

Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act &  
Youthful Offender Block Grant  
(JJCPA-YOBG)



Consolidated Annual Plan  
FY 2024-2025

Prepared By: Merced County Probation Department

**Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act & Youthful Offender Block Grant  
(JJCPA-YOBG)**

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Consolidated Annual Plan**

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## **Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act & Youthful Offender Block Grant**

Government Code Section §§ 30061 and Welfare and Institutions Code Section §§ 1961, as amended by AB 1998 (Ch. 880, Statutes of 2016), combined, and established the planning and reporting requirements under the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) and the Youthful Offender Block Grant (YOBG) programs. The JJCPA program provides state funding for counties to implement programs that have proven effective in reducing crime and delinquency among at-risk youth and youthful offenders. The YOBG program provides state funding for counties to deliver custody and care (i.e., appropriate rehabilitative and supervisory services) to youthful offenders who previously would have been committed to the California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, Division of Juvenile Justice.

An annual JJCPA and YOBG combined plan describes all programs, placements, strategies, services, and system enhancements supported with JJCPA and/or YOBG funds in the upcoming fiscal year. An annual year-end expenditure and data report for JJCPA and YOBG is developed that describes programs, placements, services, and system enhancements funded through either program during the preceding fiscal year, including identification of any programs that were co-funded by JJCPA and YOBG. Additionally, this report includes countywide figures for specified juvenile justice data elements available in existing statewide juvenile justice data systems and consists of a summary or analysis of how its grant-funded programs have or may have contributed to or influenced the countywide data reported.

Government Code Section §§ 30061(b)(4) specifies that the county's Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) shall review and update the JJCPA component of the plan annually. The JJCC is the entity that develops these JJCPA components. The YOBG component of the plan is not required to be developed by the JJCC.

# Juvenile Justice Plan

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## **Part I. Service Needs, Priorities & Strategy – (Government Code Section 30061(b)(4)(A))**

### **A. Assessment of Existing Services**

*Include here an assessment of existing law enforcement, probation, education, mental health, health, social services, drug and alcohol, and youth services resources that specifically target at-risk juveniles, juvenile offenders, and their families.*

The Probation Department continues to offer a broad array of youth services that target the needs of youth and their families. The Probation Department strongly emphasizes risk-need-responsivity principles in response to juvenile crime and delinquency. From the first entry point into the juvenile justice system, efforts to divert youth from the system and preserve the family are a priority. Targeted strategies emphasize prevention and early intervention, child and family focus and teaming, a cross-systems approach to programs and service delivery, collaboration, and trauma-informed care.

The Probation Department Juvenile Justice Plan continues to confront the problems of youth delinquency from a systems perspective. This perspective suggests that the problems of youth crime are related directly to issues involving the families, community, private and governmental agencies, as well as law enforcement, the courts, and the correctional systems. Partnerships with the Juvenile Delinquency Court and various county agencies include the Human Services Agency Children and Family Services Branch, Public Health, Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, including Alcohol and Drug Programs, and the Office of Education, Merced Union High School District, as well as with many community-based organizations explore the implementation of effective intervention services for youth and families at risk of contact with the juvenile justice system or are already justice-involved. Additionally, the Probation Department works closely with local law enforcement agencies to share information and coordinate diversion efforts.

The Probation Department Juvenile Justice Plan has ongoing efforts in collaboration and coordination through local initiatives. These activities are summarized below and in a tradition of collaboration and multi-agency initiatives in addressing the complexities of youth crime and at-risk populations:

- The Do Whatever It Takes at Home (DoWITH) Program, offered by ASPIRAnet, is a collaboration between the Human Services Agency (HSA), Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS), the Merced County Probation Department, and the Merced County Office of Education. DoWITH offers a unique blend of “wraparound” services designated to be flexible and will consider, blend, and incorporate the family's voice in the decision-making process. The strengths of the family are utilized as the foundation of the planning process. The youth's parent is given a parent partner to assist the parent with parenting troubled teens. Parent Partners are parents (mothers and fathers)

who have first-hand experience with the Child Welfare System, and who have exhibited exceptional qualities in their efforts to develop viable permanency plans for their children, an understanding of how the Child Welfare system works, an appreciation of what it takes to be successful, and personal qualities that lend themselves to collaboration on various levels. The (DoWITH) Program offers twenty-four-hour on-call assistance with crisis intervention. Youth can be best served by their families, schools, and communities. DoWITH utilizes the least restrictive, most beneficial setting for youth and their families while utilizing a culturally responsive, family-focused, strength-based, and evidence-based approach.

- The Wraparound Empowerment Compassion and Needs (WeCAN) Program has provided individualized, multisystemic strength-based interventions to ameliorate mental health conditions that interfere with a youth's functioning. The WeCAN Program is operated by Aspiranet and Merced County's other Full-Service Partnership (FSP), which serves children and youth ages 0 to 18 of all races and ethnicities with special efforts to reach those with increased risk factors. WeCAN delivers specialty mental health services to severely emotionally disturbed youths, according to an individualized treatment plan designed with the child and the family. WeCAN meet families in their homes in their own time and collaborate with families' natural support systems. WeCAN provides community services and support to youths 24 hours a day, seven (7) days a week, emphasizing those with serious emotional behavior issues living successfully in the least restrictive normative environment. The program aims to reduce out-of-home placements and provide strength-based, family-driven services that promote wellness, recovery, and community integration.
- The Bear Creek Academy Long Term Program (BCA/LTP) and Bear Creek Academy Youth Treatment Program (BCA/YTP) consist of youth who have been allowed by the Juvenile Delinquency Court to enter a coordinated system of care to break old patterns that have resulted in negative and destructive behavior. Both programs offer a system of educational and evidenced-based program elements that teach the youth new patterns for dealing with a stimulus that previously resulted in antisocial and delinquent behavior. The program(s) teach positive social skills, moral thinking, ethical values, and strategies for successful community intervention. The programs are point-based, and youth receive points for pro-social behavior(s) and for attending school/structured programming. The maximum number of points each youth can earn per day is 50.
- Youth committed to the Bear Creek Academy (BCA) Short-Term Program are allowed by the Juvenile Delinquency Court to enter a coordinated system of care to break destructive behavior patterns. Youth committed to this program are taught positive social skills, corrective thinking, ethical values, and strategies for successful community interaction. This Program is point-based, and youth receive points for pro-social behavior(s) and attending school/programming. The maximum number of points each youth can earn per day is 50. A level two commitment is 1500 points, and a level three commitment is 3000 points.

- The L.I.N.K (Learn. Inform. Network. Know.) program allows youth to LEARN life skills, get INFORMed about available resources within the community, NETWORK with positive mentors, which gives them the KNOWledge they need to be successful in the future. The Probation Department refers based on a moderate to high-risk assessment score. The program is incentive-based and held virtually. Participants receive independent living skills, employment assistance, anger management classes, substance abuse education, Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT), and more.
- Parents of youth ordered to Out-of-Home Placement attend the Parents Supporting Parents (PSP) support group. The Probation Department facilitates the PSP program. The program is designed to help parents develop and strengthen their parenting skills to promote the development of their parental support system, network with each other and utilize each other for support during difficult times and learn about resources available in the community. Also, parents are taught effective communication skills, how to set clear limitations on their child's behavior, and how to manage family conflicts without the intervention of law enforcement.
- The Re-Direct Program provides information to children and parents regarding community resources available to families to prevent deeper involvement in the Probation/Court system. The Redirect Program aims to empower parents to become more effective in their parenting by clarifying their rights and responsibilities and their children's rights and responsibilities. The target population for this group is youth 12 to 18 years of age who have parents/guardians/or a caring adult who is engaged in the life of the youth. This program is a collaborative effort amongst community justice partners including but not limited to: Merced County Probation Department, Field Services and Custody Divisions, Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, Merced County Public Defender's Office, Merced County District Attorney's Office, various Law Enforcement Agencies, Merced County Public Health, Merced County Child Welfare and Merced County Office of Education.
- Supportive Ongoing Services (S.O.S) is a multidisciplinary team that meets weekly to assist families in problem-solving and securing agency resources. The multidisciplinary team consists of Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, Merced County Probation Department, Merced County & City School Districts, Merced County Child Welfare, Parent Partners, and Central Valley Regional Center. S.O.S. aims to keep families together by building on family strengths and providing coordinated resources. All agencies and families have access to S.O.S. Referrals to S.O.S. are routed to a single source, and families are scheduled to attend a meeting with resource providers who are typically already connected to the family. Information exchanged is developed into a plan for the youth, and a follow-up meeting is scheduled to ensure the plan's success.

- The Merced County Youth Accountability Board (YAB) is a volunteer organization initially formed by citizens concerned with escalating juvenile delinquency and the disintegration of the family. YAB provides services to first-time offenders who would otherwise be under-served due to lacking city and county resources. The volunteers strive to strengthen the community by supporting parents in raising their children to be law-abiding citizens. The family meets with a Social Investigator to review the offense's circumstances and create a contract. Once all contract conditions are met, the youth's record with the Probation Department is purged.
- The Learning for Life Program addresses taking ownership and responsibility for actions, learning from mistakes, having an open discussion regarding anger and conflict management with the goal of accepting the consequences.
- The Teen Outreach Program, as facilitated by the Merced County Sheriff's Office, continues to provide informational sessions designed to provide troubled teens and their families with county resources and other assistance programs. The presentation provides an overview of parent involvement and awareness, drug & alcohol abuse, violent crimes, gang violence in Merced, gang structure & recruitment, community resources, and additional information on teen help programs.
- The 3rd Millennium Classroom for the intervention of first-time offenders. The 3rd Millennium Classrooms offers courses for marijuana and other drug use, intimate partner violence and sexual consent, nicotine awareness, and theft and impulse control. All programs use a motivational interviewing style and provide personalized feedback reports. The program(s) aims to engage the youth in a powerful learning experience that impacts behavior. Probation primarily used their Marijuana 101 program. Marijuana 101 is a marijuana education and intervention course used as a sanction for marijuana violations or possession of drug paraphernalia, as well as an educational component for DWI violations. Youths are presented with compelling information about the dangers of marijuana use in a reasonable and balanced manner.
- The Juvenile Behavioral Health Court Program is a court-supervised, comprehensive, four-phase treatment program provided in collaboration with the Judge of the Superior Court-Juvenile Division, Merced County Probation, Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS), Merced County District Attorney, and Merced County Public Defender. The program is designed for youth diagnosed primarily with an Axis I mental illness or for those with a dual diagnosis. BHRS has trained a Dual Diagnosis specialist to join the treatment team. BHRS is now under the Drug Medical Organized Delivery System and can provide services within the community, allowing their counselors and case managers to visit youths at home, school, etc. This program offers resources, tools, and a continuum of care, increasing youths' overall quality of life and decreasing incarceration.



- Therapeutic Behavioral Services (TBS) is an intensive, individualized, one-to-one behavioral coaching program available to children/youth up to age 21 experiencing a current emotional or behavioral challenge or experiencing a stressful life transition. TBS is only available to children/youth with full-scope Medi-Cal benefits receiving ongoing mental health services. TBS can help children/youth and parents/caregivers learn skills to increase successful behaviors and new ways of reducing challenging behaviors. TBS is not a stand-alone service; it supports an ongoing primary mental health service such as mental health therapy or case management.
- CHAT is a Child Abuse Treatment program that provides services to child victims of violence, abuse, neglect, domestic violence, family, school, and community violence regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion. CHAT assists in referring eligible children to Merced County Victim Witness compensation services and provides help and support during court proceedings at no cost. Approved family members may also receive services integral to the child's treatment plan. CHAT staff members provide immediate and ongoing emotional support to youths as they work through loss, anger, sadness and as they begin to reorganize their lives.
- The CUBE is a wellness center that is planned for youth by youth. The CUBE offers a safe setting for youth to set their wellness & recovery goals. The CUBE serves all transitional-age youth between 16 and 25. Services and Resources available at the CUBE include but are not limited to Therapy, Counseling, Case Management, Social Skills Groups, Indoor/Outdoor Recreation Activities, Independent Living Skills Classes, Employment Assistance, Laundry, Tables for Homework, Computers with Internet Access, Tutoring, and a Quiet Area to Relax.

As part of a larger institutional and community mental health strategy, the Probation Department and Wellpath (contracted mental health provider) have identified treatment needs that must be addressed by Title 15 Minimum Standards for Juvenile Facilities and are also in the best interest of the target population. The Merced County Probation Department and Wellpath developed a collaborative clinical team servicing the behavioral health needs of youthful offenders in the juvenile facility. Wellpath has committed to assigning licensed mental health clinicians and a substance use counselor to provide ongoing direct services to the youth in custody. This integrated team is the first placed at the Merced County Juvenile Facility. They provide a culturally competent and trauma-based service approach when delivering services to youth:

- Assessment of mental health symptoms and concerns in a confidential environment upon referral from facility staff, medical staff, or by way of self-referral.
- The clinical team determined individual therapy/rehabilitation at designated intervals as appropriate.
- Group therapy to include the following topics:
  - Aggression Replacement Therapy (ART);

- Social Skills;
- Interpersonal Skills;
- Stress Management;
- Decision Making;
- Stages of Change (Substance Use).
- Family therapy when deemed appropriate by the Clinician.
- Clinical case management, including linkage to substance use disorder services, psychotropic medication evaluation, appropriate follow-up services, and referrals upon release from the facility.
- Collaboration with, consultation, and communication of recommendations to probation and medical staff when permissible and following ethical and legal standards or with a signed release of information.
- Assessment of suicide risk in a confidential environment upon identification of risk and referral from facility staff, medical staff, or by way of self-referral.
- Crisis intervention and stabilization include, but are not limited to, an assessment of risk, de-escalation and management of the crisis, and coordination of appropriate treatment and referrals, which may include recommending transport to the hospital for medical clearance or admission to an inpatient psychiatric facility.
- Regularly, but no less than daily, reassessing youth on suicide precautions to determine whether the level of precaution or supervision shall be raised or lowered.
- Reporting all incidents of known or intended self-harm to facility staff and administrators immediately upon discovery.
- Ensuring that youth who are removed from suicide precautions receive a follow-up assessment by a clinician within twelve (12) hours of removal.
- Working collaboratively with the assigned program specialist, who will act as a liaison for programmatic services.

**Child Welfare Services** - The Probation Department works closely with the Merced County Human Services Agency, Child Welfare Services (CWS) agency, and the California Department of Social Services (DSS) in various ways. Probation staff collaborates with Social Workers and CWS administration regarding cases according to Welfare and Institutions Code 241.1 when youth come between dependency (WIC 300) and delinquency (WIC 602) court intervention. Also, CWS has committed to placing a Social Worker at the Probation Department in the capacity of a liaison to resolve issues related to dependents who have been admitted to the Juvenile Facility, to assist with the processing of 241.1 protocol reports, to generate child abuse and neglect referrals, to conduct emergency response investigations, to provide child welfare services case summaries, assist with case plan development, and participate in planned Probation organized operations.

**Public Health** – Probation placement officers consult with a Public Health Nurse to synchronize information necessary for Health and Education Passports for foster youth. Pregnant or parenting youth 19 years or under are referred to their Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP) / Young Parents Program (YPP) for prenatal services, case management support services, and linkage with pertinent medical providers. Healthy Families America (HFA) is a home visiting case management service for pregnant women (WIC) or up to 2 months postpartum, serving families up to the child's 3rd birthday. Additionally, juvenile probation staff refer youth and their caregivers to Public Health nursing services for ongoing education on managing chronic health conditions.

**Law Enforcement** - Local law enforcement agencies investigate juvenile law offenses and submit new referrals to the Juvenile Probation Division regarding all juvenile matters. The Juvenile Probation Division subsequently reviews and handles all referrals by diversion, referral for informal services, or petition for Juvenile Court intervention.

**Education** - Probation staff works closely with the local educational systems. Probation staff attend Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP) meetings, 504 meetings, Manifestation Hearings, and parent/teacher conferences, when appropriate, for probation youth. Probation staff visit school campuses regularly to contact youth, verify attendance, address behavioral obstacles, and maintain solid communication with educational staff and administrators regarding the activities (both positive and negative) of probation youth. Probation Officers serve on the School Attendance Review Board (SARB) and take a supportive/mentoring role for Merced County families and children who struggle with truancy-related issues.

