-world work crew opportunities in the community. The class works as contractors to numerous entities including the United States Forest Service to provide landscape services. The students, known as the Diamondback Conservation Crew, participate in work crews with crew leader/foremen, assigned tasks and expected outcomes. The Probation Department supports ROP programs with materials and supplies as well as

additional supervisory staff for the painting and landscape classes.

The academic and career/technical education programs are available to students as stepping stones to further opportunities. Through the earned opportunities of the level system, students who complete the secondary school program may transition to paid employment, internships and/or post-secondary education. This critical element enables youth to begin the difficult transition from the detained institution to independent life in the community. It is well known that the multitude of transition components for youth leaving institutions can be overwhelming and is a significant factor in transition failure. By commencing some of the most important activities prior to release, that pressure is mitigated and success is facilitated.

Gateway planners struggled with the evaluation component of the program. The planners sought to establish clearly enunciated objectives and identify observable and measurable evaluation criteria. Through this search the planners recognized the critical role that data could play in the implementation of the program.



The Probation Department Research Division began a comprehensive data collection process in order to objectively evaluate the program rather than simply justify its existence. The goal of this evaluation model was to create data profiles of every youth in the program. Data is collected for every appropriate element of the youth's history. Demographic data, family dynamic and experience profiles, static and dynamic risk data, school achievement, mental health history, gang and drug involvement and offence history are among the data sets collected. Through this process a picture is established of each youth. Once a youth enters the program a comprehensive record of his participation and success

is maintained. Data is collected concerning each component in which the youth participates and the level of success. This includes school achievement data and disciplinary history in the program.

This prior experience data and program participation data is then correlated to post-Gateway success. Through this process the program staff will build an increasingly large data bank that describes correlations between both the youth's history before and within Gateway to the youth's post-Gateway success. Through this analysis the summative efficacy of the program can be monitored. But more importantly a formative analysis will emerge which identifies the characteristics of youth who are best served by the program, particularly those characteristics that are contraindicative to success and a correlation between success and specific program components. Gateway is designed to be a dynamic program where changes are responsive to the demonstrated needs of the youth. This expanded evaluation program makes this possible.

As critical as it is to have objective data to describe the program there is also subjective evidence validating the program's success. For example, on December 19, 2010 winter rains moved into the Los Angeles basin and into southwestern San Bernardino County. As the rain increased, the streams flowing from the local mountains into the Santa Ana waterway swelled into torrents. At the foot of the mountains, next to a local waterway which served valley citrus

groves, sat the small village of East Highland. On the night of December 19th and the following days the local waterway became the enemy of the residents.



The waterway swelled, burying the village in mud and water. Several feet of mud piled against walls and filled the interiors of many houses. Garages were inundated and cars were covered. The tiny enclave was overwhelmed and their needs were dwarfed amongst the many victims of the storm.

The teacher of the Gateway ROP Landscape Class had grown up amongst the citrus groves and knew many of the residents of the village. He recognized that these people could not wait for the bureaucratic response to the disaster and that they did not have the resources to overcome the crisis on their own. He left his home and family during his holiday vacation and returned to Gateway. The students from his class volunteered to go to East Highland and lend their help to the residents. They took their landscaping equipment, their newly learned skills and, most importantly, their strong backs and work ethic to the village and began digging beside the residents. They returned on multiple days to help the families.

There are many stories of help and assistance that emerge from natural disasters. This, however, is a story about youth who are commonly seen as victimizers, not saviors. SB 81 returned the students who had been the most recalcitrant offenders. During this Christmas week they worked selflessly to help those less fortunate. This was not an opportunity to earn rewards, shorten incarceration or curry favor. This was done because the youth saw that they had something to offer those who were in need. They did the right thing just because it was the right thing.

