

Valencia County FY19 Final Report

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Introduction

The Valencia County Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) is a county board with around 25 members; including representatives from local government, faith-based, department of health, public education, juvenile probation, non-profits, community organizations and business entities. There are 9-11 executive board members at any given time, all of whom hold voting privileges. The board held its' first meeting in 2010 where initial plans and goals for the board were set. The board meets once a year, usually in August, during an annual retreat to decide on the strategic priorities for the upcoming grant cycle.

Regular meetings of the board are held the fourth Thursday of the month with no meeting in July and an adjusted meeting in November and December. Meetings are currently held at the Henry Perea Building located at 750 Morris Rd at 11:30 am for the executive meeting and noon for the general meeting. Meetings are open to the public and can be attended by anyone interested in the JJB without invitation. Average attendance at both meetings is 20-25 members including a few youth members from the youth subcommittee.

Mission

To serve the youth and families in Valencia County by providing comprehensive services for the purpose of empowering youth and families to be successful productive citizens

Vision

JJB will focus on increasing protective factors for disconnected middle and high school students by engaging community partners, schools, and their families in positive relationship building venues.

Guiding Principles

- Strengthening families & youth
- Promoting delinquency prevention
- Promoting education, health, and positive community involvement
- Establishing effective alternatives to detention
- Establishing a system of graduated sanctions
- Establish a continuum for Valencia County youth

Board Identified Issues

- Poverty and limited transportation to services
- Substance use
- Lack of parenting classes and positive role models
- Not enough accountability in schools
- Children raised by grandparents

Fiscal Year 2019 Update

In FY19, the Valencia County Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) has continued to move forward with the changes made in FY17; including building relationships with local law enforcement, creating a Truancy Task Force as a part of our FY17 strategic plan, improving quality of programming, and building stronger community ties throughout the county. It is the goal of the board to continue to make strides in bringing the community together under the common goal of serving youth and their families. In FY20, the board will continue to focus on reducing negative adolescent police contact, and provide quality programming and services to youth 10-17 years old who are at immediate risk of police contact or have already had contact.

The JJB received a JJAC funding increase of 148% for FY19 for Botvin Lifeskills and the Reception Assessment Center (RAC). In FY20, Valencia was awarded an additional site for its RAC program, received new funding for Restorative Justice, and was renewed funding for Botvin Lifeskills. These programs keep youth out of detention by providing services that rehabilitate them before they have committed a felony offense, and it save the county the cost of having to house youth at the detention center at a rate of \$168.00 per day.

FY19 Needs Statement

In an effort to increase access to needed support services, the Continuum will partner with providers to implement evidence-based diversion programs. The goal is to improve school attendance and academic performance among truant students, and consequently decrease youth involvement with the juvenile justice system. Needed support services include assessment, counseling, case management and life skills trainings.

In 2016, the County had an estimated youth population of 8,629 ages 10-17. Every day, scores of youth in the County are absent from school; many are absent without an excuse and deemed truant under the New Mexico's Compulsory Attendance Law. An overwhelming majority of chronically absent youth in the County are impoverished. According to data provided by CYFD for the years 2014 -2016, Valencia County's poverty rate fluctuated between 22.2% and 24.5%.

Like most communities in New Mexico, poverty in Valencia County is widespread, generational, and impacts the entire community. Sadly, poverty and school absence or truancy often feed each other. The conditions that students living in poverty face (poor nutrition, lack of access to health care, lack of transportation) exacerbate poor attendance. CYFD data for the

County indicates that truancy amounted to 95% of the top offenses for status referrals in 2016. Individuals and families in the County dealing with limited resources often lack access to needed services and often fall victim to the risks inherent in not attending school. The research consistently states that truancy is a risk factor for delinquency behavior, substance abuse, gang activity, involvement in criminal activities such as burglary, auto theft, vandalism, and negative adult outcomes.

Data provided by the State of New Mexico CYFD for the County indicate the top offenses for delinquent referrals for the past three reported years (SFY2014 –SFY2016) in Valencia County were drug related, followed by battery, public affray and criminal damage to property. The top offenses for probation violations reported in 2016 were alcohol and drug related; this amounted to 37% of the total of 57 probation violations reported in that year.

The Continuum will work with Belen CSD, Los Lunas CSD, local courts, JPO, school resource officers, truancy coaches, and service providers to address the root causes of truancy in youth 10-17 years of age. It will reduce the likelihood that County youth will receive fewer services or have less access to such services, compared to those in urban areas. Enforcing regular attendance may be one of the most potent weapons in fighting poverty, closing the attendance gap and diverting youth away from the justice system.

