

Imperial County SafeFutures Grant Program
Report of Process Evaluation and Lessons Learned

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The Imperial County SafeFutures program enabled outcomes in various areas and provided much important learning to participant organizations. The grant has changed the way organizations interact, do business with each other, and how they deliver services to clients at the local level.

This report centers on systems change and lessons learned from two different perspectives. One is the organizational perspective that includes collaborative development, policy, communications, procedures, and implementation. Second, is the perspective of the individual service delivery professionals working with clients in the field. This provides an indication of how service delivery within the SafeFutures model has changed for both these professionals and their clients.

It can be argued that organizational changes are penultimate to the changes in knowledge, attitude, behavior, and/or status for children and families. However, they are vital and a set of necessary conditions required to examine the systems change generated through participation in the SafeFutures program and the legacy of change to be sustained and/or broadened within Imperial County.

The Imperial County SafeFutures program focused attention on the county's north end including the city of Brawley. In fact, the Brawley Family Resource Center, located on the campus of Brawley High School, is a direct product of the SafeFutures grant. However, countywide systems change has developed from the grant work begun in north Imperial County under the auspices of the SafeFutures grant program.

All agencies, public and private, agree that the SafeFutures Management Team is a good forum to bring people together and examine service issues. This has allowed individuals with different organizational allegiances to learn about each other's policies, procedures, and constraints. The growth of common understanding has led to networking and informal discussions about mutual problem solving. Through this process, public and private agencies have learned about new opportunities for clients with needs that cannot be directly satisfied at their individual position in the service continuum.

Front line service delivery professionals generally found the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center model an excellent environment in which work with clients. They report the ability to link children and families with services in an incredibly expeditious manner because they are co-located with professionals from other agencies.

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They enjoy working in this model for several reasons. First, they are able to immediately consult with colleagues about client situations instead of waiting hours or days for a return telephone call. Second, they are able to direct and even introduce clients to an individual who can help them. This is in contrast to referring clients to a distant office where they will have to wait through the schedule, intake process, and bureaucracy of an additional organization.

Service professionals also appreciate knowing that these SafeFutures in-house referrals are easy enough for clients that they will keep the appointments and follow through to obtain services. They also know that they can follow up with a co-worker to insure that appointments are kept and appropriate action taken. In turn, they are able to personally follow up with clients in real time instead of waiting endless amounts of time for the normal system to work. This applies to cases that are care coordinated and others that do not reach that status. On a personal level, seeing clients through the process and resulting positive outcomes is intrinsically rewarding to service professionals.

Service professionals report that they are able to effectively handle a larger caseload in this organizational structure. Several things contribute to this perception. Having representation on site at the Brawley Family Resource Center vastly reduces the number of hours required to escort a referral to other agency services. This in turn allows a speedy return to other issues confronting the service professional, the client, and other clients.

A probation officer shared the story of a new case where the officer met with a high school youth one morning. During their interview, the officer identified several family functioning issues including lack of funds for food. The probation officer contacted the Brawley Family Resource Center social worker. The social worker advised the officer to bring the mother to the center.

The officer visited the mother that morning and brought her to Brawley Family Resource Center to meet the social worker. By that afternoon the food stamp application process was complete and the mother had food stamps for use that same day. The officer indicated that, without the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center work environment, up to one and a half workdays would have been required driving the parent to El Centro and facilitating the process. As it was, the officer spent this time with other cases.

An additional benefit is that the probation officer receives unsolicited feedback about results from colleagues at the Brawley Family Resource Center. This is

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invaluable to him because it permits him to build strong and trusting relationships with youth and families by following up on the positive experiences they have with "the system." The probation officer knows that this reduces the barriers to cooperating with him as a probation officer and will facilitate parents to seek help before more costly intervention is required.

The probation officer is amazed at the number of parents that voluntarily seek help from the SafeFutures Family Resource Center. The officer has entered into cases and had preventative influences instead of needing to intervene later when youth enters the criminal justice system.

This probation officer sees tremendous advantages for the multidisciplinary team approach to serving youth and families. The probation officer calls the fundamental benefit the "faster process." Things that would have required six hours of his work time in a normal probation officer setting get accomplished in twenty minutes because of co-location with representatives from other departments.

The benefits of this are twofold. First, the probation officer has much more time to work cases, attend SARB meetings, etc. The probation officer makes more than twice the number contacts with youth and families than in a traditional setting. Second, youth and families receive assistance in probably 90% less elapsed time than otherwise would be the case.

The following insights come from an interview with a substance abuse counselor. The counselor started out substance abuse work with adults and now finds student much more open to change. This counselor feels they have less to unlearn are willing to accept new knowledge about consequences much faster than adults are.

This counselor feels much more effective with clients because of the multidisciplinary nature of SafeFutures organization. For example, if during an assessment interview, the counselor determines that the student does not have a substance problem, the counselor is able to immediately bring the client together with a social worker, eligibility worker, probation officer, or other professional that can address core and broader situational issues. The counselor characterized this as being able to take action instead of simply "putting a client into the system without confidence that anything will ever happen" (i.e., at all, or in a manner commensurate with the clients criticality of time).

Another advantage of the Brawley Family Resource Center office is that clients can simply drop-in for impromptu sessions at critical times. This provides an

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opportunity to provide ongoing nurturing and support during times of need. The counselor sees this a major advantage over the situation of a typical alcohol and drug counselor at a high school that is limited by regulation to only meeting with students in groups.

By being able to directly communicate with other service providing disciplines in the SafeFutures setting, the counselor has learned about the services available to his clients and their families. The counselor has learned about community resources and can now refer clients directly to these services or to a SafeFutures colleague instead of handing them off to another and distant organization. In the later case, much more of his time would be required to ferret out the appropriate service, department, office and/or individual, not to mention following up with the client and service provider. This saves a great deal of time, allowing more time with other cases and to see additional clients. In fact, the counselor's conservative estimation is that the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center office situation has allowed a doubling of the number of client interactions over what would be the case in a normal situation.

A Department of Mental Health case manager expressed that the multidisciplinary nature of the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center office is an enormous advantage compared to previous assignments where sharp boundaries were drawn and obtaining collateral services for clients took much of her time as well as lengthy cycle times for the client. The time reduction for effective referrals is reduced to "literally seconds" in many instances instead of a convoluted process requiring "over two weeks."

The case manager finds that the family centered focus of SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center produces faster and longer lasting outcomes for her clients. This is as contrasted with the traditional individual focus of prior assignments.

The mental health professional finds quick service linking a tremendous pay off for clients and her personal productivity. Clients get needed assistance before their sense of urgency diminishes because of either new personal priorities or simply the passage of time. The case manager also believes that prompt services builds trust in the system, and in turn leads people to access the system for other assistance that reinforce longer term positive outcomes.

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In terms of personal productivity, the case manager states the following...

1. Has gained new knowledge about collateral services available to clients;
2. Does not spend hours driving clients to offices of other departments to insure that clients follow through on referrals; and
3. Does not spend endless hours working through the bureaucratic maze of other departments looking for the appropriate place to send a client for appropriate assistance.

The foregoing is representative of reports from many front line service professionals associated with the Imperial County SafeFutures program. Beyond the sentiments reported above, front line service professionals report a sense of personal satisfaction from working closely with colleagues in the multidisciplinary setting of the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center. One individual indicates a feeling of empowerment to make a difference in the lives of youth as contrasted with working in a bureaucratic box that is bound by strict and confining rules.

This individual truly appreciates an environment where it is possible to have an affect on the lives of youth and families. This assignment was personally fulfilling because of the visible outcomes for people. This individual reports having put additional personal effort into their job at hand because of this fulfillment factor.

These personal accounts reflect the collaborative nature of the SafeFutures work structure. Professionals have been able to work with clients in a holistic fashion across a wider range of services offered within Imperial County by both public and private agencies. Similar outcomes are reported at the organizational level. Agency management representatives see tremendous value from the experiences they have had through involvement in the Imperial County SafeFutures program. As indicated earlier, the SafeFutures Management Team has provided a forum where agency representatives can learn about the initiatives of colleague organizations that relate to common problems and clients.

Moreover, service professionals report the ability to handle cases more expeditiously in this multidisciplinary work model. They found it difficult to quantify the increased caseload they could handle in the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center work environment because they did not keep individual

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statistics. However, upon further questioning, answers ranged from 25% to 100% improvement. This variation is product of many variables, but it does indicate a general tendency for increased productivity. There is also an indication that clients are more comprehensively served (e.g., more preventative services, longer term outcomes, etc.). These two factors tend to support not only sustainability of the SafeFutures service model, but also a reason to explore implementing the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center model in other places in the Imperial County.

