



# CREATING RESULTS WITH YOUTH & THEIR FAMILIES

## Annual Evaluation

ACKNOWLEDGE  
ALLIANCE

San Mateo County  
Probation Department  
Juvenile Justice  
Coordinating Council (JJCC)



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## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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Acknowledge Alliance is a community-based mental health organization located in Mountain View. The mission of Acknowledge Alliance is to help children and adolescents develop their capacity to rebound from hardship and adversity and grow to become competent adults. They foster resilience and the building of trusting relationships, thereby empowering youth to realize their fullest potential.

San Mateo County Probation Department funds two programs at Acknowledge Alliance: 1) Court and Community School Counseling Program and 2) Transition Program.

Throughout the academic year, the **Court and Community School Counseling Program** provides onsite mental health counseling to youth attending San Mateo County Court and Community Schools. Many youth attending Court and Community Schools must participate in counseling as part of their diversion contract or formal probation terms (completing CCSC's services fulfill the counseling requirement for youth on diversion or formal probation). The program's goals include increasing students' self-awareness, self-esteem, tolerance, and empathy for others as well as preventing delinquency, improving school attendance, reducing recidivism, and improving anger management skills. Specialized individual and group counseling sessions, held weekly, provide opportunities for students to explore experiences, relationships, and feelings in a safe and confidential setting. Students gain insight into their self-destructive behaviors, learn more effective forms of self-advocacy, and develop techniques to address and cope with traumas and pressures in their lives, creating the necessary resiliency skills for lasting change. Sessions are led by graduate student interns in clinical psychology; interns participate in weekly clinical trainings and are regularly supervised by licensed, experienced therapists.

In addition to the Court and Community School program, Acknowledge Alliance offers the **Transition Program**, which provides the same counseling services for students going back to district high schools from the Court and Community Schools. In fiscal year (FY) 2011-12 Acknowledge Alliance operated successful transition programs in two public schools, and added two more in FY 2013-14, now serving students in all 4 Sequoia Union High School District Comprehensive High Schools along with Redwood High School. The program includes individual and group therapy for the students as soon as they land on the new campus (with a direct hand off from our therapists at the SMC Court and Community Schools), pre-enrollment parent meetings at the district high schools and close collaboration between Acknowledge Alliance counselors, and district high school staff to ensure a smooth transition and follow-through.

### Programmatic Challenges in FY 2015-16

In the current fiscal year, program staff reported a lower level of enrollment in Court and Community Schools, due to an attempt to reduce expulsions at the district high schools. This resulted in a slightly lower number of youth served at Gateway than in years past. Transportation difficulties remain an issue for some youth being able to consistently attend their counseling appointments at Gateway, but program staff try to be flexible in making time to see youth when they do arrive at school. Staff continue to work with the Court Schools to improve notification when youth are leaving Court schools and transitioning back into District High Schools, so they can identify youth for the Transition Program counseling in a timely manner. There is limited private space for confidential counseling at each of the schools and this prevents the program from being able to place more therapists and see more students during the year. Finally, Gateway youth transitioning back to the San Mateo Union High School District have not been receiving Transition Counseling services as the District has not been in a position to bring Acknowledge Alliance services into their schools.

## EVALUATION METHODS

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Programs funded by San Mateo County Juvenile Probation (SMCJP) monitor their programs and report client, service and outcome data to the department and its evaluator, Applied Survey Research (ASR). The methods and tools used to collect this data are described below:

**Clients and Services**—Grantee programs collected and entered demographic (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity) and service data (e.g., types and hours of service) for individual clients and entered these in their own data systems prior to transferring the data to ASR for analysis.

**Risk Factors**—In FY 2015-16, SMCJP implemented two new measures of client risk level, the pre-JAIS and the CANS. Funded programs were asked to complete these measures with existing clients beginning January 2016 and at intake with all new clients subsequently.

- The **Juvenile Assessment and Intervention System (JAIS)** is a risk, strength and needs assessment designed to assist workers to effectively and efficiently supervise youth, both in institutional settings and in the community. It is reliable and has been validated across ethnic and gender groups. The JAIS consists of a brief prescreen assessment (**pre-JAIS**) in addition to full assessment and reassessment components; SMCJP has elected to administer the pre-JAIS to provide an initial indicator of recidivism risk. The pre-JAIS consists of 8 (girls) or 10 (boys) items and yields an overall risk level of low, moderate, or high.
- The **Child Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS)** survey is a multi-purpose tool developed for children’s services to support decision-making including level of care and service planning, to facilitate quality improvement initiatives, and to allow for the monitoring of outcomes of services. The CANS consists of multiple items scored on a 4-point scale (0 to 3, with a score of 2 or 3 indicating an actionable need) and grouped into stand-alone modules—e.g., Risk Behaviors, Strengths, Behavioral/Emotional Needs, Trauma. Each grantee completed a different set of CANS modules according to the specific fit with their programs and clientele.
- Programs funded by the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) also collected data on several risk-related indicators, including whether a youth had any of the following at program entry: 1) an alcohol or drug problem, 2) an attendance problem, and 3) a suspension or expulsion in the past year.