Juvenile Justice Board

1) Board Composition

The Valencia County Juvenile Justice Board is a community-based board with over twenty general members. The Executive Board Chairman is Father Robert Mundy and the Vice-Chair is Ruben Barreras. There are ten executive board members, all of whom hold

voting privileges. They are made up of a member of the religious community, a member of the Truancy Liaison from Los Lunas schools, a representative from 1st Choice, a representative of OSAP, two community activists, a representative from YDI, a representative from the Health Department, a county commissioner, and a Juvenile Probation Officer. The JJB strives to meet all the required positions as required by the grant. The most difficult seems to be finding a judge who is able and willing to sit on the board and keeping an assistant DA for longer than a few months.

2) Youth Subcommittee

The board held a youth summit in June of 2019 to recruit new youth members to the board. Sixteen youth participated in the summit with representations from four of the seven high schools with two who are homeschooled. During the youth summit, the four topics covered with substance use, behavioral health, sexual assault, and violence in the county. Of the sixteen youth, there are three or four who are interested in attending the meetings throughout FY20.

3) Truancy Task Force Subcommittee

The Truancy Task Force was identified as a focus area during the 2016 board retreat. However, it did not officially form until the beginning of 2018. This was primarily due to the time it took to reach out to the necessary parties. The subcommittee chair is Estevan Gallegos with juvenile probation. The membership is made up of truancy representatives from both school districts, as well as Isleta, a district court judge, JJB program specialists, an assistant district attorney, and interested community members. It has an average attendance of ten and they meet once a month. With the new changes in truancy laws, they have been working closely with the attorney general's office to partner with local school districts to create plans attendance. Starting

August 2019, this task force will be called the Attendance Support Subcommittee to remove truancy from the language.

4) Family and Community Wellness Subcommittee

The Family and Community Wellness Subcommittee is chaired by Diana Good from the Department of Health. The committee has partnered with Mission: Graduate (United Way) to assist in Job Training Seminars throughout Valencia for juniors who needed more direction. Mission Graduate partnered with local businesses to put on presentations about different job opportunities within their company and youth also participated in mock interviews.

They also supported a local food and hygiene drive for homeless youth in Valencia County by volunteering their time and using their connections to community resources to gather items.

The subcommittee has also partnered with YDI to hold a Hack to the Future event at their larger Get Up, Get Moving event. The committee held mock interviews, an interview closet, selfie-stations, and other youth centered vendors. The goal of this annual event is to assist youth in job exploration and to build confidence when interviewing.

5) Networking/Community Collaboration

Through the strategic planning session, partners were identified as being essential to the success of the general JJB membership. These partners were a Judge, an Assistant District Attorney, Law Enforcement, Truancy Coaches from Belen schools, public officials, and School Administration from both school districts. We have a judge, a DA, and a representative from Belen schools administration office attend our truancy meetings but are not able to attend our

board meetings. We occasionally have someone from law enforcement attend our meetings, but not with regular consistency.

The board set up partnerships with the Belen Police Department and with the Belen Truancy Department. Belen PD does not currently send a representative but is willing to meet with the a few members of the board quarterly as issues or concerns arise. BelenTruancy Department sends their truancy secretary to provide a report each month. Through the Belen Truancy Department, contact was made with the administration, but there has not been any active attendance.

The biggest hurdle in bringing on these members is the time commitment. It is impossible to schedule a meeting that is convenient for all participants. A survey was sent out to attempt to find a better time, but the current timeframe works the best. The JJB continues to try to collaborate with community partners to further incentives the relationship. This had been particularly successful through the current subcommittees.

FY19Programs

1) Reception Assessment Center (RAC)

A) General Program Information

RAC is a key component to addressing the problems youth face in Valencia County. RAC is designed to provide law enforcement an alternative to incarceration for youth who have been detained for low level misdemeanor or felony offenses. This program accepts and provides services for 10-17 year old's. The goal of the program is to intervene swiftly, connecting youth and their families to community resources to prevent further negative contact with juvenile justice system.

It uses the JIF Interviewer, an empirically-based rapid assessment tool used to assess day-to-day functioning in children and adolescents to determine the needs of youths and their families. The JIF Interview assesses whether the youth has any mental health (depression, anxiety, trauma, self-harm, irrational thoughts) and/or substance use issues. In addition, the JIF inquires about the youth's functioning in school, home, family life, peer relationships, community behaviors (delinquency), and health issues, allowing the specialist to learn about the whole child and to identify key factors that may influence negative behavior. Based on this screening, completed by youth or parents/caregivers, an individualized strengths and goal-based Service Plan is created. Specialists informed about the formal and informal resources available within the local community can help caregivers identify programs that could foster resiliency in at-risk youths. For children who are too young to take the assessment, the program specialist will interview the child and guardian and determine which available services provide the best fit. At the end of the program, another JIF is given. In every case, noticeable changes were made. Occasionally a youth who had been tested a few years prior will re-offend and return to RAC. When comparing results, in nearly every case, the child was faced with a different set of issues for RAC to work with. In the other cases, where the child still scores in the same areas, it is due to family's choice to stop treatment after they exit the RAC program, youth refusing mental health services, or some traumatic change that results in the same or escalated patterns of behaviors.