The organizational perspective demonstrates outcomes that are equally as positive to those for the service delivery professionals. In general, people see and embrace the benefits of working collaboratively toward a common goal. This is not to say that it has not been difficult along the journey. Collaboration through the Imperial County SafeFutures grant has been a process. It took time of organizations to see and grow to respect the collaborative process. Lines of communication had to be opened, barriers to collaboration had to be incrementally broken down, and individual/organizational biases had to shrink so that the seeds of collaborative work could be planted, nurtured to grow, and bloom. This is not a unique process and SafeFutures has facilitated Imperial County through its initial stages.

SafeFutures was institutionalized through two leadership groups. These are the Interagency Leadership Council (ILC) and the SafeFutures Management Team.

The Interagency Leadership Council meets monthly and consists of senior top-level managers from all Imperial County departments. The Imperial County Interagency Leadership Council addresses policy issues facing the county. Since award of the SafeFutures grant, the Interagency Leadership Council has been a top-down support for implementation of a grass-roots initiative.

The SafeFutures Management Team is a collection of county department supervisors, private community based organization executive directors, and others. The Management Team meets monthly and with the charge of translating and implementing Interagency Leadership Council policy into practice within the SafeFutures grant program. Management Team members generally includes those individuals that supervise the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center service delivery professionals. The SafeFutures Management Team has wrestled and conquered many of the systems change and interagency collaboration issues facing the overall SafeFutures program.

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These two forums have facilitated the growth and organizational development that manifests itself as systems changes that are in place today. Through this growth process of collaborative development, members have learned to identify and focus on common problems over the particular agendas or "turf issues" of their home agencies.

The SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center has served as a laboratory where new ideas and solutions can be tested on a small scale. This has been an iterative process. Often times, today's solution led to the discovery of new and unanticipated issues. The Management Team has accepted these new barriers as challenges and methodically resolved them. This iterative process has enlightened all participants about the barriers to seemingly simple solutions and that the collaborative process can deliver novel solutions to complex problems.

The county's Behavioral Health Drug and Alcohol supervisor reports that their participation in the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center program has been a good experience. The supervisor also notes that Behavioral Health Alcohol and Drug Program would participate in similar projects in the future.

The supervisor also notes that it was very nice for Alcohol and Drug counselors to have an office at the Brawley Family Resource Center. Similarly, it was also helpful to have representatives of other agencies available at the same location for consultation about other client needs, which became evident during the alcohol and drug treatment process.

However, she points out that it would be nice if the family resource center had a room suited to group counseling. The conference room is too formal and not conducive to therapy sessions.

CASA is a youth offender program where judges assign cases to the agency. In addition to the executive director and office staff, they employ three case managers and forty-nine volunteers. CASA's executive director reports that the SafeFutures program is extremely valuable to her agency's work as well as the county as a whole.

The entire CASA staff is aware of the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center as a referral resource for clients. Although, CASA does not keep statistics about the number of referrals made to SafeFutures, the executive director knows that it has been instrumental in facilitating their work with clients.

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Following are two case success stories, where CASA referrals to Brawley Family Resource Center for supplemental services, yielded successful outcomes.

1. A fourteen-year-old youth was referred to CASA by a juvenile justice judge. CASA caseworkers determined that there were underlying family issues that contributed to the youth's behavior. CASA referred the family to the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center for mental health analysis. It was then determined that a parent was in denial and emotionally (and perhaps physically) abusing the fourteen-year-old child. The situation was compounded by the fact that younger siblings were witnesses to the abuse.

In the final analysis, the therapist worked collaboratively with CASA to facilitate removal of the children from this abusive family situation.

2. In another youth offender case, CASA referred an overwhelmed single mother of seven children to the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center for assessment. By way of this collaborative process, it was determined that the mother had serious anger issues.

The mother received counseling and began working on her anger. Moreover, the children received services from Brawley Family Resource Center and the Boys and Girls Club. At the Boys and Girls club, they had the opportunity for after school tutoring and to interact with a positive peer group.

At the level of organizational systems change, the CASA executive director expresses that SafeFutures has produced a new and higher level of inter-organizational networking in Imperial County. She knows that this has contributed to the movement of existing services to new geographic locations where they were not previously offered (e.g., Calipat, Westmoreland, etc.). She has personally heard students express appreciation for the new services. It is not uncommon to hear a student communicate specific appreciation for having a non-threatening person to talk with about problems and issues.

She notes that many agencies and service providers have embraced SafeFutures collaborative development for the long-term benefit to children, families, and the community. They have expanded their programs and collaborations plus intend sustain services beyond the SafeFutures funding cycle. She is very encouraged to be part of this process of change and looks forward to its growth in the future.

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The director is particularly complementary of the way Imperial County law enforcement agencies have come together and joined forces to resolve issues.

Imperial County's Chief Deputy Probation Officer sees significant improvements in the countywide law enforcement community as a direct result of the SafeFutures grant. By virtue of the Probation Department's involvement in integrated service linking, parents have learned that probation is here to help and not just to lock up their children. Accordingly, some parents are more cooperative with probation officers in identifying and resolving issues. This new situation has also engendered positive word of mouth public relations within the community for the probation process. Individual probation officers also echo this new proactive attitude. This is also conveyed by individual probation officers.

Probation has also been able to teach parents about the many services that Imperial County has to offer them. This is a product of probation officers being co-located with other county service providers at the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center. This co-location has educated probation officers about other county services and created an environment where probation officers can readily refer client families to professionals that can and effectively assist them.

The Deputy Chief Probation Officer also points that families get service much quicker because of the SafeFutures program and it Brawley Family Resource Center. This comes from interagency service providers being located in the same facility and collaborating together on individual cases. Therefore, transportation to El Centro is not required. He also believes that this "one stop" service center increases the probability that families will take advantage of the referred services, since they need not arrange for logistics of child care while they take a day to travel to El Centro.

Probation officers, social workers, and other service professionals working together with a common goal of client service helped reduce interagency barriers. All learned about the constraints faced by co-workers in their own organizations. This established a much stronger working relationship as professionals came to understand each other and work as colleagues.

Before the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center, probation clients referred to other services had to travel to El Centro to apply. This is a 15-20 mile trip which is confounded by the fact many families do not have auto transportation; need childcare; etc. The county offered pro bono bus transportation to facilitate this need. Unfortunately, scheduling of this service

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was not conducive to families with small children. Through the SafeFutures teamwork and collaboration, this schedule is changed to be more client-friendly.

The Deputy Chief Probation Officer expressed that the Imperial County law enforcement agencies have developed several new tools because of the SafeFutures grant experience. These tools touch all aspects of law enforcement (e.g., probation, the county sheriff, municipal police departments, the prison system, district attorney, judicial system, etc.). He and his law enforcement colleagues believe that these new tools and their ongoing implementation direct systems change outcomes from the Imperial County SafeFutures grant. Following is a brief recap of each of these new tools.

1. Through SafeFutures, several Imperial County law enforcement agencies have implemented the CAL GANG information system. This tool provides a common database, across law enforcement agencies for identifying and tracking gang members. CAL GANG has eliminated duplicate record keeping by multiple law enforcement agencies. Moreover, CAL GANG delivers cross agency intelligence that was not available in the past.
2. Another SafeFutures payoff is that law enforcement agencies within Imperial County now hold monthly meetings. These meetings serve as a forum for intelligence sharing between county and local law enforcement agencies.
3. This new level law enforcement collaboration is also evidenced interagency interventions during flare-up situations. Recently the Probation Department, District Attorney, Sheriff's Department, and the Brawley Police Department joined together in the aftermath of a drive-by shooting in Brawley. By pooling resources, they accomplished what no single agency could have done alone.

As a collaborative entity, they simultaneously canvassed an entire neighborhood door-to-door and solicited community assistance in solving this crime. By canvassing each home, people's reluctance to cooperate was mitigated since residents and the perpetrators knew that no single home has been targeted for law enforcement intelligence.

This collaborative effort facilitated arrest of the perpetrators. Moreover, the community responded positively to the fact that substantial law enforcement action was taken in their neighborhood.

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4. The forth law enforcement tool that has emanated from SafeFutures is the implementation of interagency drug sweeps throughout the county. Agencies form ad hoc task teams to sweep a specific area for drugs. This process is unique in that agencies throughout the county contribute resources for sweeps in areas away from their communities.