**Mental Health** - Probation works closely with collaborative partners such as Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services Children's System of Care Division. BHRS through their Children's System of Care, provides a streamlined process for referrals and linkage to services. Through Point of Entry (POE), children and youth referrals are reviewed and passed to the appropriate program, such as Supportive Case Management, Intensive Case Management, Home and Community-Based Services, Family-Based Treatment, Community Residences, and Residential Treatment Facilities.

**Drug and Alcohol Services** - Youth affected by substance abuse issues are referred to as the Recovery Assistance for Teens (RAFT) program as offered by Behavioral Health and Recovery Services. RAFT offers three programs under its umbrella. The RAFT Education Program provides intensive prevention services to Merced County youth who have been indicated as high-risk for substance abuse-dependence issues. The program curriculum is comprised of evidence-based principles and practices intended to motivate and support positive decision-making. The program is a minimum of 7 weeks. The RAFT Treatment Program is a counseling and recovery program for adolescents that meet diagnostic criteria for substance abuse or dependence as outlined by the DSM IV-TR, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders. The treatment program is based on the same principles that make up the long known effective and evidence-based 12-step recovery programs. Youths are encouraged to attend outside 12-

step/support meetings throughout treatment voluntarily and as a continuing care program following completion of treatment. This program is a minimum of 90 days.

**The Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Correctional Complex offers a variety of programs to meet each youth's specific treatment needs.**

While in custody, youth are required to participate in programming designed to enhance practical life skills and reduce high-risk behaviors by addressing trauma. To address the treatment needs of youth while they are in our care, the Probation Department created two positions: the Probation Program Specialist (PPS) and the Peer Support Specialist (PSS). The PPS is responsible for managing and overseeing the day-to-day operations of the cognitive-behavioral and evidence-based programs facilitated at the facility. This includes working with the facility staff to help enhance programming to reduce risky behavior. Utilizing a trauma-informed approach and healing-centered engagement, we encourage youth to understand the impact their behavior (Legacy) leaves behind. The PPS oversees facilitators and performs quality inspections to ensure youth are learning new skills. The PPS also acts as a facilitator of several groups that help teach prosocial behaviors. The PPS conducts independent research and, through data collection, recommends programs that have a long-lasting impact on youth. The PPS is also responsible for planning and executing special events: field days, curriculum ceremonies, holiday events, holiday activities, school graduations, etc. Lastly, the PPS provides staff training on Trauma Informed-Care, Cognitive Behavioral Techniques, and evidence-based practices.

Youth participate in standardized cognitive-behavioral intervention curricula that support evidence-based practices and target the youth's identified needs. Through our partnership with Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), Geo Reentry Services, Prison Education Project, Merced County Office of Education and Merced City Schools District we offer youth programming and services that are evidence-based, individualized, culturally competent, and trauma-informed to address the unique needs of our youth.

A multi-disciplinary/integrated team approach includes the youth, the youth's family, facility staff, and education and behavioral health staff.

The following is a list of different programs the facility offers to address youth treatment needs:

**Anger Management-** Phoenix New Freedom Managing Aggression and Violence is a skills-based 50-hour program designed to address key issues in aggression and violence. Each lesson is supported by a session opener from the What Do You Think? series, a subtle approach to cognitive restructuring (CBT) that includes issues relating to aggression, violence, risk and protective factors, substance abuse, victim empathy, and moral dilemmas. The program includes an ample supply of What Do You Think? scenarios so that each instructor may choose the best one that reflects their specific participants.

**Anger Management- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** is designed to be used by participants with substance use or mental disorders in 12 sessions. Core concepts include understanding anger, developing anger control plans, how to change aggressive behavior, cognitive restructuring, assertiveness training, and learning from previous experiences. The concepts and skills presented in the anger management treatment are learned by practice and review and by completing the between-session challenges in this workbook.

**Cognitive Behavioral Interventions-Substance Use Youth (CBI-SUY) University of Cincinnati** helps to create an action-oriented environment conducive to intensive interactions between group members and skill development using roleplay, behavioral practice, and other activities. The curriculum was developed for justice involving juveniles with moderate to high needs for substance use treatment. CBI-SUY is informed by the National Institute of Corrections principles of effective intervention and incorporates a cognitive behavioral approach. The program heavily emphasizes skill-building activities to assist with cognitive, social, emotional, and coping skill development. The components of the curriculum include Pre-treatment, Motivational Engagement, Cognitive Restructuring, Emotional Regulation Social Skills, Problem Solving, and success Planning.

**Coping and Life Skills by the R1 Learning curriculum** is grounded in proven behavioral health models, adapted from the work of the original authors and experts, and supported by research. The central tools of the system, Discovery Cards, provide a hands-on, concrete approach that enables both practitioners and participants to learn and apply these theories to real-life situations and circumstances. R1's tools are effective and easily adapted for different populations and settings and by practitioners at all levels of knowledge, skill, and experience. By combining the most effective content with a structure for effective implementation, R1 fosters greater engagement with treatment, counseling, and coaching —empowering individuals to live healthier lives and reach their full potential. Discovery Cards topics include Emotional Triggers, Stages of Change, Values, and others.

**Coping, Life Skills, Trauma, and Family Relationships** are part of the Power Source Program. It is an evidence-based program designed to empower youth with the social and emotional skills necessary to forge paths of healthy development and disengagement from high-risk and offending behaviors. Grounded in a belief in each person's intrinsic dignity and worth, Power Source guides trauma impacted adolescents and young adults in discovering their resilience while also building the skills associated with healthy social, emotional, and identity development. Offering a wide range of tools and resources, Power Source enables facilitators to address youth's unique socioemotional needs, risk factors, and protective factors through high impact, engaging exercises, role plays, discussions, games, and meditations. Topics include decision making, mediation, identity building, resilience building, forming healthy boundaries, and personal responsibility.

**Family Engagement, National Fatherhood Initiative Inside Out Dad** is an evidence-based program that develops pro-fathering attitudes, knowledge, and skills, giving fathers the necessary strategies to prepare them for release. The core program sessions feature unique exercises and research-based tools and techniques to encourage fathering from the inside. The optional reentry sessions help fathers prepare for the responsibilities and challenges they will face outside. Topics include Being a Man, Co-Parenting, Feelings, Men’s Health, and Optional Reentry Sessions.

**Family Engagement, Nurturing Parenting Program Family Education and Development Services** is a family-centered, trauma-informed initiative designed to build nurturing parenting skills as an alternative to abusive and neglecting parenting and child-rearing practices. The program is implemented across 15-99 weeks and can be implemented in the community upon participant release. The long-term goals are to prevent recidivism in families receiving social services, lower the rate of multi-parent teenage pregnancies, reduce the rate of juvenile delinquency and alcohol abuse, and stop the intergenerational cycle of child abuse by teaching positive parenting behaviors.

**Family Engagement, Partners in Parenting, Texas Christian University** was designed to address the needs and concerns of parents in treatment programs. The curriculum emphasizes building skills, providing support, and helping parents understand the needs and abilities of children during different stages of development. Objectives include guiding and supporting parents in improving their communication, problem solving, and guidance skills with their children.

**Healthy Relationships- Adolescents, Nada Yorke** is a trauma-informed approach that implements tactile activities leveraging art and media resources to increase engagement with adolescents. The goals of the curriculum include increasing pro-social thinking, building empathy, increasing self-awareness, and improving communication.

**Interactive Journaling cognitive-behavioral intervention** is a series that uses evidence-based strategies to assist youth involved in the criminal justice system to make positive changes to their feelings, behaviors, and thoughts. Interactive Journaling allows youth to apply the topics to their own lives, which helps them achieve their goals for responsible living. It is a structured and experiential writing process that guides and motivates youth toward positive life changes and behaviors. Additionally, it allows participants to identify strengths, search out motivations to make positive changes in their lives and create goals that can lead to sustainable change. The Interactive Journaling evidence-based practice brings consistency to service delivery and keeps program participants engaged and focused on their personal change goals.

**Juvenile MRT, Correctional Counseling Incorporated,** is an aspect of our Cognitive Behavioral Treatment (CBT) delivery. Participants develop the thinking, behavioral, and life skills needed for a healthy and prosocial lifestyle by engaging in MRT. MRT is a step-by-step, cognitive rehabilitations system that is designed to help participants change antisocial and criminal thinking, make better decisions about how to act in and respond to various situations, develop

higher levels of thinking and reasoning, Break the cycles of addiction and criminal behavior CBT is based on the belief that individuals can change their behaviors by changing their thinking.

**Life Skills, Phoenix New Freedom** serves as a preventive measure by addressing risk factors associated with delinquency. By enhancing resilience and critical thinking skills while concurrently teaching practical life skills, this intervention may reduce the likelihood of adolescents engaging in criminal activities. Teaching life skills to juvenile offenders can equip them with the tools necessary to resist negative peer pressure, make responsible/healthy daily choices, and better navigate challenging circumstances. Life Skills topics include hygiene, nutrition, personal organization, physical, and emotional health, and interpersonal skills.

**Motivational Enhancement, Getting Motivated to Change** is a pre-treatment intervention targeted to Participants in the pre-contemplation or contemplation stage of change. Adapted from the Texas Christian University curriculum of the same name, GMC utilizes the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices Node-Link mapping process to acclimate new Participants and prepare them to complete more intense interventions. Topics include Motivation 101, The Art of Self-Motivation, Improving Self-Talk, and Focusing on Planning for Change.

**Motivational Enhancement, Texas Christian University Mapping** is a visual representation counseling strategy for improving communication and decision making that can enhance any therapeutic or psycho-educational exercise in group or individual settings. Evidence shows it significantly improves treatment engagement and client progress indicators and helps compensate for various cognitive and social deficits common among Participants.

**Social Skills** consists of 50 skills that help youth respond appropriately and constructively to life situations. The five-step approach consists of defining the skill, staff modeling the skill, the youth practicing the skill, staff processing feedback with the youth, and the youth internalizing the skill. The 50 skills consist of some of the following topics: Listening, asking a Question, Negotiating, Sharing, and numerous others.

**Substance Use Programming, Living in Balance** Hazelden meets DSM-5 classifications and has been revised to reflect the most current information on substance use disorders. Research-based and listed on the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP), this flexible program draws from cognitive-behavioral, experiential, and Twelve Step approaches to help youth achieve lifelong recovery. Sessions can be easily customized for specific client populations or treatment tracks.

**Trauma, “Voices and A Young Man’s Guide to Self-Mastery,”** is an element of our trauma-informed approach. The curriculum is used to lead group or individual sessions to address the needs of participants requiring trauma resolution. Voices: A Program of Self-Discovery and Empowerment for Girls A Program of Self-Discovery and Empowerment for Girls addresses the needs of adolescent girls and young women. The Voices curriculum uses a variety of

therapeutic approaches, including psychoeducational, cognitive behavioral, mindfulness, body-oriented, and expressive arts.

**A Young Man's Guide to Self-Mastery curriculum** helps youth understand the effects of adversity and trauma, increase communication skills, and build healthy relationships. It is a trauma-informed, gender-responsive treatment program that addresses the impacts of socialization and adverse traumatic life experiences.

**Victim Impact: Listen and Learn, Office of Victim Services Department of Justice** is an evidence-based curriculum that consists of 13 units and addresses the following topics: property crime, assault, robbery, hate and bias, gang violence, sexual assault, abuse/neglect, domestic violence, impaired driving, homicide, and victim awareness. Upon completion, the youth will improve their understanding of Victims' rights/awareness and increase empathy for those harmed by crime.

**Moving Forward and Cactus Flower Programs** is a youth-based (13-20) healing initiative that draws on Indigenous practices to help young people in Merced County find alternative forms of healing, mentorship, professional development, political education, and personal growth. Guided by the Joven Noble curriculum, the program organizes talking circles encouraging participants to share their experiences and opinions on different topics that specifically affect Black, Indigenous, and communities of color.

**Love Notes** program is a comprehensive healthy relationship education curriculum that teaches adolescents and young adults (14-24) how to build healthy romantic relationships, prevent dating violence, and improve impulse control.

**The Phoenix/New Freedom 100** program reduces resistance to behavioral change and decreases antisocial behaviors, including gang activity while increasing linkage to protective factors and pro-social elements. The participants will develop emotional intelligence and empathy, identify risk and protective factors, develop coping skills and impulse control, manage aggression and violence, problem solve, and develop specific action plans. 100-hour lessons were organized into five 20-lesson books sequentially in a closed group.

**The Phoenix/ New Freedom Risk and Decision: Community-Based** is an open group that supports flexible administration for new members to attend throughout the class. Three 10-session units include elements of motivational interviewing (MI) and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), as well as analysis of risk factors, the development of key coping and refusal skills, and the development of a safety net.

**Prison Education Project (PEP)** has expanded educational opportunities for the in-custody population in 25 California correctional facilities and four international correctional facilities. PEP has embraced a progressive and innovative approach to supplementing and expanding educational opportunities for the incarcerated population. By providing academic, life skills, and career development programming, PEP aims to educate, empower, and transform the lives



of incarcerated individuals. PEP aims to create a "Prison-to-School Pipeline" and provide in-custody students with the cognitive tools necessary to function as productive citizens. Their multi-layered approach enhances human development, reduces recidivism, saves resources, and allows participants to ultimately contribute to California's economic and civic life (PEP, 2024).

### **Ongoing Programs:**

#### **Online College**

We have a College Transition Advisor (Tutor) from MCOE who assists youth in graduating high school and successfully transitioning between high school and post-secondary education. The College Transition Advisor advises students on college programs, enrollment, and financial aid.

#### **Career Technical Education: Career Portfolio/Employability Skills Training**

We have a full-time Job Development Training Technician (JDTT) who provides a wide range of career-related services to youth who need additional support to access and enter the local workforce. Some essential duties and responsibilities of the JDTT include the following:

- Assesses student-client interests, skill levels, aptitudes, and experiences and develops individualized education, training, and career goals plans. Provides case management related to the accomplishment of goals.
- Prepares schedules and delivers a broad range of career-related workshops and small group presentations, including but not limited to employability skills, job search techniques, writing applications and/or resumes, interviewing skills, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship.

#### **Regional Occupational Program (ROP)**

ROP offers high school students and adults high-quality courses in several industry sectors. ROP classes are appropriate for students who want to explore career options, gain employability skills, earn high school credits, prepare for advanced education and training, learn new job skills, and/or increase work experience or earn credits at local community colleges. In addition to the skills developed for specific fields, each class helps students develop an employability portfolio, review effective interviewing techniques, and identify sources of employment.

The following ROP services are available offsite and/or onsite:

- **Culinary Essentials (Offsite):** This program provides students with hands-on experience, fundamental skills, and knowledge of food preparation, food and kitchen safety, sanitization, food costs, basic culinary terminology, proper use of kitchen tools and equipment, and customer service. This course allows students to earn a Food Handlers Card and ServSafe Certification. This program includes the completion of an

Employment Portfolio and an internship with a local business, providing entry-level skills and training necessary to secure employment in the Food Service Industry.

- **Automotive Technology (Offsite):** The Automotive Technology Program is structured to serve the trainee seeking employment immediately or pursuing advanced training in a post-secondary Automotive Training Program. The program aims to prepare technicians who can demonstrate the skills necessary to 15 diagnose, service, and repair automotive vehicles. Instruction is designed and aligned to the California State Academic Standards and National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation Industry Standards. Trainees will demonstrate knowledge and skills related to ASE Standards A1-A8 Engine Repair, Automotive Transmissions, Suspension Systems, Brakes, Electronic and Electrical Systems, Heating & Air Conditioning, and Engine Performance. Trainees will complete training internships with local businesses. Trainees will also receive certifications in safety and pollution prevention (S/P2).
  