**Outcomes**—In FY 2015-16, SMCJP intended to assess change over time using CANS follow-up data at the conclusion of services. Because the CANS is recommended to be administered at 6-month intervals and with low response rates due to the post-January start, ASR was not able to analyze CANS post-test data for FY 2015-16.

- JJCPA-funded programs are also required to report data on the following six mandated justice-related outcomes for program participants: 1) arrest rate, 2) incarceration rate, 3) probation violation rate, 4) probation completion rate, 5) court-ordered restitution completion rate and 6) court-ordered community service completion rate. San Mateo County has elected to report these outcomes at 180 days post-entry with the reference group being the past year’s cohort of program participants (i.e., whose six-month milestone occurred in FY 2015-16).
- Additionally, many grantees elected to collect their own program-specific outcome data. Acknowledge Alliance collected two program-specific measures: 1) **Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF)** scores and 2) Percentage of School Days attended during the intervention.

## EVALUATION FINDINGS

### FY 2015-16 Data Highlights

- The average number of hours per client increased 45% while the number of clients served remained the same compared to last year
- Acknowledge Alliance clients appear to have moderate risk levels—44% Low and 34% Moderate on the pre-JAIS; only 8% with drug/alcohol problem at entry—but lack important internal, social and community supports—79% have at least one actionable need on CANS Youth Strengths module
- While JJCPA mandated outcomes continued their downward trend, program participants showed a statistically significant 11% improvement in GAF scores over the course of services

### Profile of Clients Served

This year Acknowledge Alliance served 151 youth, all of whom had demographic data (see Table 1). A majority of participants were male (74%) and identified predominantly as Latino (70%), followed by White/Caucasian (8.6%), Filipino/Pacific Islander (7.3%) and Other/Multi-racial (7.3%). The average age of clients was 16.1 years. Service data was available for 136 participants who received an average of 13.6 hours of services—predominantly individual counseling (64%) and group counseling (31%).

Table 1. Client Demographics, FY 2015-16

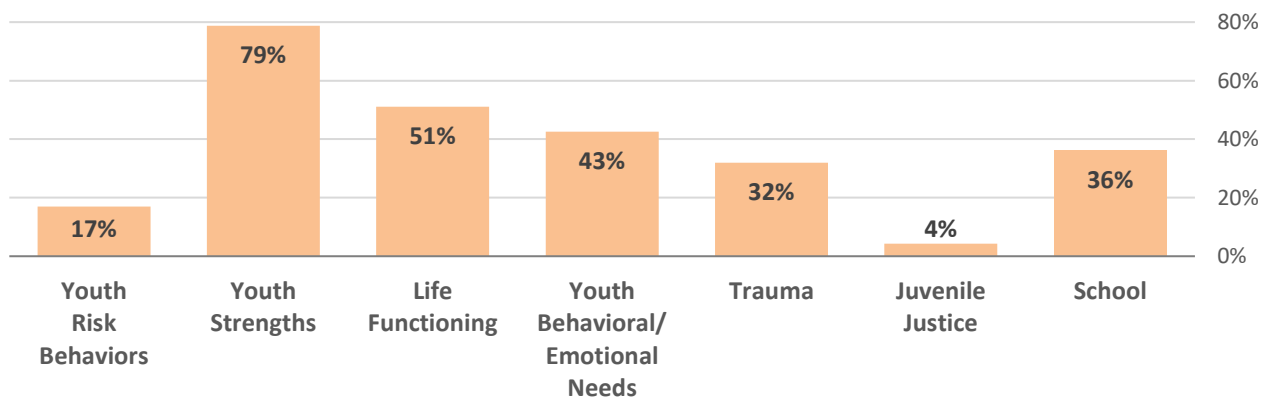
Metric	FY 11-12	FY 12-13	FY 13-14	FY 14-15	FY 15-16				
<b>Clients &amp; Services</b>									
Number of clients served	131	144	158	151	151				
Average number of hours of service	10.3	10.6	12.0	9.4	13.6				
Average time in the program (months)	3.6	4.3	3.7	4.0	3.5				
<b>Risk Indicators</b>									
<b>Pre-JAIS Risk Level<sup>a</sup></b>	Data not collected in prior fiscal years								
Low					44%				
Moderate					34%				
High					21%				
<b>CANS Items<sup>b</sup></b>	Data not collected in prior fiscal years								
Clients with 3 or more actionable needs					77%				
Number of actionable needs per client					9.1				
Percent of items with actionable needs	Data not collected in prior fiscal years				12%				
<b>Risk Indicators at Program Entry<sup>c</sup></b>									
Alcohol or drug problem	Data not collected in prior fiscal years				8%				
Attendance problem					22%	37%	49%	36%	41%
Suspension/expulsion in past year					59%	63%	72%	56%	47%

<sup>a</sup> n = 60 clients with pre-JAIS data. <sup>b</sup> n = 47 clients with data on a total of 75 CANS items. <sup>c</sup> n = 151 clients with risk indicator data.