Agencies voluntarily collaborate in these actions because they know that their collaborative partner agencies will participate when their community is the target for a sweep. These swift and effective actions cannot happen with limited local resources alone.

These drug sweeps are very effective. They also assist in building and strengthening collaborative relationships between agencies.

The SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center is located on the campus of Brawley High School. The principal of Brawley High School, reports that the Brawley Family Resource Center is a major new resource for delivering needed services to Brawley High School students and, in some cases, their families.

The high school staff includes a pupil personnel counselor for each grade. However, with over three hundred students at each grade level, counselors are spread too thin to serve the needs of all students within their span of control. The principal offers that the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center is an effective supplement to this counseling staff.

Today the Brawley High School staff (e.g., school psychologist, special education, principal, administrators, etc.) is able to make referrals to the SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center without placing additional burdens on the already overwhelmed counseling staff. The principal estimates that the number of students receiving assistance is approximately 400% greater than without the Brawley Family Resource Center.

Brawley High School wants to streamline the business processes at the family resource center to insure that clients are serviced as soon as possible and in a time window appropriate to their level of crisis. For school year 2001-2002, new standards of performance have been implemented.

The Brawley High School principal wants the Brawley Family Resource Center to go beyond servicing youth and develop capacity to provide more assistance to families. He believes that more intense work is needed with families and their underlying issues that contribute to dysfunctional settings that influence student behaviors and performance.

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The principal of Brawley High School echoes the sentiment of others about effectiveness of co-location of a multidisciplinary service team. He estimates that the rate of referrals converted to actual service delivery has increased many hundreds of percent because service delivery professionals are in the community as compared to distant. He believes this systems change is and will continue to enhance student well being and academic performance.

Any systems change, regardless of its successes, has room for improvement. Following is a of improvement recommendations and comments offered by individuals involved in the Imperial County SafeFutures program.

- Collaboration is a difficult process to learn, accept, and implement. Now that we have started to build a foundation, we must continue with the process of improvement.
- SafeFutures was a difficult process because there was no clearly articulated goal. Therefore, we spent too much time dealing with details instead of working for the collaborative result. I am still not sure what it is.
- Better communication from program leadership so that we know how we fit into the big picture.
- Less blaming and more problem solving.
- I would like to know why we are directed to do things in a certain way. Sometimes it doesn't make sense.
- I could do a better job for clients if I had needed tools to streamline my work (e.g., computer).
- The management team needs to come and see what we are doing.
- We need a coordinator that can help us when we need help and make decisions too.
- Management talks down to us.
- What we do is good. Now what we need to do is go the elementary schools and prevent the problems we've seen.
- Sometimes I'm not sure what to do. I would like someone to help me.
- There is a sense from service deliver professionals that they want to be involved in decision making that affects how they will be doing there job. Following are examples of this sentiment.

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- ✓ “I don’t understand why we keep changing the paper work. It takes time away from working with youth. There are ways we it can be done better.”
- ✓ “I would like to be involved in the decision making process so that my knowledge can help with better ways of doing things.”
- Several individuals express a need to do better SafeFutures Brawley Family Resource Center outreach to the community. They feel many families would take advantage of services if they new about the possibilities in their local area.
 - ✓ “We need to make the community more aware of the Brawley Family Resource Center. It should be advertised in the paper and other places.”
 - ✓ “There needs to be better publicity about the Brawley Family Resource Center, its services, and accomplishments. I originally believed that it was not productive. Only after a personal investigation did I learn about its benefits.”
- Service delivery professionals feel that they are not appreciated for the work they do. There is a sense of always being told what to do without appreciation for what they have done. This possibly ties into the data collection system that does not tend to reflect client outcomes.

These issues are not uncommon to any new collaborative effort. In fact, they are quite common. In the case of Imperial County SafeFutures, they are further compounded by a high personnel turnover rate experienced within the program. Many people have used a SafeFutures assignment to enter the workforce of a county department and become eligible for assignments that are more attractive.

Accordingly, there was repetitive staff development about the basics of SafeFutures with new employees. This situation also created periods of time without staff support while the hiring of replacements occurred.

The Imperial County SafeFutures grant has been a successful catalyst for interdepartmental collaborative development and systems change. Many valuable systemic changes have taken root in the community that are a foundation for further collaborative development and additional changes in the future.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

In 1996, the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) awarded a five year, \$7 million SafeFutures Initiative grant to the Imperial County Office of Education (ICOE) to prevent and control juvenile violence and delinquency. The goals of this national initiative were to:

- Develop a more efficient, effective, and timely service delivery system for at-risk and delinquent juveniles and their families that is capable of responding to their needs at any point of entry into that system;
- Build the community's capacity to institutionalize and sustain the continuum of services by expanding and diversifying sources of funding; and
- Determine the success of project implementation and the outcomes achieved, including whether a comprehensive strategy involving community-based efforts and program resources concentrated on providing a continuum of care has succeeded in preventing and reducing juvenile violence and delinquency.

ICOE; Imperial County Behavioral Health, Probation, Sheriff's, and Social Services Departments, Brawley Police Department; local school districts; Brawley Boys & Girls Club; Brawley Family Life Center; Court Appointed Special Advocates; and Child Abuse Prevention Council worked in a structured collaborative partnership to strengthen service systems for youth and families county-wide and to deliver program services for youth and families in the SafeFutures target area, North Imperial County.

SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT AND POLICY CHANGE

Imperial County's Interagency Steering Committee (ISC) provides leadership for policy changes to make public service systems work more effectively for youth and their families. Created in 1990, the ISC leads county-wide planning and coordination efforts and provides direction for collaborative youth service initiatives, including SafeFutures. Members include key leaders of ICOE; Imperial County Departments of Behavioral Health, Health, Probation, and Social Services; Imperial County Offices of the District Attorney, Sheriff, and Employment Training; Superior Court Juvenile Division; local school districts, the county-wide police chiefs association; and community-based organizations.

The inter-agency Local Coordinating Council (LCC), comprised of managers from youth-serving public and private agencies, works systematically with ISC members to carry out collaborative policies and programs. Members provide feedback from service providers and design policy and procedure changes.

PROGRAM SERVICES

SafeFutures program services targeted the underserved northern region of Imperial County. The population of this area is approximately 40,000. Some 32,981 residents live in the communities of Brawley, Calpatria, Westmorland, Bombay Beach, and Niland. Seventy percent of the total population and 82% of the youth population is Latino. These communities are 30 to 60 miles from public service centers in El Centro and have limited public transportation. Many residents are low income and lack consistent transportation. One of the major accomplishments of SafeFutures is the location of more public services at schools and other accessible sites in North County.

SafeFutures delivered services for a total of 3,152 youth. Forty eight percent of youth served were female and 52% were male. Of the 2,368 youth for whom information on race/ethnicity was recorded, 81% were Latino, 15% were White, three percent were African American, and one percent were Native American. Of the 2,282 youth for whom language information was recorded, 55% were multi-lingual (most often, English and Spanish), 34% spoke only English, and 11% spoke only Spanish.

SafeFutures funds supported a community system of prevention, intervention, treatment, and accountability services, including:

- Brawley Family Resource Center's inter-agency care coordination, targeted case management, information and referral, and family education and support services provided by a multi-disciplinary team of behavioral health, education, law enforcement probation, and social service professionals;
- Comprehensive Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression through outreach, night patrolling by a police/probation officer team, targeted interventions for gang involved youth, intensive probation supervision for gang-involved youth, and the activities of the North County Gang Coalition and the Gang Intelligence Team;
- Probation officers assigned to target area schools;
- Peer Court providing an alternative to the juvenile justice system and educational and community service activities;
- Boys and Girls Club prevention activities, including recreation, tutoring and specialized services for at-risk girls;

- **Mentoring;**
- **Student Assistance Representatives providing peer education and support;**
- **Parenting Classes; and**
- **Court Appointed Special Advocates and Child Abuse Council services designed to interrupt the cycle of child abuse and youth violence and delinquency.**

RESULTS

SafeFutures significantly advanced Imperial County's accomplishments in the areas of systems change, violence reduction, service innovations, use of data, and sustainability. It is important to recognize that earlier efforts in these areas provided a strong foundation for the work of SafeFutures. The ISC's leadership commitment; coordination of services through Healthy Start programs; COMBAT community responses to gang violence; and the programs and policies of ICOE, County departments, and community-based organizations all contributed to the positive results of SafeFutures. Similarly, the experiences of SafeFutures are now informing and shaping Imperial County's ongoing work to improve services and outcomes for children, youth, and their families.