- **Logistics and Warehousing (Offsite):** Students learn the skills needed to be successful in the logistics/warehousing industry. Logistics & Warehousing include the transportation, freight, warehousing, delivery, and support needed to move goods from producers to customers. Students also learn the importance of workplace safety and proper operation of equipment, including a forklift. SP/2 and OSHA 10 Certification provided.
  
- **Rise to Higher Grounds Café/Rise Program:** Youth participating in the Bear Creek Academy (BCA) Long Term Program (LT), or Youth Treatment Program (YTP) are enrolled in the Merced County Regional Occupational Program (ROP) Culinary Essentials program. Participation in the program is based on behavior, status within the BCA LT/YT program, and overall drive to partake in and contribute to the program's success. Youth receive employability skills training followed by paid work experience. Participants will be prepared for employment in the local labor market with their culinary training, food handler's certification card, experience in the mobile coffee trailer, and work experience with a local culinary establishment.
  - Program Sequence:
    - Participants attend several weeks of Employability Skills Training facilitated by a credentialed Career Technical Education teacher and/or a Job Development Training Technician.
    - The training is held off-campus at the Merced County Office of Education administration complex and/or Merced County Probation Department's Administrative Office to assist students transitioning from school to a sheltered work environment before placing them at local businesses for paid work experience.

- Upon completing Employability Skills Training, students can be placed in the mobile coffee trailer, paid work experience program, or additional occupational training.

### **Other Career Technical Education Program**

- Solar Technology (Offsite): This program provides students with the opportunity to train in the field of solar technology and obtain the specific technical skills and certification necessary to become a solar professional.

*Describe what approach will be used to facilitate collaboration amongst the organizations listed above and support the integration of services.*

All youth deserve to live with a committed, nurturing, and permanent family that prepares them for a successful transition into adulthood. Agencies serving youth, including child welfare, probation, behavioral health, education, and other community service partners, collaborate effectively to surround the youth and family with needed services, resources, and support rather than requiring youth and caregivers to navigate multiple service providers. System partners seek to ensure that all public programs for youth and families provide services in an integrated, comprehensive, culturally responsive, evidence-based/best practice manner, regardless of the agency door by which youth and families enter. This mission includes an awareness of and a commitment to incorporate youth experience and voice into county-level collaborations and partnerships that manage or oversee the delivery of services affecting youth currently in the system and receiving direct and indirect service. System partners ensure appropriate and timely services to youth and families.

Merced County has developed an existing continuum of services that strongly emphasizes collaboration across agency boundaries toward reducing crime and delinquency for delinquent and at-risk youth. The County has a history of developing inter-agency projects by dedicating pre-existing resources and maximizing external funding through various projects. The strengths found through this Juvenile Justice Plan include the following:

- A continuum of care, using graduated responses and programs ranging from prevention and intervention to incapacitation.
- Collaborative service is delivered through programs such as the Juvenile Behavioral Court Program, intensive wraparound services facilitated by our county contracted provider ASPIRAnet, and RISE to Higher Grounds Café Cart Program facilitated by the Merced County Office of Education.

- Programs recognizing the need to deal with the multiple causes and problems leading to at-risk and high-risk behavior.

Pursuant to Section 236 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, notwithstanding any other provision of law, probation departments may engage in activities designed to prevent juvenile delinquency. These activities include rendering direct and indirect services to persons in the community. Probation departments shall not be limited to providing services only to those on probation but may provide services to any youth in the community. The fundamental precept of 236 WIC service is that the Probation Officer will reach out into the community, school setting, housing community, etc., and with the assistance of community-based organizations, school officials and other vested stakeholders will identify and intervene with youth vulnerable to situations beyond their control, youth exhibiting risky behavior within the school setting, youth in need of exposure to enriched/prosocial activities, youth not attending school as directed, youth in need of afterschool enrichment activities, etc.

The Community Based Deputy Probation Officer (CBDPO) position was created to provide community protection, youth accountability, and competency development through early intervention. The CBDPO provides prevention, early intervention, and diversion services to all areas of Merced County. The CBDPO targets at-risk youth cited by a law enforcement agency for less serious offenses or referred by school districts. The CBDPO seeks to apply constructive, evidence-based interventions to hold the youth accountable for inappropriate negative and criminal behavior and address the youth's criminogenic needs when possible.

The City of Merced and Probation Department recognizes the opportunity for community service experiences to benefit the community. The City of Merced and the Probation Department entered a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a collaborative working relationship between the parties and participating departments and to document the responsibilities of each party relative to the provision of the Community Service Program (CSP). This collaboration aims to provide a positive community service program that benefits the community, the participants, and the agencies.

Collaboration and regular meetings across various disciplines working with youth in both public and private sectors are ongoing. Committees meet to address adverse childhood experiences, commercial sexual exploitation of children, out-of-home placements, and gang intervention.

Weekly Inter-agency Placement Council (IPC) meetings ensure systems partners' programs and policies reflect a coordinated, integrated, and effective delivery of services for children, youth, and families.

The IPC is a group led by the Merced County Human Services Agency in conjunction with representatives from Behavioral Health and Recovery Services and Probation Department that provides guidance, advice, and input to a broad range of programs for children and families, as requested by public and private agencies. Moreover, the IPC creates a committee that determines the appropriate placement of child/youth/non-minor dependent (NMD) when considering foster placement.

The Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) approves and advises the Board of Supervisors on developing and implementing a comprehensive multi-agency plan that identifies resources and strategies for providing an effective continuum of responses for the prevention, intervention, supervision, treatment of in-custody and out-of-custody youth. The Council also coordinates on a countywide basis the work of those governmental and non-governmental organizations engaged in activities designed to reduce the incidence of juvenile crime and delinquency in the greater community, develop information and intelligence-sharing systems to ensure that county actions are fully coordinated, and provide data and appropriate outcome measures.

The Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council Subcommittee assists in developing a comprehensive long-term realignment plan to serve youth locally, including identifying facilities, programming, service needs, and allocating grant funding.

The Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Council meets regularly to discuss various issues about juvenile delinquency within Merced County. Representatives from Probation attend these meetings and provide detailed updates on the various programs, future needs, gaps in services, and ongoing challenges within Merced County. To facilitate collaboration amongst the organizations listed above and support the integration of services, the JJDP council convenes to communicate, identify service gaps, and assess progress.

Additional opportunities for collaboration and integration of services come naturally through the many partnerships forged through this and other processes, including the IPC, JJCC, JJCC Subcommittee, and JJDP.

## **B. Identifying and Prioritizing Focus Areas**

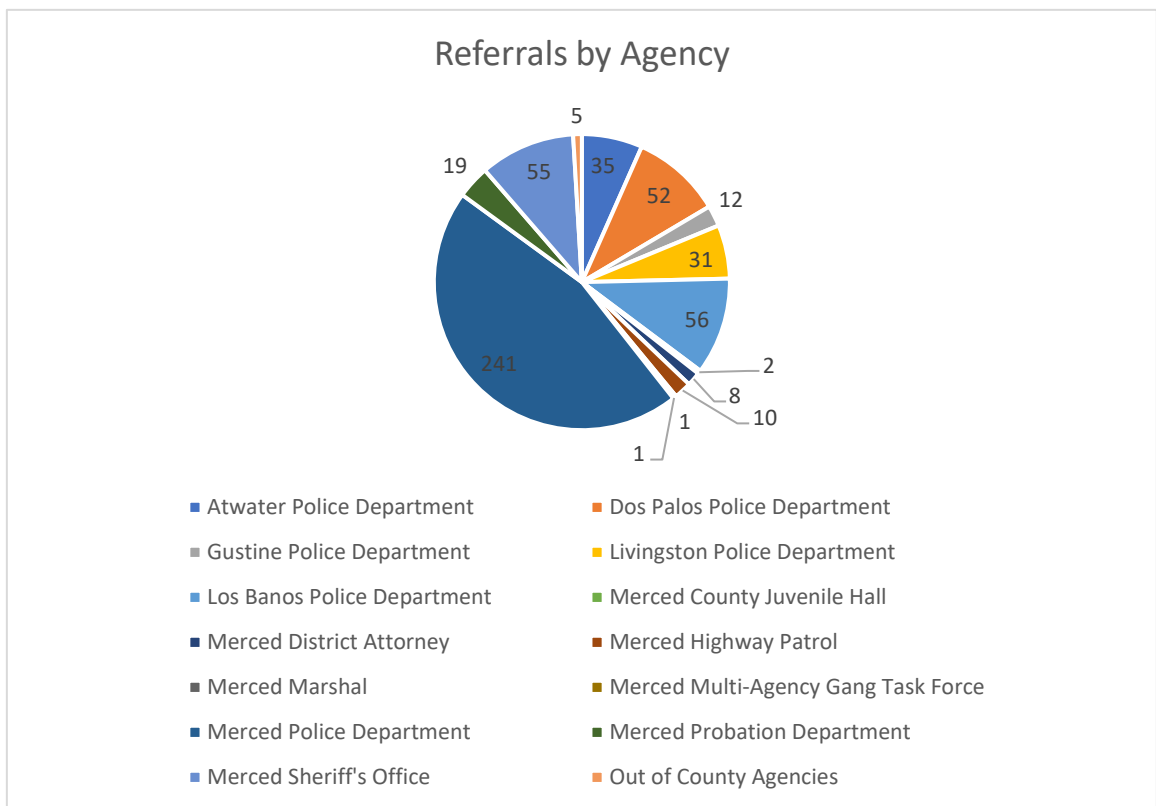
*Identify and prioritize the neighborhoods, schools, and other areas of the county that face the most significant public safety risk from juvenile crime.*

Merced County is situated in the heart of California's agricultural Central Valley. This county expands over 1,979 square miles and is culturally as well as ethnically diverse, with a population of 255,793 residents. Unfortunately, Merced County is one of the most impoverished areas in the nation, with a poverty rate of 20.3%, an unemployment rate of 7.8%, a lack of affordable housing, and low educational attainment levels (U.S. Census, 2023). Due to these economic conditions, many Merced County residents struggle to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and transportation.

While most of the population is clustered in Merced, Los Banos, and Atwater, many families live in small and rural communities. Public transportation in those rural communities is non-

existent, and long distances to services create a major logistical problem for service providers and those seeking services. In an environment of low income, high levels of poverty, low levels of education, high unemployment, a high percentage of young children, and high rates of drug-related crime, it is no surprise that Merced County experiences high rates of homelessness, child abuse, neglect, and offenses committed by youth. While Merced County has many positive attributes, pervasive poverty influences many of the issues and options discussed in this report.

As such, the Probation Department continues to focus on providing responsive programming throughout Merced County. The focus of juvenile prevention and intervention is county-wide. A greater emphasis on areas of the county where most referrals are generated will result in decreased public safety risk from juvenile crime. In the following chart, approximately 46% of referrals from July 2023 to January 2024, are generated in the City of Merced. Strategies such as providing localized programs or programs offered in a virtual platform increased access to transportation to attend said programs, and language interpreters take the programs and information directly to the lesser served populations. Implementing programs that work with the whole family, and not just individual youth, provides a more in-depth, holistic approach to dealing with the presenting offense, as well as to provide preventative services to lessen re-occurrence.



The problems of at-risk and high-risk youth in Merced County are much like jurisdictions throughout the country. Previous research has shown that youth with the most significant risk factors are best served in prevention programs. The Probation Department uses the Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT) assessment to determine risk level to re-offend, identify targets of intervention, and monitor the client's progress. The PACT is validated, reliable, representative of risk and protective factors, representative of static and dynamic factors, and clinically relevant.

At-risk and high-risk youth are composed of individuals who may meet one or more of the following problem criteria:

- **School:** Those with truancy and attendance issues; those with behavior and adjustment problems; those in danger of failing; and youth either dropping out or in danger of dropping out.
- **Family:** Those youth residing with families in conflict (including violence and abuse in the home); children of substance abusers; and those whose parents lack fundamental parenting skills. Family issues are often a precursor to youth failing to attend school.
- **Community (Anti-social peers and premature independence):** Those youth involved in gang or gang-like activities; those youth who are at risk of developing attachments to anti-social friends and norms, and engaging in activities outside convention; those exhibiting signs of early independence through rebelliousness and early initiation into problem behaviors such as truancy; and those out of parental control, and/or suffering from a mental health disorder such as depression, anxiety, and trauma impairing their normal functioning. These youth are typically the most likely to avoid the educational system.
- **Sexual activity and resulting parenthood:** Youth who engage in sexual activity, often resulting in early parenthood, create a range of problems for themselves and their children.
- **Substance Abuse:** Youth consuming substances can lead to problems at school, cause or aggravate physical and mental health-related issues, promote poor peer relationships, and place stress on the family. Continued use can develop into lifelong issues such as substance dependence, chronic health problems, and social and financial consequences.
- **Behavioral Health:** By age 14, over half of the mental health conditions begin. 75% of mental health conditions develop by age 24. The normal personality and behavior changes of adolescence may mimic or mask symptoms of a mental health condition.

Early engagement and support are crucial to improving outcomes and increasing the promise of recovery.

- **Poverty:** Youth living in poverty are pressured to survive in low socioeconomic communities that lack resources such as job opportunities, financial support, and access to affordable housing. This lack of resources in these communities can impede youth from becoming successful in a society that favors those with money.

### **C. Juvenile Justice Action Strategy**

*Describe your county's juvenile justice action strategy. Include an explanation of your county's continuum of responses to juvenile crime and delinquency as well as a description of the approach used to ensure a collaborative and integrated approach for implementing a system of swift, certain, and graduated responses for at-risk youth and juvenile offenders.*

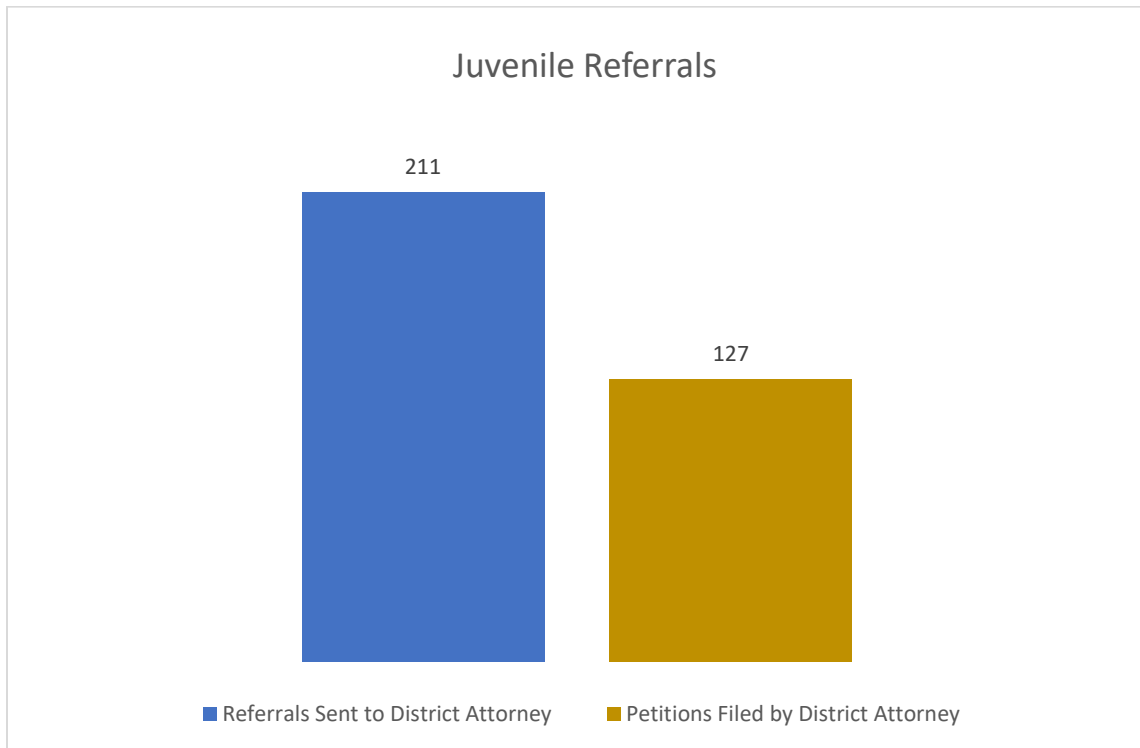
The Juvenile Justice Plan adopted several strategies to address both prevention and intervention of what was, at that time, a growing juvenile delinquency problem within Merced County. By adopting these strategies and implementing numerous programs supported by YOBG and JJCPA funding sources, Juvenile Delinquency in Merced County has decreased significantly over the last decade. Preventative services will remain a focus.