## Risk Indicators

In FY 2015-16, Acknowledge Alliance served clients across the risk spectrum. Participants assessed with the pre-JAIS were predominantly Low (44%) and Moderate risk (34%), almost half of clients had problems at program entry with attendance (41%) or prior suspension/expulsion (47%), and 8% had a drug or alcohol problem.

Figure 1. Percent of clients with at Least 1 Moderate or Significant Need by CANS Module



Note: n = 47 clients who completed a total of 75 items

On the CANS assessment, 77% of respondents had actionable needs on 3 or more items and the average number of actionable needs per clients was 9.1, slightly less than the average across all funded programs (9.5). Figure 1 presents the percentage of clients with at least one actionable need on each of the 7 CANS modules Acknowledge Alliance administered. The Youth Strengths module had the highest percentage of participants with actionable needs (79%) indicating that participating youth lack important internal (e.g., resilience, optimism), social (e.g., family strengths/support, relationship permanence) and community (e.g., community connection, educational setting) resources and supports. The Juvenile Justice module had the lowest rate (4%); it should be noted that current risk must be serious and immediate to warrant an actionable need on this domain (e.g., 1 or 2 arrests in past 30 days vs. arrest history but none in last 30 days; risk to community residents vs. risk to community property). A majority of youth (51%) also had needs on the Life Functioning module, which assesses how the youth is functioning across individual, family, peer, school and community realms.

## Justice Outcomes

Table 2 presents justice-related outcomes for 118 youth whose six month post-entry evaluation milestone occurred in FY 2015-16. Thus, data presented in this section are for youth who enrolled in the program in the 2015 calendar year. As shown, rates for Arrests, Incarcerations and Probation Violations dropped substantially from previous fiscal years. Rates of completion of court-ordered Probation, Restitution and Community Service also continued their multi-year downward trends in both sample size and completion rate.

The Percentage of School Days Attended during the intervention (84.9%) decreased 5.5 percentage points from last year (see Table 2). New for FY 2015-16, ASR also found that 46% of students were ‘chronically absent’ (i.e., missed 10% or more of school days, both excused and unexcused absences). This is a key early warning indicator of students likely to drop out of high school and a risk factor known to significantly predict delinquency.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Please refer to the Local Action Plan 2011-2015 for a list of risk factors identified in the literature, and for a list of needs to be addressed by Local Action Plan strategies.

Table 2. Justice and Program-Specific Outcomes, FY 2015-16

Metric	FY 11-12	FY 12-13	FY 13-14	FY 14-15	FY 15-16
<b>Outcomes</b>					
<b>Justice Outcomes<sup>a</sup></b>					
Arrests (for a new law violation)	15%	25%	20%	19%	9%
Incarcerations	35%	32%	38%	27%	13%
Probation violations	29%	36%	22%	38%	15%
Completed court-ordered probation	12%	14%	17%	4%	2%
Completed court-ordered restitution	22%	19%	44%	25%	0%
Completed court-ordered community service	36%	25%	27%	11%	14%
<b>Program-specific Outcomes</b>					
Percentage of School Days Attended <sup>b</sup>	87%	88%	89%	90%	85%
Clients Missing ≥ 10% of School Days <sup>b</sup>	Data not collected in prior fiscal years				46%
Increase in GAF scores				9%	11%
<sup>a</sup> Sample sizes vary for each FY and indicator; for FY 2016, n = 118 for Arrests and Incarcerations, n = 46 for Probation Violations and Completed Probation, n = 7 for Completed Restitution and Completed Community Service. <sup>b</sup> Possible school days attended during intervention.					

## Program-specific Outcomes

Acknowledge Alliance used the Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) scale which rates the social, occupational, and psychological functioning of the youth on a scale from 1 (functioning poorly) to 100 (functioning well). Table 3 illustrates the pre- and post-test scores by school. Across all schools, 125 youth were administered the GAF at pre- and post-test. The average score was 54.9 at pre and 60.8 at post, a statistically significant increase. Ninety-eight (98) of the 125 clients (78%) demonstrated an increase in their GAF score over time, while only 8 (6%) decreased.