SYSTEMS CHANGE

SafeFutures has been integral to Imperial County's ongoing efforts to make public service systems work more effectively and to make the best possible use of local resources. During the SafeFutures grant period, Imperial County made changes in financing, organization and delivery of services. Partners pooled funding, reconfigured and relocated services, and put in place new policies and procedures.

Pooled Funding

Youth-serving public agencies blended funds from their individual budgets to create and expand services and planning capacity. Behavioral Health Department funds now support Probation Department staff positions to provide mental health services for youth in detention. ICOE and County departments each contribute a share of the funds for the ISC staff coordinator position and the inter-agency analyst team.

Pooled resources from these agencies and local school districts provide the required matching funds for increased revenues from Medi-Cal (California's Medicaid program). Previously used only in the Behavioral Health Department's budget, Medi-Cal reimbursements now support services delivered by other County departments, local school districts, and even a local community police officer. (The Key Strategies section below further discusses fiscal strategies initiated during the SafeFutures grant period.)

Re-Configured and Re-Located Services

Public agencies and community-based organizations have re-directed staff resources and shared space and equipment to make services more effective and accessible. Behavioral health, education, health care, law enforcement, probation, social services, and community staff now work together in multi-disciplinary teams. SafeFutures funds supported the creation of the Brawley Family Resource Center and North County Gang Intervention teams. Based on the success of those efforts, inter-agency teams continue to deliver services at family resource centers throughout the county. The network of family resource centers uses the SafeFutures care coordination approach and the database developed by SafeFutures. A new collaborative team works with youth who are gang involved or at risk for gang involvement in South County. A new multi-disciplinary team provides care coordination services for youth at risk for out of home placement. (The Key Strategies section below further discusses the approach to integrated, multi-disciplinary services developed during the SafeFutures grant period.)

More staff, including multi-disciplinary team members, provide services in community locations distant from central county offices. Public agencies and community organizations are also locating more services in other underserved county areas. Staff state that more youth and families from different parts of the county are using more services in these new locations. Youth

and families less often miss appointments. Additionally, more services are being delivered through home visits.

New Policies and Procedures

To continue systems change efforts in a systematic way, the ISC has defined collaborative policies and procedures on:

- Selecting ISC leadership and staff,
- Meeting planning and agendas,
- Making decisions,
- Setting priorities,
- Planning grant applications and allocating grant funds,
- Sharing confidential information across agencies, and
- Setting up new multi-disciplinary teams and coordinating services delivered by multiple multi-disciplinary teams.

These processes provide a framework for ongoing collaboration when inevitable changes take place in political leadership and personnel in key positions. Clear processes also assist with the orientation and full inclusion of new ISC members.

VIOLENCE REDUCTION

Youth violence in the SafeFutures target area decreased significantly during the grant period. Juvenile arrests by the Brawley Police Department for felony violent crimes had decreased 21% from 244 to 202 by the end of 2000, according to the California Department of Justice. Local law enforcement officials attribute the decline to reduced illegal gang activity resulting from gang prevention, intervention, and suppression.

SERVICE INNOVATIONS

SafeFutures catalyzed and supported innovations in services for Imperial County youth and families in two equally important ways. First, service approaches and methods changed during the grant period to continuously improve the quality of services and to respond to the dynamic needs of youth and their families. Second, other programs in Imperial County now use SafeFutures service innovations.

Coordinated, Integrated Services

The Brawley Family Resource Center moved from co-locating uncoordinated behavioral health, probation, and social services to full integration of services through a multi-disciplinary team. The resource center developed an approach to coordinating and integrating behavioral health, education, probation, health, social, and community services through care coordination for youth and families needing intensive services and targeted case management for youth and families needing early intervention services. (The Key Strategies section below provides more detailed information on care coordination and targeted case management.) This approach has been adapted for use by a network of school-linked family resource centers throughout Imperial County and by a new multi-disciplinary team working with youth at risk for out of home placement and their families.

The companion report, *Imperial County SafeFutures Report of Process Evaluation and Lessons Learned*, documents improvements in service delivery achieved through coordination and integration of services. This approach has created a faster process for connecting youth and families with services which increases:

- The number of youth and families staff can assist,

- The amount of time staff can devote to working with individual youth and families,
- The number of youth and families following through and using services, and
- The number of youth and families getting access to services before problems and issues escalate to crises.

School-Based Probation and Student Assistance Services

SafeFutures supported the assignment of probation officers to work on North County school campuses and the school-based work of student assistance representatives with youth at risk for dropping out of school, gang involvement, and other negative behaviors. School administrators credit both of these approaches with reducing school discipline problems, enhancing the learning environment on school campuses, and helping to keep at risk students in school and out of trouble. At the request of school officials, the Probation Department has expanded the assignment of school probation officers to all school districts in Imperial County.

Gender and Age-Specific Prevention Activities

Through SafeFutures, the Brawley Boys and Girls Club developed gender-specific activities to build resiliency and reduce risk factors among girls. When initial approaches to activities for girls encountered difficulties attracting and retaining participants, the activities were re-designed based on feedback from girls. More training and support was provided for newly assigned staff.

The approach that resulted in the highest levels of consistent participation integrated recreational activities, tutoring, health education, workshops on college and careers, visits to universities campuses, job shadowing opportunities, group counseling, and individual attention to personal and educational issues. Prevention education sessions featured teen and adult women who spoke to girls from their experiences as teen mothers, recovering substance abusers,

corrections and law enforcement officers, university graduates, and businesswomen. Girls participated more actively in counseling and education sessions after they had opportunities to get to know each other and staff through recreation activities.

National Boys & Girls Club training and technical assistance helped the Brawley Boys & Girls Club begin planning more age-specific programs, including activities designed for youth at risk for gang involvement. The club expanded programming to deliver SafeFutures funded prevention services for elementary and middle school aged youth with an emphasis on homework assistance and tutoring. The club worked in partnership with the Police Activities League and secured additional funds for a new center and prevention activities for higher risk, older youth.

The 60 youth who participated in SafeFutures tutoring for children and for at risk girls improved school attendance and achievement.

	Improved Grades	Same Grades	Lower Grades
Children who participated in tutoring	76%	14%	10%
Children who did <u>not</u> participate in tutoring	22%	31%	47%

Expanded Peer Court

As a result of positive responses from youth and adult community members, Peer Court grew during the SafeFutures grant period and is now expanding further to involve more youth participants and adult volunteers in more communities. Probation and school staff and volunteer judges and attorneys have worked with youth to enhance the program curriculum, requirements, and schedule. SafeFutures staff and partners developed a Peer Court Manual now in use countywide.

Peer Court serves as a real-life forum for young first-offenders to be represented, judged and sentenced by their own peers. In turn, each offender must also contribute to Peer Court by participating as a lawyer, court officer or juror for other young offenders before the Court.

Youth who volunteer to join the Peer Court Clubs at their schools and young offenders referred by police and schools build leadership skills and contribute to their communities in meaningful ways.

This juvenile truancy and delinquency intervention program is a hands-on alternative to the juvenile justice system. Peer Court empowers young people to choose the most just and meaningful sentence for each offender. They hold youth accountable through requirements such as community work, service and restitution, curfews, and driving restriction. Offenders are often ordered to make apologies and write essays. Peer Court sentences also include terms designed to prevent repeat offenses such as additional study time, family counseling, anger management and drug-alcohol abuse classes, and mentorship presentations before younger students in school. Parents and family members of each offender must participate throughout the Peer Court process.

USE OF DATA

Imperial County's work to meet OJJDP's national requirements for SafeFutures evaluation data and data on gangs contributed to the use of data to address local priorities. SafeFutures focused the attention of decision makers, managers, and staff on data and provided resources for information systems. (The section on Challenges/Learning Opportunities below further discusses this process.)

Data on Family Services and Outcomes

Efforts to make the SafeFutures evaluation database more “user friendly” and more useful for local purposes evolved to produce a comprehensive management information system for youth and family services. This management information system is based on Griot software, originally developed to track and evaluate integrated services delivered through the State of California’s Healthy Start program. Griot is a word used in West Africa to refer to village storytellers and poets. Griots carry the wisdom and history of their people. The Griot management information system is designed to help comprehensive community service programs to capture their wisdom and history.