The Probation Department works collaboratively with our Child Welfare partners to ensure that engagement is at the least restrictive level within the various systems. Protocols are established for staff cases according to the 241.1 Welfare & Institutions Code. Weekly meetings of the IPC ensure system partner programs and policies reflect a coordinated, integrated, and effective delivery of services for children, youth, and families. As public and private agencies requested, the IPC continues to provide guidance, advice, and input to a broad range of programs for children and families.

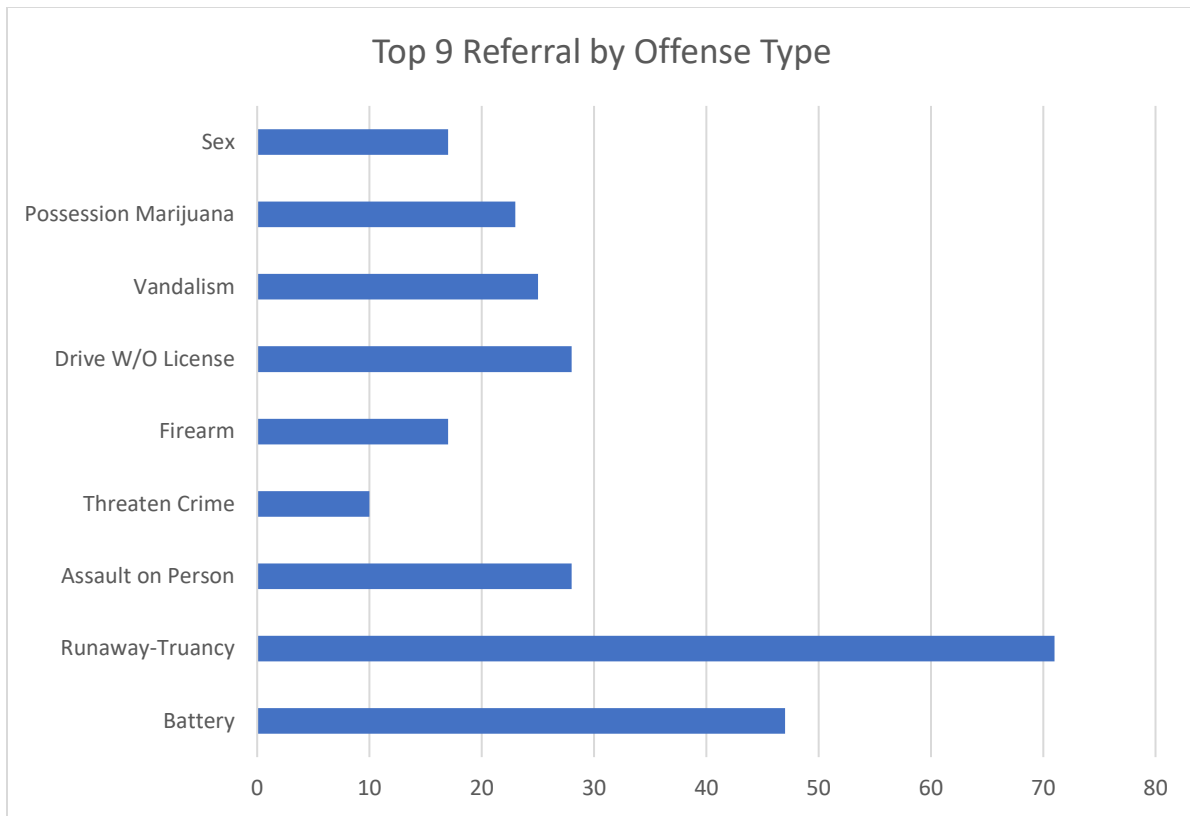
The Probation Department continues to be proactive in implementing evidence-based strategies, establishing strong collaborative relationships, and developing needed programs and interventions both within the department and with outside agencies. This approach has contributed to the significant reduction in juvenile arrests, incarceration, and youth under correctional supervision. The youths under supervision have significantly higher needs, and Merced County has continued looking at strategies for addressing this youth population. Probation's juvenile justice strategy is to continue to be evidence and strength-based, as well as collaborative and balanced in terms of offender accountability and rehabilitation.



The Juvenile Services Division oversees all juvenile matters referred to the Probation Department by other law enforcement agencies in Merced County. Probation staff process hundreds of referrals from law enforcement agencies for youth alleged to have committed law violations, those beyond parental control, curfew violators, truants, or runaways. In the following chart, between July 2023 and January 2024, the Probation Department forwarded 211 referrals to the Merced County District Attorney’s Office for review. A petition was filed with the juvenile court on 127 of those referrals.



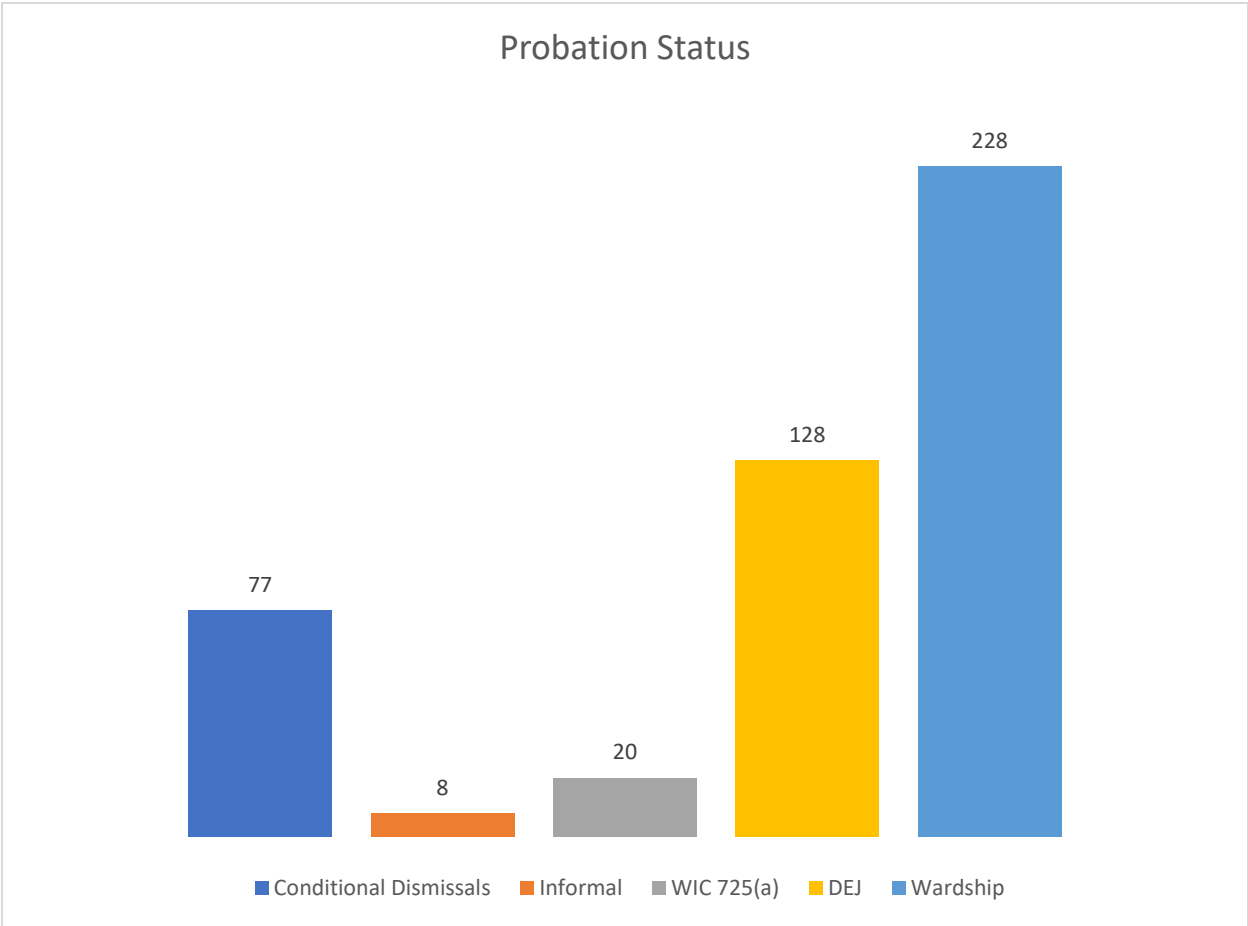
In the following chart, between July 2023 and January 2024, the Probation Department identified the top 9 received referrals by offense type.



In a review of the data presented above, referrals for Runaway still make up the largest category of referrals received. Youth who run away face new problems like not having money, food to eat, a safe place to sleep, or anyone to look out for them. Youth with no home and no money become desperate, doing anything to meet their basic needs. Because of this, they often find themselves in risky situations.

As previously mentioned, the Community Based Deputy Probation Officer (CBDPO) intends to target at-risk populations in underserved and high-risk neighborhoods. The CBDPO provides prevention, early intervention, and diversion services and applies constructive, evidence-based interventions to hold the youth accountable for inappropriate negative and criminal behavior and address the youth's criminogenic needs when possible.

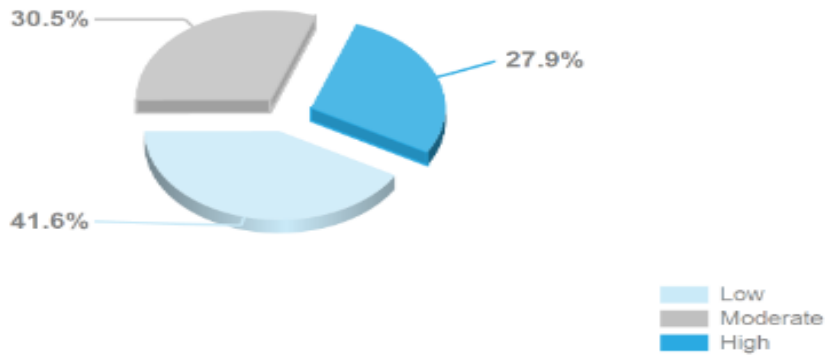
The following chart, between July 2023 and January 2024, shows the number of youths under supervision and type of supervision (the totals below were calculated on a daily average).



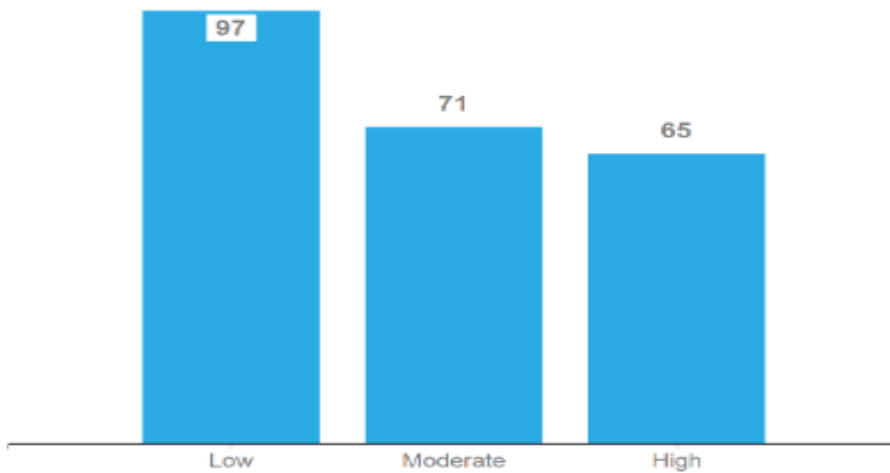
The Probation Department has adopted the use of detailed assessments of all juvenile referrals to help categorize the level of supervision warranted and to provide targeted interventions to address the specific criminogenic needs of youth. In the following chart, between July 2023 and January 2024, the Probation Department identified the average number of cases assessed at

specific level. On average, 65 youth were assessed as high risk, 71 were assessed as moderate risk, and 97 were assessed as low risk.

**Percentage**  
PERCENTAGE GROUPED BY RISK LEVEL



**Count**  
COUNT GROUPED BY RISK LEVEL



To ensure an integrated approach for a system of swift, certain, and graduated responses for youth, the Probation Department utilizes a “Graduated Positive Response Grid” for an incentive-based approach and a “Graduated Response Grid” for redirecting and encouraging behavior change. The Graduated Positive Response Grid provides a continuum of motivational incentives to achieve desired behaviors and decrease undesirable behaviors for youth under supervision to the extent attainable. For a graduated positive response system to be effective in modifying behavior, probation must adhere to certainty and magnitude.

	LOW LEVEL	MODERATE LEVEL	HIGH LEVEL	
DESIRED BEHAVIOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adhering to Curfew</li> <li>Keeping Appointments</li> <li>Enrolled in Required Programs</li> <li>Enrolled in School</li> <li>Improved Family Relationships</li> <li>Modeling Pro-Social Skills</li> <li>Engaged in Physical Activities</li> <li>Improved Hygiene</li> <li>Arranging Own Transportation</li> <li>Positive Collateral Contacts/Reports</li> <li>Making good choices</li> <li>Keeping Program Appointments</li> <li>Attending Court Hearings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clean drug/alcohol test</li> <li>Improved School Attendance</li> <li>Program Attendance/Participation</li> <li>New Pro-Social Activity</li> <li>Making Restitution/Fine Payment</li> <li>Identifying Own Trigger(s)</li> <li>Active Participation in Case Planning</li> <li>Positive Court Review</li> <li>Association with Pro-Social Peers</li> <li>Demonstrates Effective Coping Skills</li> <li>Self-referral to Program</li> <li>Applying for Gainful Employment</li> <li>Reduction in Risk Level(s)</li> <li>Completing Registration Requirement</li> <li>Taking Prescription Medication</li> <li>Display Sincere Appreciation for Others</li> <li>Improved Grades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Securing Gainful Employment</li> <li>Completing a Program</li> <li>Secure &amp; Maintain Housing</li> <li>Completion of Case Plan Goal/Objective</li> <li>Gang Tattoo Removal</li> <li>Membership in Pro-Social Organization</li> <li>Self-sufficiency</li> <li>Obtain High School Diploma/GED</li> <li>Obtain Driver’s License</li> <li>Six Months of Sobriety</li> <li>Payment of Restitution/Fines in Full</li> <li>Disassociation with Anti-Social Peers</li> <li>Leadership Role in a Probation Program</li> <li>Acting as Peer Mentor</li> </ul>	DESIRED BEHAVIOR
SUGGESTED RESPONSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Verbal Positive Praise/Reinforcement</li> <li>E-mail/Text Message Affirmation</li> <li>Snacks</li> <li>Drinks</li> <li>Achievement Coin</li> <li>Note Card with Positive Message</li> <li>Bus Tokens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any Low-Level Response</li> <li>Bus Pass</li> <li>Five/ Seven Dollar Gift Card(s)</li> <li>Decreased Reporting Requirement</li> <li>Decreased Drug/Alcohol Testing</li> <li>Positive Report to Court/Judge (Ex-Parte)</li> <li>Reduced Level of Supervision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any Low- or Moderate-Level Response</li> <li>Certificate of Completion</li> <li>Recommendation to Modify Term/Condition of Probation</li> <li>Ten Dollar Gift Card (s)</li> <li>Early Termination of Probation</li> </ul>	SUGGESTED RESPONSES

Probation utilizes a “Graduated Response Grid” to bring more uniformity and objectivity to the Probation Officer's response to a client's behavior to reduce violations. The implementation of evidence-based responses to violations of probation enhances community safety and promotes behavior change. It is also important to recognize and acknowledge the signs of progress and to encourage youth toward greater compliance and positive life accomplishments.

