



# CREATING RESULTS WITH YOUTH & THEIR FAMILIES

## Annual Evaluation

PYRAMID ALTERNATIVES

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



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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- Program Description .....3**
  - Programmatic Challenges in FY 2015-16 ..... 3
- Evaluation Methods .....4**
- Evaluation Findings .....5**
  - FY 2015-16 Data Highlights ..... 5
  - Profile of Clients Served ..... 5
  - Risk Indicators ..... 5
  - Client Vignette ..... 6

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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Pyramid Alternative's Strengthen Our Youth (SOY) program serves the needs of at-risk students and families at four school sites in Daly City, South San Francisco, and Half Moon Bay. SOY is an early intervention program designed to increase developmental assets, school engagement, and family functioning. The SOY program has three main components: substance use prevention, topic specific group therapy, and parent education. In September and October, SOY counselors facilitated classroom presentations on substance use and prevention as a part of the 6th, 7th or 9th grade health curriculum.

Once these classroom presentations were completed, SOY counselors began their topic specific groups; the topics varied by school site depending upon the needs of each school. SOY's Spanish language parenting group, located in South San Francisco, focused on topics related to child and adolescent development. This year the SOY Program began their first English speaking parenting group, located in Daly City. In addition to the main components of the program, SOY staff also provided individual and family counseling, brief crisis intervention, and case management.

### Programmatic Challenges in FY 2015-16

Program staff indicated that the challenges in 2015-2016 include that four out of the five staff were new to the program, meaning that learning the programmatic requirements took longer than expected. Other programmatic challenges included implementing the CANS and JAIS assessment tools, starting with certifying a super-trainer to getting the staff certified.

Many of the schools that receive services through the SOY Program were going through administrative transition which made it more difficult for program staff to receive referrals and begin providing group/individual services earlier in the school year. Another challenge that was experienced throughout the years is parent engagement and involvement in services has been low to minimal, making it difficult to implement services and preserve the quality service.

## 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.

**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.

# EVALUATION FINDINGS

## FY 2015-16 Data Highlights

- The number of clients served (+21%) and average hours of service (+29%) both increased compared to FY 2014-15
- Participants had low risk on measures related to justice involvement and behaviors—pre-JAIS and CANS Youth Risk Behaviors module—but had high needs related to developing internal assets and general functioning—CANS Youth Strengths and Life Functioning modules

## Profile of Clients Served

This year Pyramid Alternatives served 224 youth, all of whom had demographic data (see Table 1). A majority of participants were female (64%) and identified predominantly as Latino (37%), followed by Unknown (31%), Filipino/Pacific Islander (11%) and White/Caucasian (9%). The average age of clients was 14.7. Participants received an average of 12.4 hours of services—predominantly individual counseling (26% of hours), case management (26%), assessment (22%), and group counseling (16%).

Table 1. Client Demographics, FY 2015-16

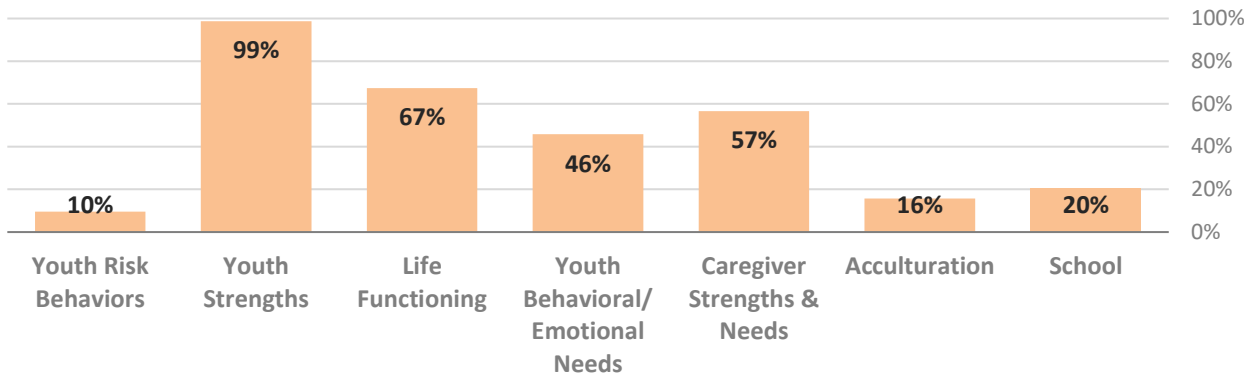
Metric	FY 11-12	FY 12-13	FY 13-14	FY 14-15	FY 15-16
<b>Clients &amp; Services</b>					
Number of clients served	249	298	209	185	224
Average number of hours of service	11.2	9.7	11.0	9.6	12.4
Average time in the program (months)	4	4	4	6	4.8
<b>Risk Indicators</b>					
<b>Pre-JAIS Risk Level<sup>a</sup></b>	Data not collected in prior fiscal years				
Low					98%
Moderate					2%
High					0%
<b>CANS Items<sup>b</sup></b>					
Clients with 3 or more actionable needs					95%
Number of actionable needs per client	8.9				
Percent of items with actionable needs	14%				
<small><sup>a</sup> n = 84 clients with complete pre-JAIS data. <sup>b</sup> n = 83 clients with data on a total of 65 CANS items.</small>					