The Griot-based system now used in Imperial County family resource centers has three main components: a powerful and easy to use relational database for organizing and analyzing data about services and outcomes; a complete set of forms tailored specifically for Imperial County for conducting assessments and re-assessments, recording contacts, and following up on outcomes; and a file system that organizes the forms and corresponding reports from the database into an easy to access system of information.

Multi-disciplinary staff teams at family resource centers have received training to use the system to coordinate services for youth and families. Staff collect intake information that provides a profile of each family’s needs and resources and complete additional assessments in specific areas as needed. Staff repeat this process with each family at six month intervals. Every service contact with each participating family by any program providing services through the family resource center is recorded on contact logs. These contacts are then entered into the database which generates reports used to track and manage services and for billing Medi-Cal.

The system has built-in reports that provide staff with information on demand on services delivered and brokered for youth and families. Family resource center staff have received training to use the reports to quickly understand the full range of services a family has received and to relate that information to outcome data. Other reports are designed for use in multi-disciplinary team meetings to help develop individualized service strategies for each family. The system is easy to update to incorporate new outcome measures, services, and evaluation requirements.

Data on Illegal Gang Activity

Meeting OJJDP's requirements for analysis of data on illegal gang activity seriously strained the resources of the Brawley Police Department, Imperial County Sheriff's Department, and other collaborative partners working on SafeFutures gang prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies. These small law enforcement agencies barely had resources to computerize the most basic information on arrests and reported crimes for annual reports to local, state, and federal authorities. To collect the data required by OJJDP, gang intervention team members had to spend time off the streets manually compiling data from hundreds of individual police reports.

When the process was complete, the local gang coalition and gang intervention team decided to set as a priority ongoing access to information on illegal gang activity in and around Imperial County. SafeFutures and local law enforcement agencies invested in the Cal-Gang data system, a cooperative project among local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. The system organizes and provides information on criminal street gangs and gang members via a statewide network. Imperial County law enforcement agencies enter information on illegal gangs and gang members (strictly as defined under State of California law) and use the system to get

updated information on local gangs and gang members and on illegal gangs from other areas moving into Imperial County.

The sheriff's deputy assigned to the gang intervention team took responsibility for getting the Cal-Gang database up and running in North Imperial County. By the end of the SafeFutures grant period, the database had documented and continuously shared with other agencies information on the activities of the two gangs most responsible for violence in North Imperial County and on 170 youth and young adult gang members in the area. Law enforcement agencies in other regions of Imperial County have also begun to use the Cal-Gang system.

Imperial County's Gang Intelligence Team is the source for much of the local information in the Cal-Gang database. Law enforcement and probation officers from throughout Imperial County, federal Drug Enforcement Agency and Immigration and Naturalization Service agents, and state corrections and parole officers participate and meet monthly to exchange information and plan inter-jurisdictional suppression strategies. Members are in contact between meetings to keep one another up to date on gang activities in Imperial County communities, in nearby correctional facilities, and across the border in Mexico.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Imperial County Steering Committee and Imperial County Office of Education (ICOE) provided leadership and direction for a planning process and fiscal strategies to assure continuation of and continuous quality improvement in systems changes, service innovations, and uses of data achieved during the SafeFutures grant period. In fact, Imperial County is now expanding systems change efforts and many program services.

Three months after the end of the SafeFutures grant period:

- A new coordinator position is staffing the Interagency Steering Committee and an interagency team of analysts is working to identify barriers to integrated services and funding and to recommend solutions.
- Local school districts are administering inter-agency care coordination and targeted case management services through the county-wide network of family resource centers with coordination support from the County Office of Education. Family resource center multi-disciplinary teams continue to include behavioral health, probation, and social services staff and have expanded with the assignment of public health nurses. A community police officer continues to provide intervention services as a member of the Brawley Family Resource Center team.
- Community members, business owners, city council members, law enforcement officers, and school representatives continue to work together on the North County Gang Coalition. A similar coalition has been formed in South County.
- Representatives of more law enforcement agencies are participating in Gang Intelligence Team meetings. Two additional agencies are using CAL-GANG software to track illegal gang activity.
- Brawley Police Department officers, probation officers, and the Housing Authority continue to work together in “hot spots” where concentrations of gang members live and associate.
- Probation officers are assigned to each school district in Imperial County.

- Peer Court, now operated by the Probation Department in partnership with local schools, has expanded to involve schools beyond the SafeFutures target area in El Centro and Calexico.
- At risk youth continue to be matched with positive adult role models through the County Office of Education's Student Well- Being and Family Resources mentoring programs.
- ICOE, school district, and probation staffs continue to present parenting classes.
- Court Appointed Special Advocates and the Child Abuse Council continue to provide family violence intervention and education.

Imperial County has encountered problems identifying funds that can be used to support gang outreach and intensive probation supervision for high risk gang offenders. ISC members continue to work on this area. The recently re-authorized California Gang, Crime, and Violence Prevention Partnership Act is a potential funding source. However, State of California budget cuts in other areas may force elimination of some probation officer positions and limit the Probation Department's ability to make special assignments.

Sustainability Results

Component	Status	Current Lead Agency	C
Systems change	Expanded, dedicated staffing	ISC	Poo
Care coordination	Expanded county-wide	Local school districts/ Behavioral Health Dept.	Me
Family resource centers	Expanded inter-agency staffing county-wide	Local school districts	Me
Gang Coalition	Continuing and replicated in South County	Community leadership	Sta
Gang Intelligence Team	Expanded membership	Sheriff's Dept.	Sta
Brawley Gang Intervention Team	Continuing police and probation staffing	Brawley Police Dept.	Bra Ho
Probation Officers in Schools	Expanded to all school districts	Probation Dept.	Sta
Peer Court	Expanded to El Centro and Calexico	Probation Department	Sta
Mentoring	Continuing	ICOE	Re-
Student Assistance Representatives	Continuing	ICOE	Re-
Boys& Girls Club prevention activities	Continuing	Boys&Girls Club	Re-
Parenting classes	Continuing	School Districts	Re- ICO

KEY STRATEGIES

To achieve the results discussed above, Imperial County developed and continually refined several, interrelated strategies. These included a multi-level collaborative structure; comprehensive gang prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies; new approaches to integrating services; collaborative fiscal strategies; and an ongoing commitment to training and technical assistance.

MULTI-LEVEL COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURE

Imperial County has put in place a flexible collaborative structure to assure that inter-agency and community partnerships are coordinated and directed at improving outcomes for youth and their families. During the SafeFutures grant period, the structure consisted of the ISC and LCC. It has now been expanded to include an inter-agency planning team of analysts.

Interagency Steering Committee

The ISC is the umbrella collaborative for public agencies with representation from community-based organizations serving youth and families in Imperial County. Executive level decision makers work together at and between monthly meetings to improve coordination among agencies, eliminate duplication of services, and develop policies to make the most effective use of public resources. Members select a chair for the ISC annually and work together in subcommittees on specific tasks, such as creation of inter-agency information sharing policies and procedures and development and implementation of fiscal strategies to increase public resources for youth and family

services. ISC leadership regularly report on decisions and activities to the Imperial County Board of Supervisors, the jurisdiction's elected governing body.

Local Coordinating Council

The LCC was formed before the ISC to address State of California requirements for inter-agency and community planning groups on alcohol and other drug abuse prevention. Managers on the LCC saw the need for the involvement of key decision makers and recommended creation of the ISC. The LCC now works with the ISC on the design and implementation of systems changes and coordination of collaborative programs. Managers of public and private agency program services work together at and between monthly meetings to:

- Assess resources and gaps in services,
- Develop formalized documentation and policy recommendations related to interagency and interorganizational collaboration,
- Assess progress of collaborative efforts, and
- Recommend ways to solve problems and continuously improve the quality of services for youth and families.

The Collaborative Structure at Work

The work of the ISC and LCC to develop and carry out inter-agency policies and procedures on sharing of confidential client information illustrates how Imperial County's collaborative structure works. The ISC led a two year effort to develop and implement inter-agency policies and procedures for the disclosure of confidential public agency information in order to coordinate services for youth and families. The inter-

agency policies and procedures replaced a hodgepodge of sometimes conflicting single agency policies and procedures.

To assure new policies and procedures would be effectively carried out, the inter-agency process of developing the new policies and procedures and the leadership of agency decision makers addressed the concerns of agency staff members. California legislation on inter-agency teams resolved some of the legal issues, however, distrust, misunderstandings, and differences in agency philosophies had continued to be obstacles to inter-agency information sharing.