	MINOR VIOLATIONS	INTERMEDIATE VIOLATIONS	SERIOUS VIOLATIONS
PROBATION VIOLATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Truancy (2 days of varied unexcused absences w/in 1 mo.)</li> <li>• School Disruption resulting in on campus suspension/detention</li> <li>• Curfew Violation (2 or less within 1 mo.)</li> <li>• Failure to Keep Appointments/Maintain Contact with DPO (whereabouts known)</li> <li>• Leaving Home Without Permission for less than 24hrs (1 time w/in 1/mo.)</li> <li>• Leaving County Without Permission (1 time w/in mo. – whereabouts known)</li> <li>• Positive Drug Screen or Admission (marijuana), Alcohol Use/Possession, Tobacco Use/Possession (1 time w/in 1 mo.)</li> <li>• Traffic Infraction</li> <li>• Failure to Attend Court Ordered Programming (2 or less times w/in 1 month)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple (3 or more) minor violations w/in 30 days</li> <li>• Truancy (3-5 days of varied unexcused absences w/in 1 mo.)</li> <li>• School Disruption resulting in off campus suspension</li> <li>• Curfew Violation (3-4 within 1 mo.)</li> <li>• Leaving Home Without Permission for less than 24hrs (2 times w/in 1 mo.)</li> <li>• Positive Drug Screen or Admission (marijuana), Alcohol use or Possession, Tobacco use or possession (2 w/in 3 months)</li> <li>• Association with Restricted Persons and/or Wards</li> <li>• Entering Prohibited Places</li> <li>• Arrest for Non-Violent Misdemeanor</li> <li>• Failure to Attend Court Ordered Programming (4 or less times w/in 2 mo.)</li> <li>• Failure to Attend Court Ordered Counseling (1-time w/in 1 mo.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple (3 or more) intermediate violations w/in 30 days</li> <li>• School Expulsion</li> <li>• Leaving Home Without Permission for more than 48hrs (whereabouts unknown)</li> <li>• Positive Drug Screen or Admission for any substance other than marijuana</li> <li>• Violate no Contact Order - Victim</li> <li>• Association with Gang Members and/or Co-defendants, Felons/Ex-Felons</li> <li>• Arrest for Violent Misdemeanor or any Felony</li> <li>• Leaving Court Ordered Placement</li> <li>• Refusal to Test</li> <li>• Tamper with GPS Device/Equipment</li> <li>• Tamper with Drug Test</li> <li>• Leave state/county w/o permission (Whereabouts Unknown)</li> </ul>
LOW RISK	RESPONSE FOR MINOR VIOLATIONS	RESPONSE FOR INTERMEDIATE VIOLATIONS	RESPONSE FOR SERIOUS VIOLATIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal Reprimand</li> <li>• Letter of Apology</li> <li>• Writing Assignment on Condition Violated</li> <li>• Essay, Book Report or Thinking Report</li> <li>• Home Based Chores (up to 7 days)</li> <li>• Loss of Home-based Privileges (up to 7 days)</li> <li>• Restriction on Curfew and/or Association(s) (Up to 7 days)</li> <li>• Community Service (up to 8 hrs.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any minor level sanction(s)</li> <li>• Meeting with Youth/Parent/School (CFT)</li> <li>• Referral to MH/RAFT counseling</li> <li>• Referral to Breaking Barriers (Westside)</li> <li>• Increased reporting (in person or by phone)</li> <li>• Community Service (up to 16 hours)</li> <li>• Increase Drug/Alcohol Testing</li> <li>• Recommend modification of terms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any minor or intermediate level sanction(s)</li> <li>• Referral to WRAP Services</li> <li>• Restrictions on Curfew/Location(s)/ Association(s) (up to 14 days)</li> <li>• BCA Home Commitment Level II</li> <li>• Increase Supervision Level</li> <li>• Community Service (up to 40 hours)</li> <li>• Home-Based Chores (up to 14 days)</li> <li>• Loss of Home-Based Privileges (up to 14 days)</li> </ul>
MODERATE RISK	RESPONSE FOR MINOR VIOLATIONS	RESPONSE FOR INTERMEDIATE VIOLATIONS	RESPONSE FOR SERIOUS VIOLATIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal Reprimand</li> <li>• Meeting with Parent/Youth/School (CFT)</li> <li>• Essay, Book Report or Thinking Report</li> <li>• Home-Based Chores (up to 7 days)</li> <li>• Loss of Home-Based Privileges (up to 7 days)</li> <li>• Increased Reporting (by phone or in person)</li> <li>• Restrictions on Curfew and/or Associations (up to 7 days)</li> <li>• Community Service (up to 16 hours)</li> <li>• Increase Drug/Alcohol Testing</li> <li>• Recommend modification of terms</li> <li>• Referral to MH/RAFT counseling</li> <li>• Referral to Breaking Barriers (Westside)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any minor level sanction(s)</li> <li>• Home-Based Chores (up to 14 days)</li> <li>• Loss of Home-Based Privileges (14 days)</li> <li>• Restrictions on Curfew and Association (up to 14 days)</li> <li>• Community Service (up to 24 hours)</li> <li>• BCA Home Commitment Level II</li> <li>• Increase Supervision Level</li> <li>• Referral to WRAP Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any minor or intermediate level sanction(s)</li> <li>• Community Service (up to 40 hours)</li> <li>• BCA Home Commitment Level III</li> <li>• Increase Supervision Level</li> <li>• Detention (Requires SPO Approval)</li> <li>• Referral to L.I.N.K. (Eastside of County)</li> </ul>
HIGH RISK	RESPONSE FOR MINOR VIOLATIONS	RESPONSE FOR INTERMEDIATE VIOLATIONS	RESPONSE FOR SERIOUS VIOLATIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal Reprimand</li> <li>• Home Based Chores (up to 14 days)</li> <li>• Loss of Home-Based Privileges (up to 14 days)</li> <li>• Restriction on Curfew and/or Association(s) (up to 14 days)</li> <li>• Essay, Book Report or Thinking Report</li> <li>• Increase Reporting (by phone or in person)</li> <li>• Community Service (up to 24 hours)</li> <li>• BCA Home Commitment Level II</li> <li>• Increase Drug/Alcohol testing</li> <li>• Recommend modification of terms</li> <li>• Referral to MH/RAFT counseling</li> <li>• Referral to Breaking Barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any minor level sanction(s)</li> <li>• Community Service (up to 40 hours)</li> <li>• BCA Home Commitment Level III</li> <li>• Referral to WRAP Services</li> <li>• Home Based Chores (up to 30 days)</li> <li>• Loss of Home-Based Privileges (up to 30 days)</li> <li>• Restriction on Curfew and/or Association(s) (up to 30 days)</li> <li>• Referral to L.I.N.K. (Eastside of County)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any minor or intermediate level sanction(s)</li> <li>• Detention (Requires SPO Approval)</li> </ul>

As a result of various interventions, Merced County has seen the level of out-of-home residential placements drop significantly. Increased and better-coordinated services, both in the community and in the Juvenile Facility, have resulted in lowered populations of youth on formal probation and reduced numbers of youth requiring detention.

The Merced County Probation Department intends to utilize all the programming and services funded through the YOBG in coordination with the services provided through JJCPA to provide supervision and rehabilitative services to realigned youth.

## **Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Correctional Complex**

The juvenile facility continues to provide youth with the Behavioral Management System (BMS) that promotes positive behavior by encouraging adherence to facility rules, providing pro-social and skill-building chores to willing residents, and recognizing hard work and good behavior with enhanced privileges. The BMS is a multi-level system designed to increase desired behaviors through reinforcements and decrease unwanted behaviors through a menu of appropriate sanctions. The system is designed around effective interventions and follows best practice guidelines of effective reinforcement and sanctioning behavior.

The BMS is designed on several principles of effective reinforcement/sanction, relying especially on two primary principles: immediacy and consistency. The BMS allows youth and staff to promptly reinforce and sanction behavior while providing opportunities to reinforce long-term positive change. The BMS is comprised of a three-tiered system that is designed to address immediate, short-term, and long-term behavior.

### **D. Comprehensive Plan Revisions**

*Describe how your Plan has been updated for this year.*

#### **JJCC Funded Program, Strategy and/or System Enhancement**

No updates for this year.

## **Part II. Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) – Government Code Section 30061(b)(4))**

### **A. Information Sharing and Data**

*Describe your information systems and their ability to facilitate the sharing of data across agencies within your county. Describe the data obtained through these systems and how those data are used to measure the success of juvenile justice programs and strategies.*

The Probation Department utilizes a web-based SaaS (software as a service) solution that enables the department to coordinate, communicate, record, and track each step of a client's supervision process. Built-in features allow for streamlined client management, while multiple layers of security provide system protection at a centralized data center, application, and user levels that is Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) compliant and meets Amazon GovCloud requirements.

The system allows for full case monitoring and reporting capabilities for adult and juvenile clients. Additionally, the system was developed with institution management in mind. The scalable and flexible system allows seamless tracking, recording, moving, and reporting. Moreover, the system provides for:

- Integrated forms generation
- Document management
- Reduce missed events by sending automatic appointment reminders
- Integration with 3<sup>rd</sup>. party assessment providers
- Reports generation (Reports can be shared with agencies within the County)

## **B. Juvenile Justice Coordinating Councils**

*Does your county have a fully constituted Juvenile Justice Council (JJCC) as Prescribed by Welfare & Institutions Code 749.22?*

Yes

*If no, please explain what vacancies exist on your JJCC, when those vacancies began, and your plan for filling them.*

## **C. Funded Programs, Strategies, and/or System Enhancements**

Describe each program, strategy, and/or system enhancement that will be supported with funding from JJPCA, identifying anything that is co-funded with Youthful Offender Block Grant (YOBG) money.

### **JJCC Funded Program, Strategy and/or System Enhancement**

#### ***Program Name:***

Juvenile Field Supervision Services

#### ***Evidence Upon Which It Is Based:***

The officers assigned to the Juvenile Field Supervision Services Unit utilize the Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT) to determine what level of supervision a youth will receive. Supervision by risk level is a fundamental principle of evidence-based supervision supported by extensive research. Moreover, the Probation Department utilizes a Response Matrix to bring more uniformity and objectivity to the Deputy Probation Officer's response to a client's



behavior. Nevertheless, the primary role of our Deputy Probation Officers is to keep communities safe and act as change agents by mobilizing youth into change and action, utilizing other evidence-based practices such as motivational interviewing, and facilitating cognitive-behavioral treatment programs.

***Description:***

Since the inception of the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA), the Merced County Probation Department has utilized the allocation for school-based supervision. The initial focus was to supervise juvenile probationers and provide prevention and intervention services to other students who exhibit at-risk behaviors such as truancy, tardiness, and poor academics. Over time, the various school districts evolved the utilization of Deputy Probation Officers more for campus security rather than utilizing evidence-based approaches for addressing youth behavior.

The Merced County Probation Department presented a modification to employ a three-pronged approach to addressing juvenile delinquency: 1. Caseload reduction; 2. Assign minors to caseloads based on risk and need; 3. Provide cognitive behavioral services to address dynamic needs. First, Probation implemented evidence-based supervision practices. Professionals recognized for identifying these practices, including the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), recommend minor-to-staff ratios of between 15 and 50:1. APPA's 2006 publication, *Caseload Standards for Probation and Parole*, was authored by Bill Burrell, Associate Professor, Temple University. Burrell recommended a 15:1 ratio for highest risk, 30:1 for moderate to high, 100:1 for low, and no supervision for lowest (administrative supervision in those cases).

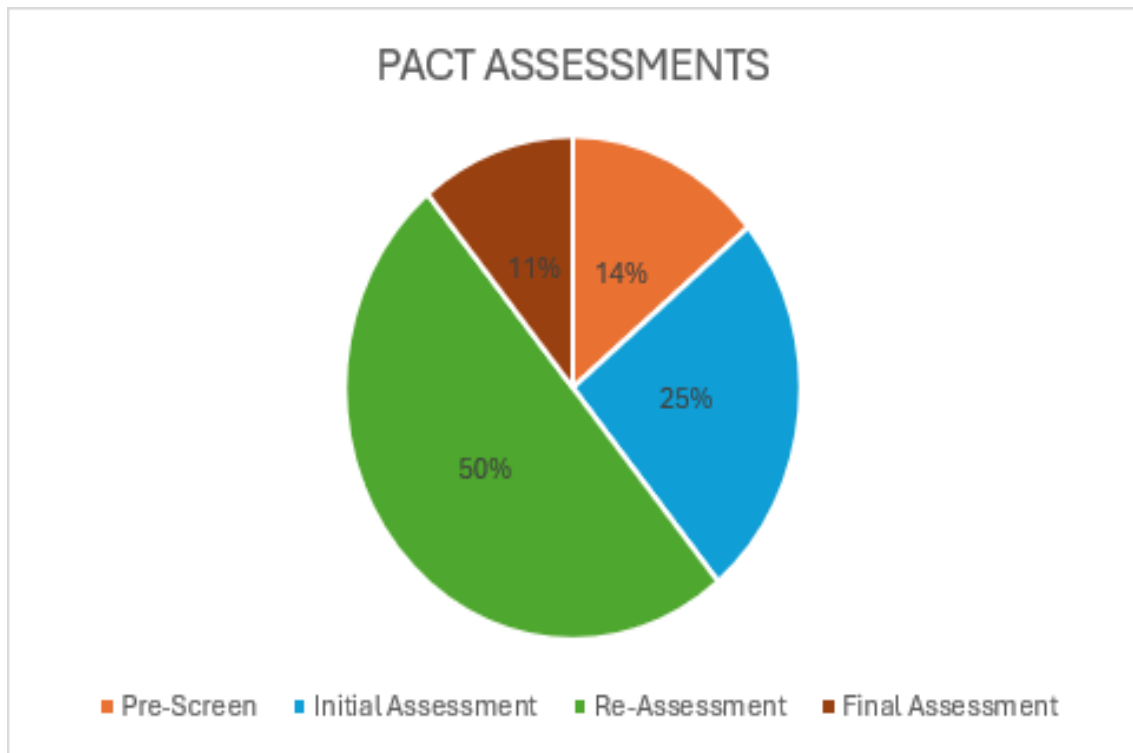
Before the modification, Deputy Probation Officers supervised between 60 and 75 youth. The caseload assignment did not distinguish between the level of risk or offense, nor were the assignments offender-need specific. The timing for the modification was perfect for implementing the Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT). According to the probation department's vendor: "The PACT identifies not only the areas (domains) in which the juvenile is most at risk but just as importantly, those in which he or she has strengths (protective factors) which can be built upon to help turn the youth's life around. Risk and protective factors in the instrument include both static and dynamic characteristics. The benefit of measuring both factors and characteristics is that a juvenile justice professional can better match a child's current needs with the appropriate programs and services. The comprehensive assessment instrument measures a youth's risk and protective factors in the following 12 domains: Criminal History, School, Use of Free Time, Employment, Relationships, Family, Living Arrangements, Alcohol and Drugs, Mental Health, Attitudes/Behaviors, Aggression, and Skills. Assessing criminogenic risk factors and treatment directed toward changing dynamic characteristics provides the best chance of reducing recidivism."