The Valencia County RAC program keeps youth in the program for an average of 45-60 days and sometimes longer if needed. This timeframe allows the RAC Specialist to follow up with the youth and their family to make sure they followed through on recommended services. It also allows them to offer support through the initial transition to services which may include

resources for transportation, job training, and alternative education programs. The case management component of the diversion strategy will place a high priority on promoting positive school attendance and positive behaviors. The specialist will act as a liaison between parents/guardians and other providers to facilitate the success of referred youth.

RAC primarily operates within the schools. This requires the full-time Specialist to travel from school to school based on need and current caseload. The Specialist will also provide services in public places if the parents wish. Belen Consolidated School District has students from Socorro County, because of this, a Specialist may have to travel up to an hour to reach the homes of some students.

B) Accomplishments

In FY19, RAC was funded for three sites for the first time. New Day was able to staff the Los Lunas and Valencia high school sites for most of the year. They had some coverage at Belen high school as well. Although there was some turn over, community relationships stayed in place and for the first time, the JJB established a strong relationship with Valencia high school.

RAC received 3-5 referrals per month from Belen PD. Due to the success of the Belen PD referrals, the same group approached Los Lunas PD in the spring and began receiving 12-15 cases each quarter. It is the goal of the JJB to reach out to Bosque Farms PD but did not receive any referrals from them in FY19. This is likely due to the fact they only have a few youth cases per year.

C) Program Difficulties

This program struggled a bit this year with turn around. The Los Lunas site went through two Specialist with the second Specialist leaving in April, making it difficult to rehire for the

contract period. The Belen site also went through two Specialists and New Day decided not to rehire that position after their supervisor was no longer with them. The Valencia site had the most success and was able to run through May. Due to these changes, 122 youth were served by this program in 2019.

D) Program Sustainability

RAC was approved for funding under the JJAC grant for FY20. New Day decided not to renew their contract with the JJB because it was too difficult to manage from Albuquerque. H2 Academic Solutions is the new contractor for RAC. It is a local business in Valencia County who is familiar with all the local partners. They have begun the process of reaching out to grantee continuity of programming. As a business, they have the opportunity to seek additional funding to support this program and other youth programs.

New Things in Valencia County

1) Community Gardens

Valencia County has Community Gardens, but through the Soil and Water Conservation District two more gardens were added called the East Valencia Urban Gardens. These gardens are almost entirely volunteer run and serve populations that do not have grocery stores outside of a Dollar General. Many youth-driven programs have volunteered to care for the garden one to two days a week. In FY18 and FY19, the community gardens were able to offer 10 paid youth positions to help assist with the garden. This funding came through a grant in partnership with YDI.

2) Police Athletic League

The Police Athletic League (PAL) officially began in February of 2017 and is a non-profit organization designed to bridge the gap between first responders and the youth of our community. It is a community partnership involving law enforcement, the fire department, and other community organizations. The goal of Valencia County PAL is to provide a mentorship program matching up children with police officer and remain a part of the child's life for a full year. The mentoring involves meeting with the child as well as an explorer program that introduces them to the work police and fire do. This program runs a four-week program where youth get to work with police officers and fire fighters doing hunter safety training, learning how to use a bow and arrow, learning how to box, playing volleyball, and riding ATVs. They are funded through a mentoring grant and currently serve elementary school students throughout the county. Since their start, they have graduated over eighty youth and are looking for additional funding so they can provide programming all year round. In FY18, PAL was looking for a new location within the county. In FY19, they are now housed out of the Youth Mentoring Center in Los Lunas. They have also contracted one part-time staff person to run this program.

3) Drop-in Center

Valencia County does not currently have a drop-in center. However, discussions on the possibility began in 2017. After the group was unable to find a space, they partnered with the Youth Mentoring Center and hosted a fundraiser in 2019 that provided money to keep it running during the evenings on weekdays. It does not have the space for an overnight shelter, but is a start in that direction and allows local partnerships to test the collaboration, work out difficulties, and then to apply for separate funding to replicate the idea two more times within the county.

A youth drop-in center could have a large impact on decreasing a number of problems faced by students in Valencia County. Some of these problems include access to food and clean

water, adequate shelter, and a safe place to hang out. Belen High School has identified, through their truancy department, ten teenagers who are attending school, but are homeless. This does not include the 120 families identified by the McKinney-Vento Project in the southern half of the county. If the drop-in center stays open throughout the night, it would give some of these youth a place to sleep, shower, and eat. At a minimum, the community hopes that the drop-in center will provide access to food, have a shower facility, and a washer and dryer.