LCC members identified major issues and worked with ISC decision makers to craft policies to address those issues. This dialogue led to the following key agreements:

- Information shared among team members is restricted to the extent necessary to carry out the team purpose. This addressed concerns about unnecessarily divulging a family's private information.
- Information is released only to designated team members. Persons who are not team members may obtain information by being invited to participate in a team meeting on services for a family and signing a confidentiality agreement, or by obtaining a separate release of information from the family.
- All 29 signatory public agencies use forms and procedures approved by the ISC to obtain informed consent for release of confidential information from families. This assures that families have adequate information about privacy rights.
- The LCC organizes orientation and ongoing training on policies and procedures across agencies. Consistent training and cross-training supports staff of all agencies to follow the policies and procedures.

This policy making process defined an inter-agency team and established a procedure for establishing a team. These steps were necessary to protect confidential information and also to assure that new, grant-funded inter-agency teams are part of the county-wide system of services for youth and families. The process includes:

- Preparation of a request to create an inter-agency team with information on the purpose of the team and designation of specific individuals to serve as team members, leader, and convener by department heads and school superintendents.
- Review of the request by the LCC to determine if the proposed inter-agency team addresses a community priority and uses care coordination concepts and practices.
- Recommendation to the ISC by the LCC on approval of the request and action by the ISC.
- Reporting to the LCC on the activities and operations of new inter-agency teams.

The ISC and LCC continue to use approaches similar to these to develop and carry out systems changes. The new analyst team will provide data and other planning information to inform improvements in service systems.

COMPREHENSIVE GANG PREVENTION, INTERVENTION AND SUPPRESSION STRATEGIES

Based on OJJDP's Spergel model, Imperial County's approach to preventing and responding to violence by illegal gangs employed five coordinated strategies: community mobilization, social intervention, provision of opportunities, suppression, and organizational change. Within this framework, Imperial County developed local strategies to address the specific nature and scope of illegal gang activity in a jurisdiction

of small communities with nearby state corrections institutions and adjacent to the United States border with Mexico.

North County Gang Coalition

This local gang coalition involves diverse community members and provides leadership for community anti-gang efforts. Membership includes residents, business owners, representatives of the faith community, and City of Brawley staff. The objective of the coalition is to increase community awareness of illegal gang activity and community involvement in steps to reduce it. This is accomplished through regular monthly meetings, dialogue with the sheriff's department and district attorney's office about community concerns, and special reports and events. The local media provides extensive coverage of the coalition's activities.

Since its creation, the North County Gang Coalition has worked to increase resident involvement in partnership with law enforcement and schools to prevent illegal gang activity. Gang Coalition members make presentations to parent groups on how to discourage their children from joining gangs, early warning signs of gang involvement, and how to become active in their children's education and in community efforts to combat gangs. During SafeFutures Year V, the group began the process of organizing a youth coalition on gang prevention to mobilize the age group from which many gang members come. The local Domino's Pizza, whose owner is a member of the North County Gang Coalition, sponsors the youth coalition. Adult coalition members serve as advisors.

Gang Intervention Team

The intervention team (outreach workers, case managers, and law enforcement and probation officers) offered gang members positive alternatives to illegal gang activity. During the SafeFutures grant period, the team defined and redefined the roles of individual members and coordinated those activities with other community services. The team redefined roles to meet OJJDP requirements and to use resources efficiently.

During SafeFutures Years I and II, police and probation officers and Student Assistance Representatives conducted outreach to gangs. OJJDP staff informed ICOE that this approach to outreach did not comply with the Spergel model. Dr. Spergel's research had found that former gang members were the most effective outreach workers because they could most best build trust and rapport with young gang members. To meet this requirement, public agencies receiving SafeFutures gang funds all agreed to reduce their allocations of grant monies to provide funds for a contract with the Brawley Family Life Center to recruit, hire, train, and supervise outreach workers who had themselves overcome the challenges faced by youth trying to leave gangs.

Paid and volunteer outreach workers of the Brawley Family Life Center developed strong relationships with gang members and their associates. Outreach workers shared information with law enforcement members of the intervention team about illegal gang organizations, conflicts within and among gangs, and potential violence. Outreach workers and a prevention specialist in the Student Assistance Representatives program worked together to involve gang members in community service projects. This has been an effective way to reach out to gang involved youth and involve them in their community. Gang members who were required to complete

community service hours as a condition of probation and their friends and relatives who came along as volunteers participated. Projects were designed to build job skills and provide meaningful work experiences that youth could list on resumes and job applications. Gang-involved youth who had resisted participating in services were willing to work on community service projects. Members of rival gangs even worked together.

Intervention team members worked together on specific strategies for connecting individual gang members with positive activities and community services, including Brawley Family Resource Center care coordination services. The team helped gang involved youth get access to employment, alternative education, health care, substance abuse treatment, and other services.

Intensive Patrolling and Probation

New patrol assignments helped reduce gang violence in the north and east side areas of Brawley where the "Chicalenos" and "Brolenos" gangs operate. An Imperial County Sheriff's Deputy and Probation Officer patrolled known hot spots together three times weekly. They contacted known gang members, documented youth associating with gang members, and conducted field interviews. Brawley Police Department officers, Sheriff's deputies, and probation officers continue to work together on increased foot patrols in the Austin Thomas Public Housing Development and to patrol three times per week at and around Brawley High School during the school lunch and after school hours.

Intensive probation supervision curtailed the activities of gang leaders and other influential gang members. Through night patrols, frequent contacts with probationers, and information from other law enforcement officers, the assigned probation officer was able to monitor probationers' activities and respond to problems promptly. When youth

on probation tried to continue their illegal gang activity, these probation violations promptly resulted in electronic monitoring or a period of secure confinement. When youth indicated a willingness to change their gang lifestyles, the probation officer and other intervention team members provided encouragement and linkages to services. Of 20 youth on intensive probation who consented to participate in the SafeFutures evaluation, 14 or 70% successfully completed their terms of probation. The intervention team is particularly proud of one youth who completed probation, graduated from Brawley High School, and enlisted in the United States Air Force.

Organizational Change

These coordinated gang strategies resulted in a number of permanent organizational changes, including:

- Establishment of the inter-agency Gang Intelligence Team;
- Use of Cal Gang software to track gang activity;
- Re-direction of law enforcement, probation, and community staff to work together on gang intervention strategies; and
- Open communication and strong partnerships among schools, city government, community and faith-based groups, law enforcement, probation, residents, and business owners.

SERVICE INTEGRATION STRATEGIES

During SafeFutures Years 1 and 2, the Brawley Family Resource Center coordinated behavioral health, juvenile justice, and social services for youth and families. Service providers shared office space at the resource center and met together to discuss

some cases, however, services continued to operate independently. Beginning in Year 3, OJJDP's Systems Improvement Training and Technical Assistance Project helped the Brawley Family Resource center to design strategies for integrating services to meet the needs of specific priority populations. By the end of the grant period, the Brawley Family Resource Center had fully implemented a tiered system of targeted case management and intensive care coordination. Family resource centers throughout Imperial County are beginning to use similar models.

These strategies operate within a system of care in which effective linkages among services and supports are as important as direct services. The system holds service providers accountable not only for delivering services for youth and families but for working with families to assure the services have positive results.

Priority Populations

Technical assistance helped Brawley Family Resource Center team members to recognize that youth and families have different kinds of assets and problems and need different levels of assistance and support. With guidance from the LCC and the approval of the ISC, the team defined criteria for identifying youth and families who need:

- Information and referral services,
- Targeted case management to find and get access to appropriate services to intervene early in problem situations, or
- Intensive care coordination to deal with complex situations involving multiple service systems and threatening a youth's ability to stay in school and a family's ability to stay intact.

The Brawley Family Resource Center team expanded to include a "screeener" position. Under the supervision of the resource center coordinator, the screener reviews referrals for the purpose of triage and to facilitate access for each family to the appropriate points in Imperial County's system of care. The screener pays special attention to the cultural and linguistic needs and resources of the area's large Latino population. Screening results in linkages to direct services, targeted case management, or care coordination.

Care Coordination

This intensive approach to service integration is designed for families who are dealing with complex, multi-dimensional problems and have limited personal and extended family support resources. Examples include a homeless, single parent family of eight with educational, health, and mental health problems; a pregnant 12 year old with an unsupportive family; and a youth facing school expulsion whose parents abuse and sell drugs.