All youth completed a PACT assessment and were assigned to supervise caseloads based on their level of re-offense and specific needs. Each of the officers currently funded by JJCPA was assigned workspaces within the confines of the juvenile probation office rather than being

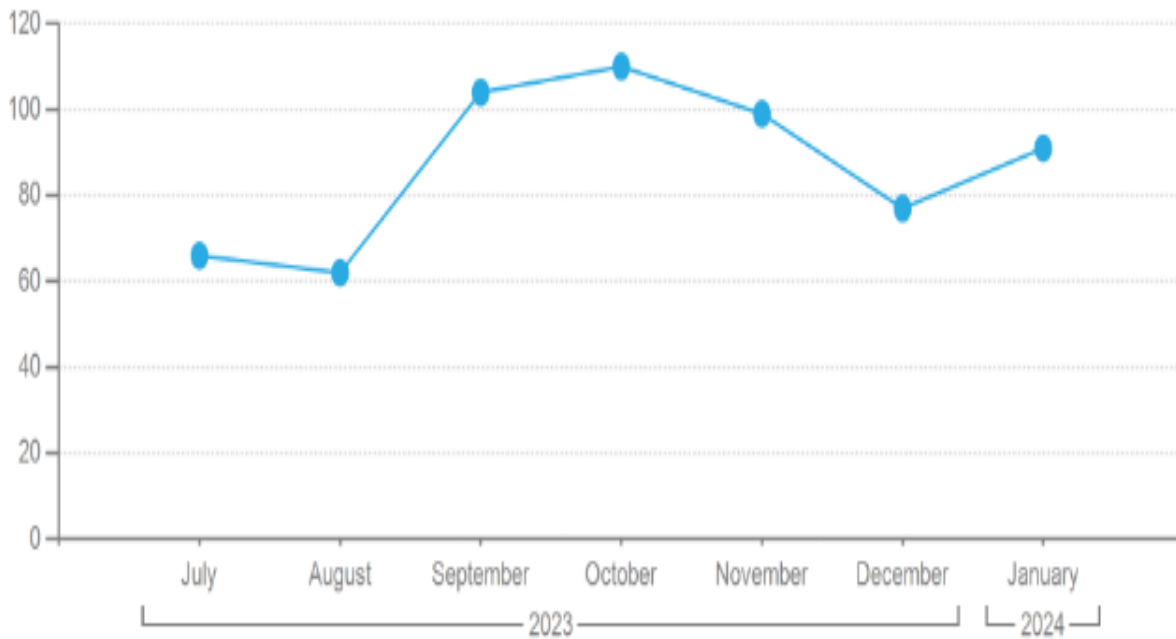
stationed solely on school campuses. The officers continue to be present on various campuses; however, the focus will be more on providing proven intervention services rather than serving as a school resource and truancy officers.

Currently, the Juvenile Field Services Unit comprises seven (7) Deputy Probation Officers and one (1) Supervising Probation Officer who partners with various law enforcement and community service agencies to supervise high-risk and moderate-risk youth. As previously mentioned, all cases identified as low risk in the Merced area continue to be supervised by a Probation Assistant. The average caseload size is approximately 20 cases.

Between July 2023 and January 2024, the Probation Department completed 168 Re-Assessments, 84 Initial Assessments, 47 Pre-Screen Assessments, and 37 Final Assessments for a total of 336 Assessments (PACT Assessments Chart). On average, staff complete 48 monthly assessments with an average completion time of 20 to 30 minutes (Count Over Time Chart).



## Completed Assessments between 7/1/2023 and 1/31/2024 for Merced County Juvenile



The scores from the PACT are utilized to determine the dynamic factors influencing the youthful offender’s anti-social behavior. It will provide the facts (evidence) needed to develop a case plan to effectively address these prioritized criminogenic needs. In a very focused way, the case plan helps probation staff define the youthful offender’s unique behavioral problems and create goals and actions to resolve those problems.

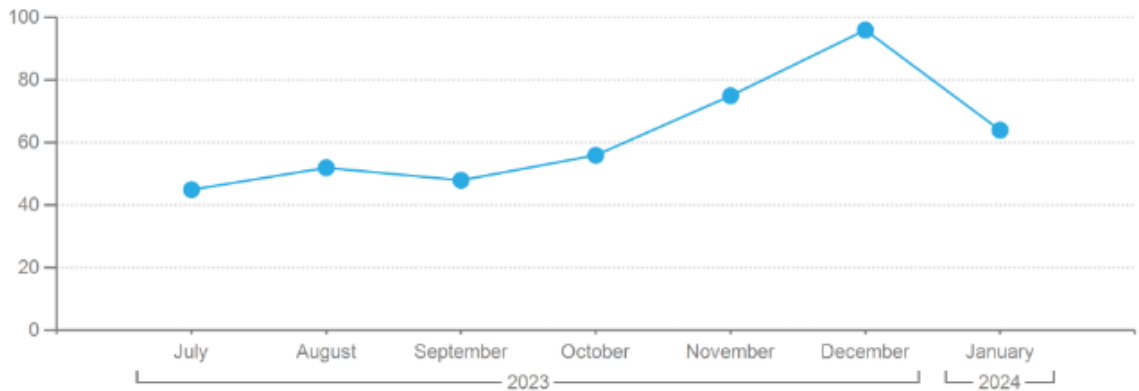
Between July 2023 and January 2024, the department completed a total of 437 case plans.

# Completed Case Plan Snapshots Report

Completed Case Plan Snapshots between 7/1/2023 and 1/31/2024



**Count over Time**  
COUNT OF SNAPSHOTS



**Count by Case Plan Type**  
COUNT OF SNAPSHOTS

Case Plan Type	Total Snapshots
Standard Case Plan	185
Institutional Case Plan - Ongoing Periodic	165
Title IV-E Case Plan	46
Institutional Case Plan - Initial	27
CPOC Placement Case Plan	10
Institutional Case Plan - Final Transitional	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>437</b>

Effective case planning addresses meeting a youth’s unique needs to reduce re-offending rates and set up the youth for success in their community. To improve the odds of young people succeeding on juvenile probation and beyond, probation officers formulate case plans collaboratively with youth and their families. Under this practice, probation staff conduct early and intensive activities (Family activities and MDT/CFT meetings) to build relationships with the youth and the family members and other supportive adults in that youth’s life. The Merced County Probation Department offers various family-focused intervention strategies to address delinquent conduct effectively. We recognize that strengthening probation’s role in partnering with parents and other family members is critical since these individuals influence a youth’s person’s life. As such, between July 2023 and January 2024, the Merced County Probation Department held 7 MDTs and 22 CFTs.

These practices have been proven effective as eighty-two percent (82%) of those being engaged by the department had positive changes when they completed reassessments.

## Changed Answers Report

Report comparing assessment responses

### Percentage

PERCENTAGE OF COMPLETED ASSESSMENTS WITH NO CHANGED ANSWERS



FIGURE 1

- Percentage of completed assessments with no changed answers
- Percentage of completed assessments with changed answers

## Counts

COUNT OF DUPLICATE ASSESSMENTS GROUPED BY RISK LEVEL

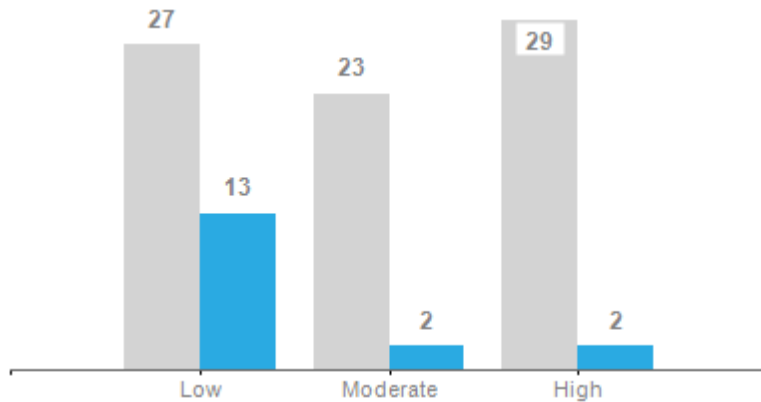


FIGURE 2

- Count of completed assessments with no changed answers and risk level
- Count of completed assessments with changed answers and risk level

In summary, the modification to the Merced County Probation Department's JJCPA program has improved how we address rates of recidivism, incarceration, and community service, as well as continue to address school attendance and academic achievement.

### JJCC Funded Program, Strategy and/or System Enhancement

#### ***Program Name:***

Community Based Deputy Probation (CBDPO)

#### ***Evidence Upon Which It Is Based:***

Engaging in delinquent behavior and/or risky behaviors can lead to drug use and dependency, dropping out of school, incarceration, adult criminal behavior, and injury. Early intervention and prevention of delinquent behavior can divert juveniles from the adverse consequences that can result from delinquency and the juvenile justice system.

Some identified risk factors increase a juvenile's likelihood to engage in delinquent behavior, although there is no single determinative risk factor. To counteract these risk factors, protective factors have also been identified to minimize a juvenile's likelihood of engaging in delinquent behavior.

The four areas of risk factors are individual, family, peer, school, and community. Individual risk factors include early antisocial behavior, poor cognitive development, hyperactivity, and emotional factors, such as mental health challenges. Family risk factors include poverty, maltreatment, family violence, divorce, parental psychopathology, familial antisocial behaviors, teenage parenthood, single-parent families, and large family size. Peer factors of association

with deviant peers and peer rejection are identified as risk factors. School and community risk factors include failure to bond to school, poor academic performance, low academic aspirations, neighborhood disadvantage, disorganized neighborhoods, the concentration of delinquent peer groups, and access to weapons. Many of these risk factors overlap. In some cases, the existence of one risk factor contributes to the existence of another or others.

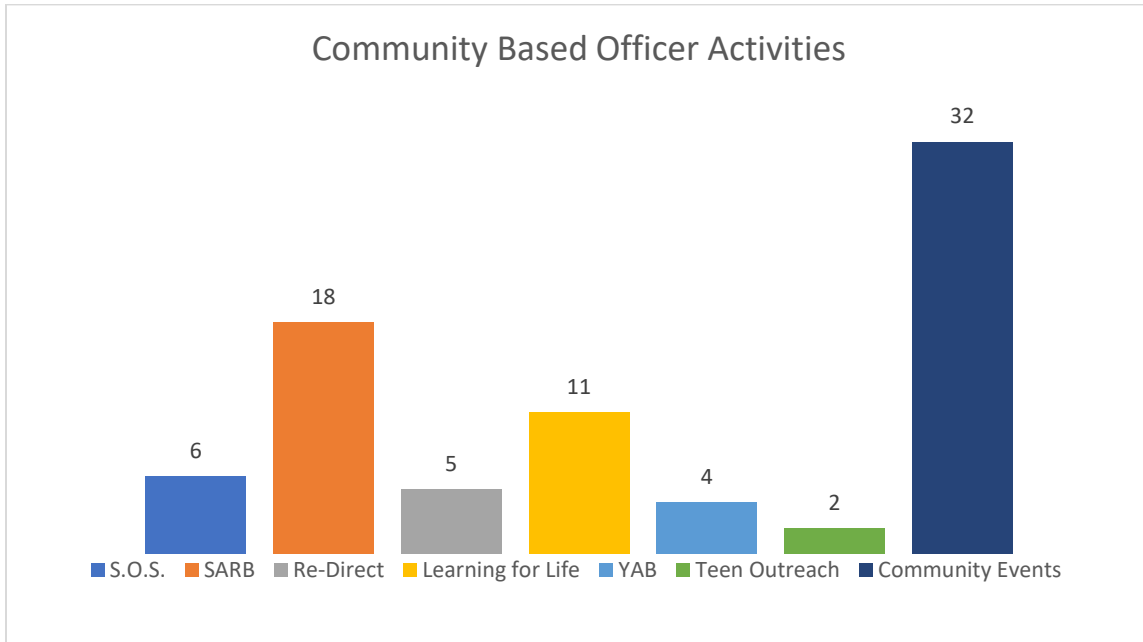
Generally, protective factors --such as positive school attendance, positive social orientation, or the ability to discuss problems with parents --are a buffer to minimize or moderate the effect of risk factors and their ability to bring about delinquent behavior. Protective factors seem to mitigate the influence of risk factors. Both risk and protective factors are discussed as part of delinquency prevention and intervention (National Conference of State of Legislatures, 2022).

***Description:***

The CBDPO provides prevention, early intervention, and diversion services to all areas of Merced County. The CBDPO targets at-risk, low-level youth cited out by a law enforcement agency or referred by school districts. The CBDPO seeks to apply constructive, evidence-based interventions to hold the youth accountable for inappropriate and criminal behavior and address the youth's criminogenic needs when possible. The CBDPO is currently located at the Merced Main Office (they will be relocated at the Pathways to Success soon) and is supervised by the Juvenile Intake/Investigations Supervising Probation Officer. The CBDPO is the point of contact for all school districts within the County of Merced. The CBDPO is responsible for making regular contact with school districts and school sites to establish and build rapport. The CBDPO also acts as the primary representative of the Probation Department to participate in School Attendance Review Boards (SARB). The CBDPO is also the point of contact for our partnership with the Merced County District Attorney's Office Supporting Attendance and Families through Education (S.A.F.E.) Program. All truancy referrals are assigned to the CBDPO for intake and investigation. The CBDPO works collaboratively with the respective school district that generated the truancy referral.

In addition, the CBDPO is responsible for managing the Youth Accountability Board (YAB) program and ensuring appropriate youth receive a suitable level of services. The CBDPO provides community outreach and attempts to recruit volunteers to serve as Social Investigators and panel members. The CBDPO also participates in and acts as a representative of the Probation Department for monthly (or as needed) Supporting Ongoing Services (S.O.S.) meetings. The CBDPO also participates in and acts as a representative and primary presenter for the Re-Direct Program. From July 2023 through January 2024, the CBDPOs participated in six (6) S.O.S. panels and presented at five (5) Re-Direct sessions.

In addition to these activities, the CBDPOs facilitated eleven (11) Learning for Life sessions and four (4) YAB panels and participated in eighteen (18) SARB meetings for various school districts throughout Merced County. During this period, the CBDPOs also participated in thirty-two (32) community events, including Breaking Barriers' Trunk or Treat, Coats for Kids, National Night Out, Kids Connect, Rachel's Challenge, Week of the Child, and various career fairs.



**JJCC Funded Program, Strategy and/or System Enhancement**

***Program Name:***

Probation Assistant (PA) Supervising Low-Risk Caseload

***Evidence Upon Which It Is Based:***

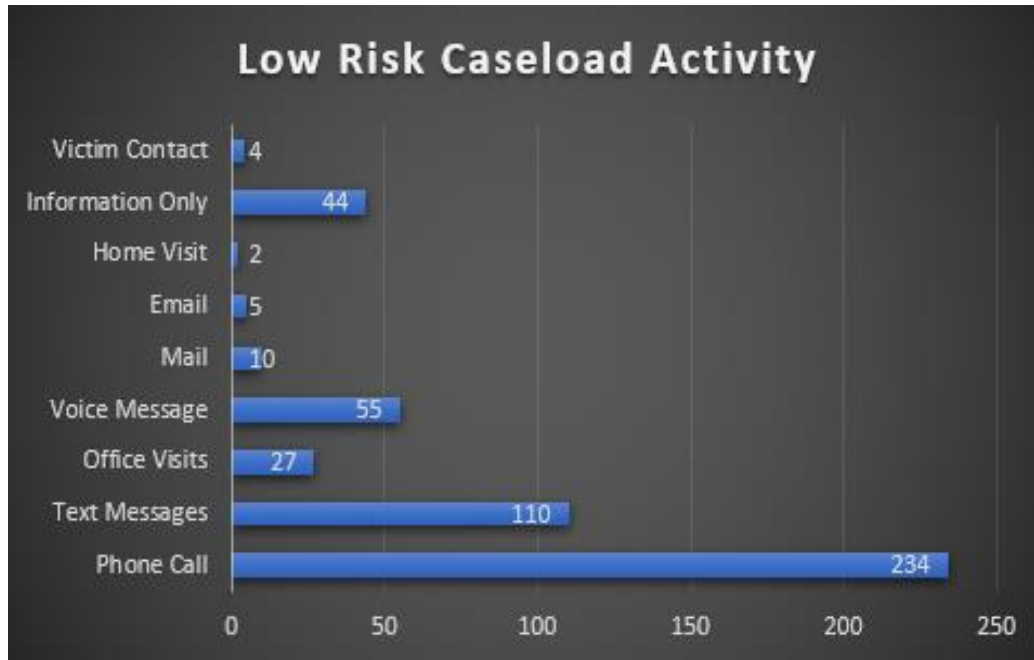
Research has shown that focusing time, attention, and resources on low-risk youth has negligible impacts on recidivism. Intensive supervision of these youth can produce negative consequences: Low-risk youth supervised at higher levels are more likely to re-offend compared to low-risk youth who are placed under supervision programs involving minimal levels of contact, treatment, monitoring, etc. (Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J.,2010).