Table 3. GAF Pre- and Post-test Scores by School

School	Number of Matched Clients	Average GAF (Pretest)	Average GAF (Posttest)	Percent Increase
Redwood	7	46.9	61.1	<b>30%</b>
Multiple Schools	12	46.4	58.5	<b>26%</b>
Gateway	21	54.3	61.1	<b>13%</b>
Menlo-Atherton	11	51.5	57.8	<b>12%</b>
Hillcrest	19	49.2	54.2	<b>10%</b>
Sequoia	23	63.1	68	<b>8%</b>
Carlmont	15	57.3	60.8	<b>6%</b>
Canada	5	65.6	66.8	<b>2%</b>
Woodside	12	58.6	59.3	<b>1%</b>
All schools	125	54.9	60.8	<b>11%</b>
Note: For all schools, improvement over time was statistically significant. Paired-samples $t_{124} = 9.327, p < .001$ .				

## Client Vignette

As a way to illustrate the effort of Acknowledge Alliance’s Court and Community School Counseling program and the benefits to its participants, staff provided a summarized case history of one client served this year.

<b>Name of focus client:</b>	“Mateo”
<b>Age and sex of client:</b>	14 at first session – 18 at final session – Male
<b>Reason for referral:</b>	The director of Attendance and Welfare for the Sequoia Union High School District referred Mateo because he was involved in a felony case as a 12 year old, 7 <sup>th</sup> grader. He was transitioning into mainstream high school while still being consumed by the court system, probation, immigration issues and strained familial dynamics due to the case. The above issues caused Mateo to develop a need for mental health support.
<b>Client’s behavior, affect and appearance when they first started your program:</b>	<p>Mateo first came to us as a 14-year-old who appeared to be no older than an 11- or 12-year-old in stature. He was petite, had a sweet and innocent look and feel to his face and presence. He presented as scared and withdrawn, but always extremely respectful. Mateo was very careful with how forthcoming he was. It was clear that he was experiencing family strife, immigration terror and academic difficulties leading to symptoms of anxiety, depression and complex trauma; however, he shared very little.</p> <p>He came to session every week, but remained on the surface for months. He initially seemed to be in our voluntary program because he needed to be, as if he was involved due to fear of being reprimanded rather than to gain support and/or work on himself and his symptoms. Yet, despite this initial feeling, he was aware that it was never mandatory. Mateo would eventually complete four years of voluntary treatment.</p>
<b>What activities did your client engage in and was their engagement consistent?</b>	<p>As a sophomore, due to his particular needs and his commitment to therapy, Mateo was chosen to be a part of a pilot program where Acknowledge Alliance partnered with The Wildlife Associates (a sanctuary for wildlife) for their “At-Risk Youth Program” (<a href="http://www.wildlifeassociates.org/html/programs_atrisk.html">http://www.wildlifeassociates.org/html/programs_atrisk.html</a>).</p> <p>Mateo had 100% attendance to this program and would speak very highly of the experience, or in his words “opportunity,” during his therapeutic sessions. He was able to connect, appreciate and learn to open up by way of being with the animals, their stories and the mentors that worked with them. Mateo was beginning to learn to trust again.</p>
<b>Describe client’s affect, behavior or appearance toward the end of your program, noting any ways in which they changed.</b>	By the time Mateo was a senior in high school he was a young man who had grown (physically, mentally and emotionally) into a model student, friend, son and client. He had successfully completed all probation requirements, built strong relationships/attachments, gained trust within his family again and was a committed, forthcoming and reliable client. His demeanor was gleeful, confident and he spoke of high hopes for his future.
<b>What did your client learn as a result of this program?</b>	During a speech given by Mateo, as he accepted a Role Model Student award, he stated that through therapy he learned the importance of “thinking before you act” and that, like the animals at Wildlife Associates, “trust can give you a second chance.” He also spoke about the importance of familial support and mentorship.



<p><b>What is your client doing differently in their life as a result of the program?</b></p>	<p>Mateo learned that trust and relationships are crucial in building a strong sense of self. He learned that we are all entitled to mistakes, but it is what you make of them that count. Mateo became focused on the positive aspects of life rather than the adversities. He utilized his traumatic experiences to catapult him into completing high school, creating strong relationships, applying to college and working toward to an EMT career where he could help “give back.”</p>
<p><b>What does your client say is the value of the program for them?</b></p>	<p>During Mateo’s speech, mentioned above, he stated, “it was people like his therapist at Acknowledge Alliance that helped him have hope and to trust again.” He also said he saw himself in the injured eagle at Wildlife Associates. He too felt “trapped, in pain and out of control at one time and that it was caring people, like those at Acknowledge Alliance that helped him see he deserved to be successful, happy and could have a second chance.”</p> <p>During his final session with his therapist of four years, Mateo cried (no longer withdrawn), hugged (was able to trust again) and thanked her for her help and for being available (healthy sense of receiving support and having had it make a difference).</p>