An inter-agency team comprised of a behavioral health case manager, probation officer, and social worker works with these families. Each team member is the primary care coordinator for 12 to 15 youth and their families. These comparatively small caseloads allow care coordinators to make frequent contacts and spend extended time with youth, families, and direct service providers.

Care coordination helps insure that youth and families benefit from multiple services delivered in a coordinated and holistic manner within a system of care. Care coordination is a service in and of itself consisting of five core functions: assessment,

service planning, linking and or brokerage of services, monitoring, and advocacy on behalf of families.

The Griot management information system guides family assessments and helps care coordinators identify the need for specific, professional assessments in areas such as learning disabilities and mental health problems. Based on assessments, care coordinators work with families to define what family members want to accomplish by participating in services and to identify which services can help them to achieve those objectives. Care coordinators make referrals to services, help arrange appointments and transportation, and accompany family members to initial appointments. They are in frequent contact with families and service providers to find out whether services are helping families accomplish their objectives. If families have problems with services or if services are not producing the desired outcomes, care coordinators work with family members and service providers to solve problems and make needed adjustments.

The care coordination team meets weekly to discuss cases. To make these meetings effective, each care coordinator brings an individual perspective from his/her field of expertise. Presenting cases to each other and giving and receiving input and feedback on case plans is critical to the success of care coordination. Meetings follow a basic format of presenting the information about a family, identifying strengths and concerns, and working as a team to develop and follow up on a service plan. Additionally, team members identify gaps in services and barriers to access. That information is communicated to the LCC and ISC.

The transition from delivering services independently to care coordination was not easy for team members. They initially perceived the system as creating additional

meetings and paperwork that took time away from their work with youth and families. As the family resource center implemented care coordination, this perception changed dramatically. Team members now believe that care coordination reduces the time that it takes to link families with services from weeks to minutes. They have more time for home and school visits and to consult with service providers.

Targeted Case Management

The Brawley Family Resource Center created this early intervention strategy to address the less severe and less complicated cases referred to the Family Resource Center that did not meet criteria for care coordination. Examples include a youth arrested for the first time for a misdemeanor offense and the youth's concerned family, or a family coping with the diagnosis and implications of a child's chronic disease such as asthma or diabetes, or a single parent seeking help dealing with a young adolescent's rebellious behavior and truancy. Targeted Case Management also provides case management for gang involved youth who do not meet the criteria for or who do not want to participate in care coordination.

The Targeted Case Management Team members are a Brawley Police Department community services officer, ICOE prevention specialist, and Brawley Family Life Center Outreach Worker. The community services officer and prevention specialist each work with a caseload of approximately 20 youth and their families. They work closely with outreach workers and school administration to connect youth and families with services and supports to keep problems from becoming crises.

Targeted Case Management was fully operational and reached 38 youth and their families during the final six months of the SafeFutures grant period. Of those youth,

- 27 improved their school attendance,
- 19 participated in tutoring,
- 14 participated in counseling on alcohol and other drug abuse,
- 14 participated in community service projects, and
- Six were matched with mentors.

FISCAL STRATEGIES

To sustain SafeFutures services and support other components of Imperial County's system of care for children, youth, and families, the ISC has put in place multi-level funding strategies. The core elements of these strategies include:

- Maximizing payments from Medi-Cal and other federal/state funded fee for service programs,
- Pooling funds across public agencies,
- Leveraging local resources with new state and federal grants, and
- Re-directing existing staff and other resources.

The commitment of key leaders to these strategies was only the first step in carrying out these fiscal systems changes. Each core element required careful planning and multiple changes in policies and procedures within and across agencies. It has been necessary to continuously strengthen and adjust the administrative and fiscal infrastructure to support integrated services for children, youth, and families. These strategies have required not only commitments in principle but significant commitments of the time of decision makers, managers, and fiscal and other administrative staff.

Increasing Medi-Cal payments required authorizations from the State of California, staff training on regulations and documentation procedures, and design of billing systems. Each of these steps was subject to change and delay outside of the control of Imperial County decision makers. The systems now in place are being continuously adjusted to make procedures as efficient as possible and to comply with frequent changes in State of California and federal guidelines and regulations.

New fiscal management procedures were necessary to allocate and track funds pooled across agencies. Blended funding requires staff in the Imperial County Controller's Office and fiscal staff in county and city agencies, school districts, and ICOE to work together in new ways. Steps have also been taken to streamline processes for contracting with community agencies.

To effectively leverage local resources and attract new state and federal grants that support local priorities, the ISC has developed an inter-agency process for identifying grant opportunities and preparing collaborative applications. The ISC coordinator works with the analyst team to track grant opportunities and make recommendations to the ISC on grant priorities and strategies. The ISC makes decisions on which grant opportunities to pursue, which agency should act as lead agency/fiscal agent, what service innovations to include in a grant applications, and how to budget grant funds.

Re-direction of staffing resources has required personnel departments to change their processes. This has included new descriptions of job responsibilities and qualifications, review of pay scales, and new procedures for recruiting and hiring for inter-agency positions and for assigning existing staff to inter-agency teams. New

approaches have also been necessary to effectively supervise and evaluate staff assigned to inter-agency teams and community locations.

TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Training and technical assistance has been and will continue to be a critical part of Imperial County's progress to improve systems and strengthen services for youth and families. Training and technical assistance has helped Imperial County to achieve SafeFutures goals and objectives. Moreover, training and technical assistance has helped to build skills and provide tools that will continue to benefit the community beyond the SafeFutures grant period.

During the SafeFutures grant period, Imperial County annually allocated more than double the \$50,000 required by OJJDP for training and technical assistance. The local training coordinator managed a monthly schedule of local, inter-agency training on effective services for youth and families. Staff from multiple agencies, parents, and youth participated in a range of training opportunities on topics, including leadership, personal development, cultural awareness, communication, child and youth development, health promotion, and community resources.

The SafeFutures Management Team worked with the national SafeFutures Training and Technical Assistance Coordinator to target national resources to support local priorities. Training and technical assistance supported a multi-level approach to building community capacity. For example, SafeFutures partners participated in three types of training and technical assistance on integrated services. Coordinated training and technical assistance included: 1) strategic consultation for decision makers on

information sharing policies and funding options; 2) technical assistance for managers and supervisors on procedures and accountability; and 3) training for line staff on assessment, service planning, and follow-up. A similar approach to support new uses of data included: 1) strategic consultation on management information systems, 2) technical assistance to adapt Griot software for use by family resource centers, and 3) training for staff on using the Griot system.

Imperial County has and will continue to emphasize inter-disciplinary training. Many training resources have been organized in agency-specific and problem-focused categories, just as services for youth and families have been. Cross-training has helped Imperial County agencies and organizations to develop common language, coordinate services, clarify roles and responsibilities, and resolve conflicts in order to better serve youth and families. Imperial County has allocated new State of California resources received through ICOE to construct a central, permanent site for inter-disciplinary training. The ISC is overseeing plans for design and construction of classroom and conference space dedicated for cross-agency training.

CHALLENGES/LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

SafeFutures posed numerous challenges for Imperial County that decision makers, managers, and staff all worked to address and to transform into opportunities for learning and progress. The challenges that presented the most opportunities for learning included the SafeFutures start-up period, collaborative partnerships, grantee-funder relationships, and the SafeFutures evaluation. Imperial County continues to work with and learn from challenges presented by local demographics, economics, and geography.

START-UP

The first two years of the grant period were in many ways the most challenging phase of SafeFutures. Partners worked as fast as possible to get SafeFutures programs up and running. During this period, more attention had to be devoted to individual program components than to systematic linkages among components. Staffing was a special challenge. Most of the staff turnover in SafeFutures programs occurred during this phase as a result of resignations and re-assignments. Some staff moved on because of new opportunities or promotions. Others were not well suited to SafeFutures assignments that required new skills and perspectives. The SafeFutures Program Coordinator relocated for a new job opportunity during Year 2.

These personnel challenges presented the opportunity for collaborative partners to take new approaches to staffing assignments and management. ISC and LCC members identified the need to assign staff who had expertise in their fields and also were flexible, able to take initiative and work in teams, and enthusiastic about trying new service

delivery methods. ICOE recognized that a management team could handle the complexities of administering SafeFutures more effectively than one individual.