***Description:***

The agency sees the benefit of transitioning all low-risk youth to the direct supervision of a Probation Assistant (PA). The agency utilizes the Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT) to determine what level of supervision a youth will receive. Supervision by risk level is a fundamental principle of evidence-based supervision supported by extensive research. The assigned PA has met the expectation as outlined by the agency to include monthly contacts in the office or by phone, home visits (as needed and conducted by DPO's), monthly collateral contacts/resources referrals, monthly victim contact, and drug/alcohol testing and searches (as



needed and performed by DPO's). The following chart shows all activities conducted between July 2023 and January 2024.



Additionally, the PA will limit their supervision activities for low-risk youth to monitor compliance with the conditions of release, if applicable, and respond appropriately to any changes in circumstances.

**Program Name:**

The Cactus Flower Art Program

**Evidence Upon Which It Is Based:**

Research indicates that the arts can improve the outcomes of vulnerable and justice-involved youth (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency, 2023). The path to sustainable community safety solutions includes evidence-informed strategies that support youth and guide them away from arrest and incarceration when possible. The arts support the development of skills that play a crucial role in lasting success in school, work, and life. As such, our focus is supporting a high-quality arts program for justice-involved youth to reduce juvenile delinquency, recidivism, and/or other problems and high-risk behaviors.

**Description:**

The Probation Department implements the Cactus Flower Art Program. The purpose is to expand and enhance the quality and cultural relevance of the arts programs for current and previous justice-involved youth in the service area of Merced County and to reduce juvenile

delinquency, recidivism, and/or other problem and high-risk behaviors. The Probation Department coordinates program activities with a sub-recipient, Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), which is dedicated to building youth leadership to serve communities by solving pressing social issues.

The Cactus Flower Art Program is the next step for youth who have completed Moving Forward. Both are YLI-developed, using a blend of El Joven Noble, Positive Youth Development (PYD), and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). Both programs are healing initiatives that draw on Indigenous practices to find alternative forms of healing through talking circles (Moving Forward) and art (Cactus Flower), leading to meaningful youth and family partnerships through art. Youth participate in storytelling that leads to artistic expression, an introspective process to examine their values, beliefs, culture, and traditions and how they impact their family, their chosen family, and the person they want to become. Programs also explore Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the influence that have on how they react to stimuli and their environment. Art experts will be brought in to facilitate the creation of projects.

Program components include learning about and exploring various artistic mediums such as spoken word, canvas paintings, oral storytelling, poetry, photography, murals, abstract art, embroidery, etc. Art is utilized as a tool for youth to use their voice for activism, healing, and to help others - family members, other youth, and community members, avoid following a path that leads to being system-involved. From July 2023 through January 2024, thirteen (13) youth participated in the program.

Milestones: Youth art creations will be featured in four art shows throughout Merced County with family, friends, dignitaries, and community members, followed by art being on display at multiple public venues, as well as being featured in a zine (small magazine) and/or anthology published by YLI. Finally, the youth will reflect on the creation process, their completed projects, the art show, and the impact of the experience on themselves and their families.

Expected outcomes: Broadened youth opportunities for a better future through 1) A reduction in juvenile delinquency, recidivism, and high-risk behaviors; 2) Strengthened collaborations among arts and community-based organizations; 3) A reduction in justice system risk factors; and 4) An increase in protective factors.



**Program Name:**

Pathways to Success (*This program has not fully launched as the Stephen Leonard Community Center sustained damage due to a fire on May 16, 2022; a new location was secured and is scheduled to open in March 2024. Some services are being delivered to our Administrative Office.*)



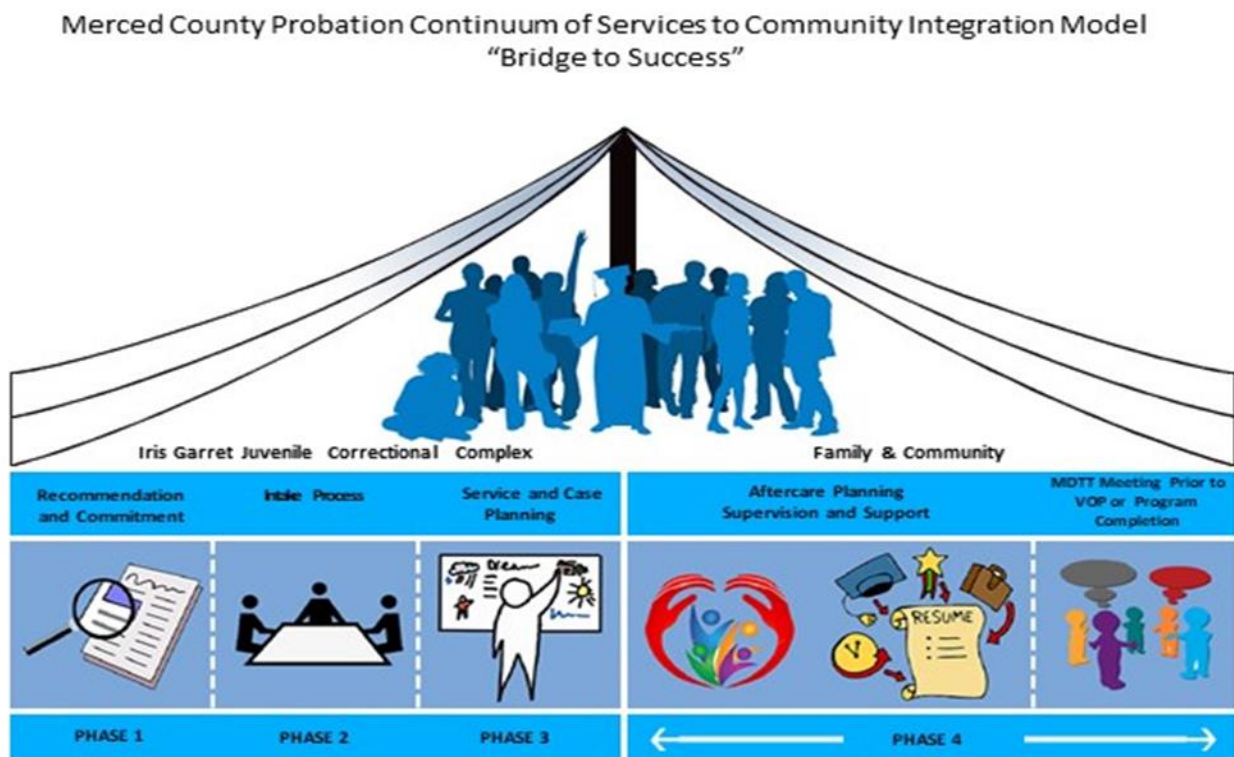
**Evidence Upon Which It Is Based:**

The Pathways to Success Program is modeled after successful reentry and prevention programs across the state and nation. The Pathways to Success Program uses a multiagency collaborative approach to work with youth and their families needing care, services, and support. This center offers wrap-around reentry support to youth returning from camp commitments and serves as a prevention hub where supportive services and evidence-based programming will be provided to at-risk and probation-involved youths and their families.

**Aftercare Planning (Reentry Services):**

Assisting youthful offenders to live crime free lives requires that they have access to programs and services that help build the skills needed to reintegrate into the community successfully. Unfortunately, young people leaving a secure treatment facility face many barriers as they reintegrate with families and communities. Research indicates many young people return to

unstable home environments, struggle to remain in school, have barriers to securing employment, and have a behavioral health disorder that can negatively impact reintegration (Youth.gov, 2022). Effective service delivery must bridge many agencies, services and supports before and after release to improve the odds of success for youth reentering the community. As such, the Merced County Probation Department has adopted a Community Integration Model to reintegrate justice system-involved youth to their families and communities with the knowledge and skills necessary to live successful, crime-free lives. Our Community Integration Model or “Bridge to Success” approach will ensure staff work collaboratively with the youth and their families. It will also provide other significant support to develop individualized rehabilitation plans that consider all their needs and are designed to assist with community reintegration. Our model consists of four main phases.



### **Phase I: Recommendation and Commitment**

Youths being considered for our commitment programs will be assessed to determine their risk level to the community to ensure confinement is utilized as a last resort due to less restrictive alternative dispositions being unsuitable.

### **Phase II: Intake Process**

To prepare youth for successful re-integration, planning for re-integration must begin from day one. All youth committed to our commitment programs receive a variety of comprehensive

assessments to identify risk factors, needs, and strengths to develop the Individual Rehabilitation Plan. The Residential Positive Achievement Change Tool (R-PACT) identifies each youth's risk level and needs. The R-PACT identifies not only the areas (domains) in which the youth are most at risk but also those in which their strengths (protective factors) can be built upon to help turn their life around. Risk and protective factors in this instrument include both static and dynamic characteristics. The benefit of measuring both factors and characteristics is that a juvenile justice professional can better match the youth's current needs with the appropriate programs and services.

This comprehensive assessment instrument measures the youth's risk and protective factors in the following 12 domains: Criminal History, School, Use of Free Time, Employment, Relationships, Family, Living Arrangements, Alcohol and Drugs, Mental Health, Attitudes/Behaviors, Aggression, and Skills. Assessing criminogenic risk factors and treatment directed toward changing dynamic characteristics provides the best chance of reducing recidivism.

The R-PACT may be used by non-clinical staff in juvenile intake, diversion, probation, detention, group home placement, and aftercare settings. The instrument is administered in a client interview setting and requires approximately 45 minutes.

Other facility assessments, such as Individualized Education Program (IEP) evaluations, aptitude tests, and behavioral health evaluations, will also help prepare the youth's treatment plan and rehabilitation program.

### **Phase III: Service and Individual Rehabilitation Plan**

The scores from the R-PACT are utilized to determine the dynamic factors influencing the youth's anti-social behavior. It will provide the facts (evidence) needed to develop an Individual Rehabilitation Plan (IRP) to effectively address these prioritized criminogenic needs. In a very focused way, the IRP helps probation staff and judges define the youth's unique behavioral problems and create goals and actions to resolve those problems.

This phase consists of periodic meetings and Court hearings to review the youth's rehabilitation progress and mitigate potential setbacks. This phase includes the following:

- Monthly meetings with the youth's Deputy Probation Officer to monitor their progress toward treatment goals and intervention services and to routinely conduct criminogenic risk/needs assessments.
- Monthly meetings with the youth's multidisciplinary treatment team (probation officer, education provider, behavioral health, and other service providers identified by the Probation Department) to discuss treatment goals and potential barriers to the reintegration process.

- Finally, as previously mentioned, the Child and Family Team will develop a transitional plan for reintegration into the community.

#### **Phase IV: Aftercare planning**

A Deputy Probation Officer monitors youths who are transitioning back into the community. The Deputy Probation Officer will have attended the multi-disciplinary treatment team meetings and will know the goals and objectives for reintegration. In addition, the Deputy Probation Officer also ensures the youth abides by the terms and conditions of community supervision.

#### **Prevention and Intervention Services:**

The Community Based Deputy Probation Officer (CBDPO) works with at-risk, and probation involves youth and their families. Research consistently shows that individuals and families gain what they need to be successful when key protective factors are robust in their lives and communities. Unfortunately, due to the economic conditions impacting Merced County, many residents struggle to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and transportation. Examples of these needs can prevent individuals from progressing to self-sufficiency and thriving in communities. These findings indicate that family strengthening is needed to improve the odds of success for youth and their families.

The CBDPOs will be in the Pathways to Success program, where they will continue to promote protective factors by co-locating needed services, support, and opportunities in an underserved and high-risk neighborhood. According to the Center for the Study of Social Policy, “Protective factors are characteristics or strengths of individuals, families, communities, or societies that act to mitigate risks and promote positive well-being and healthy development. We often see them as attributes that help families successfully navigate difficult situations.” As such, the CBDPOs will build protective factors by facilitating Parent Cafés and evidence-based programming to youth and families exhibiting risk factors in the Pathways to Success program.

Community and/or Family Resource Centers (Neighborhood Centers) offer an integrated system of community-based services and resources that respond to the needs of vulnerable families in Merced County. These centers provide prevention and intervention programs, including advocacy, psychological and physical safety, parent education, and connecting families to additional resources and support. These centers act as one-stop hubs where people can access needed services, and protective factors can be built to help strengthen families and communities.

Parent Cafés are physically and emotionally safe spaces where parents and caregivers discuss the challenges and victories of raising a family. Through individual deep self-reflection and peer-to-peer learning, participants explore their strengths, learn about their Protective Factors, and create strategies from their wisdom and experiences to help strengthen their families (Be Strong Families, 2022).

Strengthening families will be essential when mobilizing youth into action and change. Research consistently shows that family involvement is vital in successfully rehabilitating at-risk and high-risk offending youth since families influence and inspire their child's behavior. When individuals and families address their unique needs, this positively impacts individual and family outcomes since protective factors are being built and risk factors are reduced.

***Description:***

**Aftercare Planning (Reentry Activities):**

Pathways to Success program is a collaborative effort between the Merced County Probation Department, City of Merced, Worknet, BHRS, and local community-based organizations, which focus on serving youth and their families needing supportive and rehabilitative services. Some program goals include assisting probation youth in reentering and remaining in the community (helping youth access and stay in their programs) and helping strengthen youth and their families. The Continuity of Care, as well as other intervention services, is coordinated by the Probation Program Specialist, who ensures smooth continuity of services. The Merced County Probation Department staff ensures that warm handoffs and transportation occur—not just passive referrals to services. The following aftercare components will necessitate improved outcomes for youthful offenders as they reintegrate:

- Continuity of services and programs such as mentoring, cognitive behavioral treatment (designed to address delinquent conduct), case management (linkages to support employment, housing, and continuing education), strengthening families, trauma and culturally responsive services, and system navigation, as necessary.
- Continuity of social connections and community engagement are encouraged to develop positive relationships and create a sense of community. This component will be fulfilled with mentorship programs, community events, and family involvement and education through Parent Cafés.
- Monitoring the youth's progress toward individual rehabilitation plan goals while updating criminogenic risk/needs assessments (PACT) at least every six months (or when there is a life-changing event) to identify risk factors related to re-offending as well as identifying strengths and/or protective factors that might mitigate those risk factors.
- Hold Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Meetings to discuss the youth's progress toward their rehabilitation plan to mitigate potential barriers to completing the plan.

Participants will need to participate in graduated phases of the program, which will consist of evidence-based programs as well as other supportive services that are going to be offered in the center. Through a partnership with Merced Union High School District, youth will be

required to participate in school (independent studies and/or virtual school until the youth is able to transition back into mainstream education and/or their designated school) and other programs such as soft skills training, cognitive-based interventions, and behavioral health services during this phase.

Deputy Probation Officers, Peer Support Specialists, and community partners will teach evidence-based programming. Youths' terms of probation may be terminated once they have completed the Aftercare Planning portion of the programming.

### **Prevention and Intervention Services:**

The CBDPO engages youth and their families before and after they interact with law enforcement. Some at-risk behaviors the CBDPO continues to target, but are not limited to, school and home issues, chronic truancy and absenteeism, school violence (expulsions or suspensions), gang involvement, and/or at risk of becoming involved in juvenile delinquency.

The CBDPO targets the following underserved and high-risk neighborhoods:

- Pathways to Success
- Meadows Community Center
- At-risk schools: schools experiencing the following:
  - Habitual truancy
  - familial incarceration history
  - reported instances of gang involvement and/or delinquency.

The CBDPO offers the following prevention and intervention services in underserved and high-risk neighborhoods:

- Community outreach through community events and activities
- Positive Youth Development Activities (Recreational activities/sports) at the Meadows Community Center and soon at Pathways to Success.
- Facilitate the following evidence-based programming:
  - Risks & Decisions Gang Program
  - Delinquent Behavior
  - Drug and Alcohol Education

Some program objectives of the CBDPO include:

- Build protective factors by providing targeted, evidence-based programming in underserved and high-risk neighborhoods.



- Provide Positive Youth Development activities to divert youth from law enforcement contact and/or delinquent-type behavior.