## Risk Indicators

In FY 2015-16, Acknowledge Alliance served clients across the risk spectrum. Participants assessed with the pre-JAIS were almost universally Low risk (98%).

On the CANS assessment, 95% of respondents had actionable needs on 3 or more items and the average number of actionable needs per clients was 8.9, slightly less than the average across all funded programs (9.5).

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



Note: n = 83 clients who completed a total of 65 CANS items.

Figure 1 presents the percentage of clients with at least one actionable need on each of the 7 CANS modules Pyramid administered. Almost all youth had at least one actionable need on the Youth Strengths module, and the rates were also high for the Life Functioning and Caregiver Strengths & Needs modules. Rates were relatively low, by contrast, on Youth Risk Behaviors.

These results suggest Pyramid is serving clients who have a lot of need areas—especially related to developing 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—but these have not yet developed into serious risk behaviors or justice involvement.

### Client Vignette

As a way to illustrate the effort of Pyramid’s programs and the benefits to its participants, staff provided a summarized case history of one client served this year.

<b>Name of focus client:</b>	Dominique
<b>Age and sex of client:</b>	Client is currently a 12 y.o. female
<b>Reason for referral:</b>	Dominique was referred by teachers for odd behavior in the classroom such as rolling on the floor during class. She was rarely on task, distracted other students, and would bully/manipulate other students. She had difficulties maintaining friendships. Upon assessment, the therapist learned that Dominique engaged in self-harm behavior twice, she has had minimal contact with her father, her mother has a severe substance abuse issue, her sister and grandmother are her legal guardians, her brother has fetal-alcohol syndrome, and they all live in the mother’s house.

<p><b>Client’s behavior, affect and appearance when they first started your program:</b></p>	<p>Dominique presented hyper, impulsive, but interested in being in counseling. On our first session she hid under the table and then a cabinet. She was smiley and did not talk much. If asked a question, she would respond by stating the name of her favorite band or favorite band member.</p>
<p><b>What activities did your client engage in and was their engagement consistent?</b></p>	<p>The client’s engagement to certain activities was inconsistent. Initially, the client had limited engagement in structured interventions. The client participated in some art therapy interventions about her family and coping strategies. She responded best to play therapy and non-directive counseling. Eventually, the client was engaged in more therapeutic activities such as sand tray therapy, learning mindfulness skills, taking a walk outside, and expressive arts therapy.</p>
<p><b>Describe client’s affect, behavior or appearance toward the end of your program, noting any ways in which they changed.</b></p>	<p>Client was able to participate in talk therapy without diverting or deflecting the conversation to her favorite band. She explored traumatic experiences of abandonment, witnessing her mother’s odd behavior, and living with her mother who has severe substance abuse issues. Her teacher reported that she was able to focus more in class and was being sent out of the class less for disruptive behavior. Dominique was able to form a healthy attachment with the counselor.</p>
<p><b>What did your client learn as a result of this program?</b></p>	<p>The client learned about emotional regulation, healthy coping skills through creative expression, and effective communication with her guardians, peers, and teachers.</p>
<p><b>What is your client doing differently in their life as a result of the program?</b></p>	<p>Many of the client’s issues were a result of family hardship and dysfunction. The client and her legal guardians seemed to have a breakthrough towards the end of treatment in which they were able to communicate better and empathize with each other. The family also seemed receptive to psychoeducation on alternatives to disciplining approaches. After this family work, the client presented happier.</p> <p>The client showed improvements as a result of the program. The client was able to build relationship skills, make friends, do homework, and focus more in class.</p>
<p><b>What does your client say is the value of the program for them?</b></p>	<p>During our last session, Dominique stated that her relationships were better with her family and she was able to make friends.</p>