By Year 3 SafeFutures staffing and management had stabilized. Partners were able to turn their attention to creating a system of services for youth and families and to identifying and correcting weaknesses in program components. Partners began to consider and act on ways that SafeFutures could undergird all of Imperial County's ongoing efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth, and their families. The assignment of a new OJJDP Program Manager with a clear understanding of systems change and Systems Improvement Training and Technical Assistance Project consultation assisted in this transition.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Before SafeFutures and early in the grant period, collaborative partners in Imperial County worked together in areas where mutual interests and goals were clear and where activities could be coordinated without significantly disrupting the status quo and within a certain mutual level of comfort. SafeFutures challenged collaborative partners to go beyond this comfort zone and to work through inevitable tensions and conflicts in order to improve services and systems.

To build collaborative partnerships strong and flexible enough to support systems changes, an approach evolved that is similar to the process used to encourage and support youth and families to make positive choices and changes. The process focuses on continuing changes and development in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. Collaborative partners from behavioral health, community, education, faith, health care,

juvenile justice, law enforcement, and social services agencies and organizations had to learn about each other's work and perspectives and learn one another's "professional languages" in order to work together.

The process of gathering this knowledge helped to dispel stereotypes and challenged negative attitudes that persons in one field had held about those in other fields. Beliefs that law enforcement and probation officers only wanted to punish youth, that social workers would excuse any illegal behavior, and that staff in some fields were "more professional" or "more committed" than others began to slowly change as individuals from different agencies and organizations learned more about the philosophies, legal requirements, and day to day realities of those in other fields.

Collaborative work on service innovations and systems changes made marked progress when partners at each level (decision makers, managers, and staff) began to address conflicts. Partners at all levels concluded that conflict is an essential part of systems change. It is essential to work through conflicts in order to build the trust and respect necessary to design and deliver quality services for youth and families. Moreover, breaking the boundaries between disciplines, agencies, and organizations allowed partners to put and keep the focus on improving outcomes for children, youth, and families.

GRANTEE/FUNDER RELATIONSHIPS

The scope and complexity of SafeFutures sometimes made the relationship between Imperial County SafeFutures partners and OJJDP staff challenging, particularly during the first years of the grant period. Imperial County was committed to meeting all

SafeFutures grant requirements, however, it was sometimes challenging to work with OJJDP's specific interpretations of general requirements and periodic changes in what those interpretations emphasized. It was also occasionally difficult to respond to "recommendations" and "encouragement" from OJJDP staff that did not always complement local priorities. These challenges and the willingness of OJJDP staff to communicate openly provided an opportunity for SafeFutures partners to learn about meeting grant requirements while balancing local priorities with the interests of a funder. In the process, local strategies and services were strengthened.

In particular, the Spergel gang intervention model presented challenges in Imperial County's working relationship with OJJDP. SafeFutures partners at times perceived OJJDP's guidance about implementation of the Spergel model as interference in local decision making. This occurred, for example, when OJJDP staff and Spergel technical assistance providers expressed concerns about the participation of Imperial County law enforcement agencies and the Probation Department in "gang sweeps" with the California Department of Corrections and federal Immigration and Naturalization Service and Drug Enforcement Agency. SafeFutures law enforcement and probation partners considered OJJDP's concerns and the benefits of inter-agency gang sweeps and decided to continue participating in the sweeps.

Another challenge involved Imperial County's work to integrate Spergel model strategies with other SafeFutures services, including care coordination. To make the most of resources and to respond to OJJDP's Year 3 emphasis on service integration, Imperial County had linked gang intervention with care coordination. OJJDP staff and Spergel model technical assistance providers were concerned that care coordination was not the

kind of case management envisioned in the Spergel model. Initially, SafeFutures partners perceived a mixed message from OJJDP: integrate services but not services included in our model. Extensive discussions with OJJDP staff, the Spergel technical assistance provider, the SITTAP lead consultant, and the national technical assistance coordinator about these concerns and perceptions contributed to the creation of the Targeted Case Management Team to reach gang involved and other youth who did not meet the criteria for care coordination.

EVALUATION

The design and requirements of the SafeFutures national evaluation presented challenges that were not fully resolved during the grant period. Those challenges did, however, contribute to new uses of data. Unfortunately, the challenges were not resolved completely or soon enough to allow for collection of adequate data to meaningfully measure SafeFutures outcomes.

The sheer volume of data requirements impeded collection of evaluation information. Staff were reluctant to require youth and families to take the time to provide information on the lengthy list of data elements, particularly when many of the data elements did not relate directly to national or local SafeFutures goals and objectives.

Care coordinators needed and did obtain assessment information in most of the areas included in the evaluation design. Staff providing other services included in the evaluation, such as mentoring and after school activities, were reluctant to ask sensitive questions about topics such as parental substance abuse when they did not know what to do next if family members answered affirmatively. Many families, particularly

immigrants and families involved with the justice and child welfare systems, would not consent to participate in the evaluation.

Local and national evaluators were not able to assist us to solve these problems. The organization that provided local evaluation services for SafeFutures during Years 1, 2, 3, and 4 was not able to provide data reports or recommendations to guide solutions. These challenges led Imperial County to take a new approach to evaluation services in Year 5. ICOE contracted with one firm for process evaluation services and with another firm to analyze SafeFutures data and develop a management information system for ongoing use.

SafeFutures partners worked together and with the new evaluation contractors, the SITTAP lead consultant and the national training and technical assistance coordinator to try to solve SafeFutures evaluation problems. In the process, partners developed the information sharing policy and the system now used by family resource centers to manage assessment information, track services, and measure outcomes.

These and other challenges contributed in unforeseen ways to Imperial County's work to improve services and systems. In addition to responding to specific issues, collaborative partners had opportunities to learn about team building and about using outside resources. Working through challenges made stronger relationships and commitments to improving outcomes for youth and families.

LOCAL CHALLENGES

Many of the challenges described above were probably experienced by other SafeFutures sites. Imperial County encountered and continues to address additional

challenges specific to local demographics, economics, and geography. These challenges are related to Imperial County's rural location on the U.S. border with Mexico.

Between 1990 and 2000, Imperial County's total population increased by 33,000 or more than 36% to 142,400. Imperial County is the fifth fastest growing of California's 52 counties. The population is projected to reach 294,200 by 2020, an increase of 107% over current figures. Immigration from Mexico accounted for most of the growth combined with a smaller increase attributed to the location of a new state prison in the community of Calipatria.

Latinos comprised 72.2% of Imperial County's 2000 Census population, the largest concentration of this ethnic group in California. The population of Latinos grew by 44% and the African-American and Asian populations increased slightly while the White population decreased by 10%.

Imperial County was the third poorest county in California in the 2000 Census with a poverty rate of 23%. The poverty rate increased despite a drop in unemployment. This disparity appears to indicate that while job opportunities have grown for some workers, the number of families living in persistent poverty without access to the resources and skills needed to climb the economic ladder to self sufficiency is also growing.

The local labor market has shifted from dominance by agricultural employment to dependence on government employment. According to the California Employment Development Department, 35% of Imperial County jobs are now in government and 23% in agriculture. Four of the largest employers are the California Department of Corrections, El Centro Naval Air Facility, Imperial Irrigation District, and Imperial

County. This employment pattern raises concerns about the effects on local employment of recent and anticipated reductions in state and federal government budgets.

SafeFutures helped individual families to use their own strengths and community services to cope with the stresses of immigration, living in poverty, and building community in a rapidly changing area. Now a county-wide planning process is defining the causes of ongoing challenges and looking for creative solutions. A community planning process, based on the Communities That Care model, is involving diverse residents, employers, faith community members, and government officials in long term planning to improve the quality of life for children, youth, and families.

SAFEFUTURES LEGACY IN IMPERIAL COUNTY

SafeFutures provided the undergirding and infrastructure for the next stages of Imperial County's work to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. Program services "piloted" in North Imperial County are continuing there and "going to scale" in communities throughout the county. Collaborative approaches to working across systems developed through SafeFutures have become part of Imperial County's regular ways of doing business.

SafeFutures is making ongoing contributions to changes in systems and services, including:

- A community-wide planning strategy based on the principles of the Communities That Care and Comprehensive Strategy processes introduced through SafeFutures,
- Coordination and integration of services for children in the critical development period from birth to age five adapted from the SafeFutures care coordination approach,
- Inter-agency services for youth at high risk for out of home placement and their families delivered through a team approach similar to care coordination,
- Ongoing strengthening and expansion of the county-wide family resource center network, and
- Application of SafeFutures multi-funding strategies to new programs and services for younger age groups.

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