As mentioned above, the Probation Program Specialist will coordinate services and programs at the Pathways to Success program. Since this center will have many community partners under one roof, the Probation Program Specialist will ensure that services are being coordinated effectively; this person will be tasked to create monthly calendars to inform and reach our community members. This person is also responsible for planning and executing activities and events with our community partners.

## **JJCC Funded Program, Strategy and/or System Enhancement**

### ***Program Name:***

RISE Program/ RISE to Higher Grounds Café mobile trailer program

### ***Evidence Upon Which It Is Based:***

Years of research have revealed the key barriers that inhibit someone's ability to succeed upon reentry and that the reentry process should begin on day one of incarceration. While incarcerated, correctional staff and facility programs should strive to help youth acquire pro-social and positive community relationships/connections and overcome any existing substance abuse or mental health concerns. Once the individual reenters society, their likelihood of becoming a contributing community member depends on whether they can secure meaningful employment, find a place to live, and have the education and skills necessary to advance in life. A successful reentry program helps youth overcome one or more of these barriers and collaborates with other community resources to complement its program with other services.

### ***Description:***

The purpose of the Rise Program is to assist youth who suffer from stigma and barriers that exist from being system-impacted. The RISE Program provides participants with employability skills training, paid work experience, and additional occupational training. The RISE to Higher Grounds Café mobile trailer program provides a paid work experience for youth currently detained and completing an in-custody program to learn skills related to customer service, handling cash, barista, merchandising, stocking, and other tasks oriented towards daily operational duties.

Youth participating in the Bear Creek Academy (BCA) Long Term Program (LT), or Youth Treatment Program (YTP) are enrolled in the Merced County Regional Occupational Program (ROP) Culinary Essentials program. Participation in the program is based on behavior, status within the BCA LT/YT program, and overall drive to partake in and contribute to the program's success. The program's instructor is a credentialed teacher who is a former restaurant

owner/manager. The program is also supported by an Instructional Aide with food service experience. The youth are transported and supervised by the officer assigned to the in-custody portion of the BCA program. Once youth have learned the necessary culinary skills in the classroom/kitchen lab and have obtained their Food Handlers certification card, they can then utilize their skills in the mobile coffee trailer to gain hands-on culinary experience and customer service training through interaction with customers from the public. Once students complete the culinary program and transition out of the Juvenile Facility, they will continue to receive employment support and be able to participate in paid work experience under the Rise Program at Pathways to Success.

**Program Sequence:**

- Participants attend several weeks of Employability Skills Training facilitated by a credentialed Career Technical Education teacher and/or a Job Development Training Technician.
- The training is held off-campus at the Merced County Office of Education administration complex and/or Merced County Probation Department's Administrative Office to assist students with transitioning from school to a sheltered work environment before placing them at local businesses for paid work experience.
- Upon completion of Employability Skills Training, students can be placed in the coffee mobile trailer, paid work experience program, or additional occupational training.

**The following criteria were established for students to get into the RISE program:**

- GPA 2.0 or better (required for a work permit)
- Right to work documents (original SS card, school ID)
- Age 16 or older
- Progress with Probation requirements
- Has demonstrated a willingness to learn/improve
- Attendance (to be determined by school administration)

**The following criteria were established for students to stay in the program:**

- Successful completion of workshops
- 100% school attendance unless the school administration excuses the absence
- Continue to progress with Probation requirements
- Appropriate behavior at school and on the job

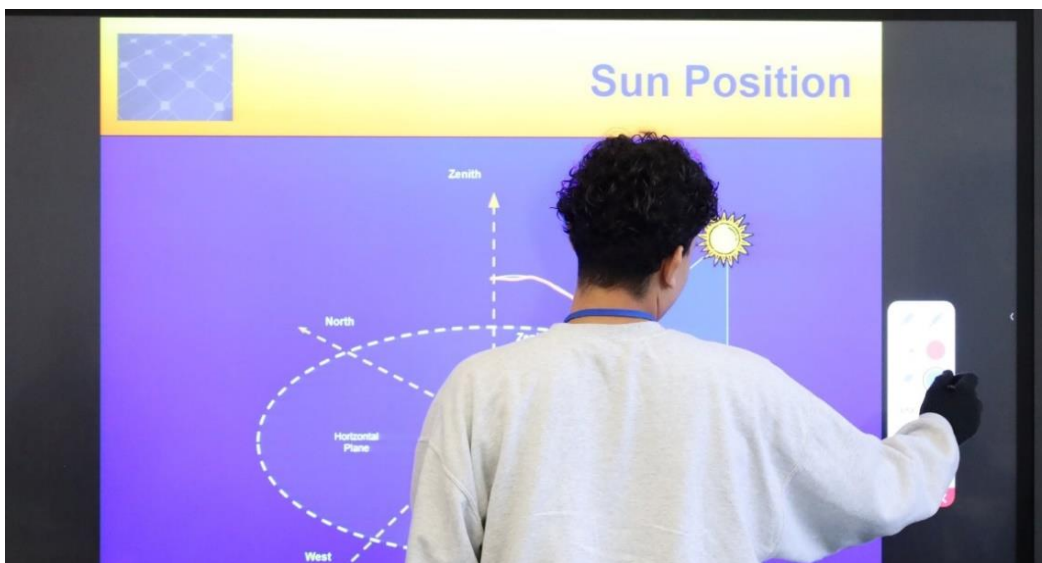
**The following measures were agreed upon to measure program effectiveness:**

- Completion of the program
- GPA

- Behavior
- Attendance
- Recidivism
- Employment and job retention after the program
- Exit survey for employers

### **Employability Skills Training/Paid Work Experience/Occupational Training**

The Probation Department has referred forty-nine (49) youth to the program between July 2023 and January 2024. Of those referrals, forty-nine (49) youth actively participated in the program. Additionally, six (6) youth participated in Logistics and Forklift training, and four (4) youth participated in Solar Technology training.







## **JJCC Funded Program, Strategy and/or System Enhancement**

### ***Program Name:***

Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT)/Cognitive-Based Therapy/Evidence-Based Programs

### ***Evidence Upon Which It Is Based:***

Moral reasoning is how people make decisions about what they should or should not do in each situation. Cognitive-behavioral Therapy (CBT) fosters moral development in treatment-resistant individuals. MRT® and Phoenix/New Freedom Programs are an effective systematic, cognitive-behavioral approach that treats a wide range of issues, including gang involvement, antisocial behavior, substance abuse, domestic violence, trauma, parenting, job skills, and other issues. These programs are implemented in groups utilizing workbooks directly targeting specific issues. MRT® and Phoenix/NewFreedom Programs have been shown to reduce recidivism, reduce criminal justice involvement, reduce substance abuse, increase housing stability, and job retention, increase medication acceptance, increase treatment adherence, decrease hospitalization, enhance life purpose, and raise motivation.

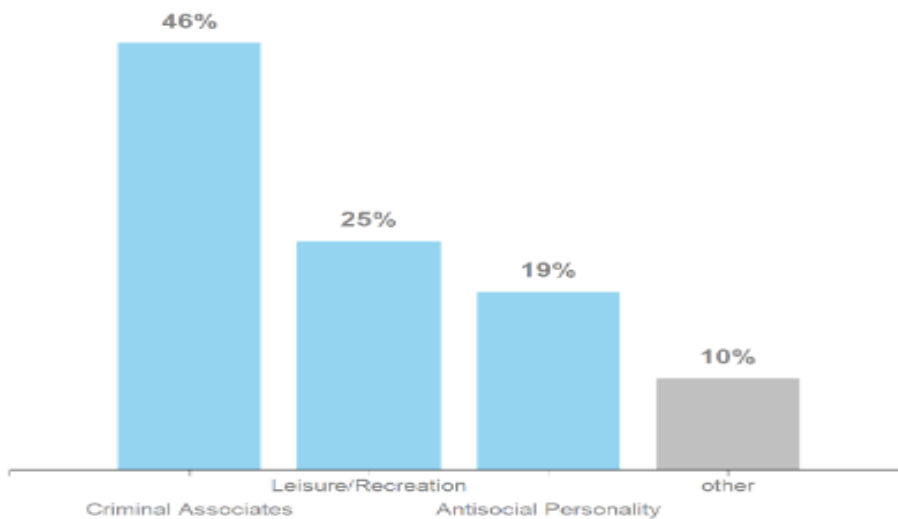
The Criminogenic Needs Report below demonstrates that Criminal Associates and Antisocial Personalities are the top reasons youth engage in risky behaviors. As such, the Merced County Probation Department utilizes evidence-based programs, such as MRT and Phoenix/New Freedom Programs, to challenge youths' behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs.



# Criminogenic Needs Report

Evaluate your agency's top need areas for assessments completed between 7/1/2023 and 1/31/2024

**Percentage**  
TOP CRIMINOGENIC NEEDS



**FIGURE 1**  
■ Top 3 Criminogenic Needs  
■ All other Criminogenic Needs

**Description:**

High and Moderate Risk Officers have received training in Moral Roconation Therapy - MRT® and Phoenix/New Freedom Programs. Officers facilitate MRT® groups in the L.I.N.K. program, which will replace the Pathways to Success program and the Juvenile Facility. While at the Juvenile Facility, officers are under the Probation Program Specialist's (PPS) direction. As previously mentioned, the PPS oversees facilitators and performs quality inspections to ensure youth are learning new skills and ensure fidelity to the program model.

Officers currently facilitate one (1) weekly session on a scheduled rotation. To date, officers have facilitated over twenty-two (22) Phoenix-New Freedoms sessions.



## **JJCC Funded Program, Strategy and/or System Enhancement**

### ***Program Name:***

Graffiti Abatement Program

### ***Evident Upon Which It Is Based:***

Per California Penal Code, graffiti is an act of vandalism. Our local government, like most, sees graffiti as a negative because it inhibits or detracts from the beautification of a local community. Graffiti often stigmatizes a neighborhood or community by being labeled as a low socio-economic area. Indeed, this converts to suppressed housing prices and strongly correlates with local crime and gang activities. Considering graffiti's cost to local communities, governments remove the burden. Graffiti is nearly impossible to eliminate, despite changes in legislation to increase the fine for committing such offenses. Graffiti abatement is a joint effort between the community, its public works division, the police department, community development, parks, recreation, and community services to eliminate graffiti vandalism.

**Description:**

The Graffiti Abatement Program focuses on hot spot areas frequently targeted by graffiti vandals. These hot spots are checked regularly, with the goal of removing graffiti as soon as possible. The Graffiti Abatement Program has a long history in the County of Merced. Youths adjudicated for vandalism (graffiti) or those who need to learn the importance of not damaging personal or government property will have the opportunity to participate in the graffiti abatement program. Their participation will reduce local government costs while allowing youth to perform community service under the supervision of a Deputy Probation Officer.

During July 2023 and January 2024, the program ran five (5) times and served many of the unincorporated communities within the county. The program has provided participating youth an opportunity to complete community service hours. Both in custody and out-of-custody youth have been referred to and completed community service hours. In total, four (4) youth participated in the program during this period.





### Part III.

## Youthful Offender Block Grant (YOBG) – (Welfare & Institutions Code Section 1961(a))

### A. Strategy for Non-707(b) Offenders

*Describe your county's overall strategy for dealing with non-707(b) youthful offenders who are not eligible for commitment to the Division of Juvenile Justice. Explain how this plan relates to or supports that strategy.*

The Probation Department operates the Bear Creek Academy (BCA) Camp Program. The BCA program comprises 30 beds dedicated to the Long Term and Youth Treatment Programs. The BCA programs are point-based with up to five phases, one to two years in length, depending on which program is ordered. Program elements include vocational education, alcohol and drug education, mental health counseling, and cognitive and life skills development. The program's final phase includes aftercare and re-entry services to effectively transition youth into the community. A re-entry plan is developed for each participant. An assigned probation officer will provide case management to ensure adherence to the re-entry plan.

The BCA Camp Program has dedicated peer support specialists (PSS) who promote change and deliver evidence-based services and interventions. Peer support specialists bring hope by sharing their experiences and promoting a sense of belonging. They provide supportive services such as education, advocacy, coaching, and mentoring. The Officers assigned to the BCA Camp Program and PSS participate in Child and Family Team Meetings (CFT-M). A CFT-M is defined as "A group of individuals who are convened by the placing agency and who are engaged through a variety of team-based processes to identify the strengths and needs of the child or youth and his or her family and to help achieve positive outcomes for safety, permanency, and well-being" (Public Child Welfare Training Academy, 2014). The CFT-M comprises a care network that is responsible for assessing, planning, intervening, monitoring, and refining service delivery over time. During the CFT-M process, staff create an action plan and gather information needed to develop realistic goals for the institutional case plan.

### B. Regional Agreements

*Describe any regional agreements or arrangements to be supported with YOBG funds.*

N/A

## **C. Funded Programs, Placements, Services, Strategies and/or System Enhancements**

*Describe the programs, placements, services, strategies, and system enhancements to be funded through the YOBG program. Explain how they complement or coordinate with the programs, strategies, and system enhancements to be funded through the JJCPA program. For additional template pages, simply click the “copy template” box below.*

### **YOBG Funded Program, Placement, Service, Strategy, and/or System Enhancement**

#### ***Program Name:***

Bear Creek Academy (BCA) Long Term and Youth Treatment Programs

#### ***Nature of Coordination with JJCPA:***

Youth participating in our commitment programs have access to a diversified team that uniquely provides the services and programs they need before and after their release. Youth have access to highly trained staff that deliver individualized and compassionate care. Our Community Integration Model or “Bridge to Success” approach ensures staff work collaboratively with the youth and their families and other significant supports to develop individualized rehabilitation plans that consider all their needs and are designed to assist with community reintegration.

#### ***Description:***

The Bear Creek Academy works with at-risk youth who have great potential to be productive citizens of the community. The academy is structured into five phases with an estimated length of one year (Long Term) to two years (Youth Treatment Program). For youth to complete the program, they must complete a required number of points (in custody portion) or time (aftercare portion) to pass each phase. Points received are based on an evaluation system, rating the youth's participation in the academy elements with an opportunity to earn up to 50 points daily. The mission of the Bear Creek Academy is to strive to make positive changes in how youth committed to the academy think and behave to prepare them to return to their families, their community, and live a delinquent-free life.

The Bear Creek Academy consists of two Deputy Probation Officers funded by YOBG. Both Deputy Probation Officers are housed in the Juvenile Justice Correctional Complex. Their primary responsibility is to interface with youth participating in the in-custody portion of BCA. The BCA Officer's roles and responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Routinely assists in conducting criminogenic risk/needs assessments of each youth to identify risk factors related to reoffending as well as strengths and protective factors that might mitigate those risk factors.
- Works closely with the youth and other multi-disciplinary treatment team members to develop treatment goals, case plans, and transition plans.
- Transport youth to appointments and community-based vocational/educational programs and services.
- Monitors and documents the youth's progress toward their rehabilitation goals and communicates with the multi-disciplinary team members regarding the youth's progress in meeting their treatment goals and potential barriers to the reintegration process.
- Prepare case reports for court.
- Facilitates/co-facilitates weekly intervention groups.
- Participates in the Review Board for youth assigned to the BCA Program. The Review Board comprises a Deputy Probation Officer, a Supervising Juvenile Institutions Officer, and a Division Manager. The group meets weekly to discuss and review all academy movements and disciplinary actions that resulted in a loss of points in the academy. The Review Board will convene a special hearing if the regular board meeting is not within 48 hours, excluding weekends and holidays.

Officers assigned to the Juvenile Field Services Unit conduct aftercare support and deliver evidence-based programming. The officers work with the Probation Program Specialist and Supervising Probation Officers in seeking out and coordinating local community-based organizations that can provide informative discussions and training. As mentioned earlier, the L.I.N.K. program will continue to operate in the Pathways to Success program, which will be a collaborative effort between Merced County Probation Department, Merced Union High School District, Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS), and local community-based organizations to support youth transitioning from our commitment programs. This center will offer wrap around reentry support and services to youth and their families.

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