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Clark County Juvenile Department Connections: A Strength-Based Program for Probationers with Behavioral Health Issues

MISSION STATEMENT

The Clark County Juvenile Court has committed itself to a holistic Balanced and Restorative Justice philosophy in fulfilling its statutory duties and mandates. It seeks to create a justice system where the focus is not simply on short-term external control of offenders, but where immediate and long-term needs of victims, community, and offenders are weighed in the balance, and all gain tangible benefits from their interactions with the juvenile justice system. This approach values the needs of victims and the community, and recognizes the juvenile court's obligation to provide services that meaningfully address those in need.

CONNECTIONS BACKGROUND

In the spring of 2000, the Clark County Juvenile Department staff, at the direction of Ernie Veach-White, Juvenile Court Administrator, conducted a survey to document risk factor domains of youth served by the juvenile system in Clark County. Of primary concern were youth that were high users of detention, had behavioral health issues, and/or had co-occurring substance abuse disorders. Data was gathered on all youth on community supervision and deferred prosecution served by the department in 1999. Of the 891 youth surveyed, 58% had drug/alcohol issues and 46% had behavioral health issues. Of the 50 top users of detention, 91% had drug/alcohol issues and 88% behavioral health issues; many youth had co-occurring disorders. National research indicates, and local information supports, that an increasing number of juveniles in the justice system

have behavioral health issues. It became apparent to juvenile court administration that in order to better address the multiple needs of juvenile offenders with behavioral health issues; reallocation of local resources needed to occur. A new program was developed, Connections, with the endorsement and support of the Superior Court Judges, the Board of County Commissioners and in partnership with the Children's System of Care, the Department of Community Services, the Regional Support Network and Portland State University.

In Clark County, all juvenile probationers are assessed for risk to re-offend using the Washington State Juvenile Court Risk Assessment tool. Case assignment and service delivery are determined based on youths' level of risk to re-offend. The assessment tool identifies risk and protective factors in ten life domains-Criminal History, School, Use of Free Time, Employment, Relationships, Environment in Which the Youth was Primarily Raised and Current Living Arrangements, Alcohol and Drugs, Mental Health, Attitudes and Behaviors, and Skills. Clark County has a history of implementing programs that target specialized populations: younger, at-risk offenders (Special Intervention Program); youth who commit sex offenses (Special Sex Offender Disposition Alternative); youth who abuse substances (Chemically Dependent Disposition Alternative); youth who are high risk and/or gang affiliated (Intensive Supervision).

After thoughtful consideration of at-risk populations and service delivery to youth in specialized programs, the decision was made to bring closure to the Special Intervention Program, reassign program youth to other units, and reallocate its resources to target offenders with cross system needs. The implementation of Connections is Clark County's response to the needs of juvenile offenders with behavioral health issues. A partnership between the juvenile department and the mental health community has been formally established. A Wraparound/ Individualized and Tailored Care model has been embraced to deliver family-centered and strength-based services to program youth and their families.

Connections is a family-centered program and the voice of the family is valued. This value has resulted in the formation of a Family Advisory Committee. The committee is comprised of parents/guardians of children in the program, program youth, and Connections staff. The committee meets monthly to review procedures, forms and best practice guidelines and serves as consultant to the management of Connections.

PROGRAM GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Connections is designed to deter program participants from continued criminal activity and to stabilize the youth in the community by establishing effective community-based support systems that will serve youth during and after court ordered supervision expires.

The goal will be achieved by implementing the following objectives:

- ◆ Program staff will support and reinforce Superior Court decisions regarding case dispositions.
- ◆ Balanced and restorative justice principles and values will be incorporated to increase youths' skills, provide services to victims, and increase public safety.
- ◆ Each participant will have a culturally competent, individualized service plan built on strengths to address his/her needs.
- ◆ Individualized service plans will be developed in a wraparound process and in a collaborative manner with the youth and parent/guardian, program staff, representatives from community agencies, and others that have important relationships with the youth and family.
- ◆ Plans will ensure that participants have access to a comprehensive array of services that address the youth's physical, behavioral health, emotional, social, and educational needs, and that support the youth and his or her family.
- ◆ While participating in the program, youth will be encouraged to accept responsibility for their

behavior and be required to fulfill obligations related to court orders and diversion contracts.

- ◆ Program staff will have regular contact with all parties participating in the development and/or delivery of service specified in the individualized service plan.
- ◆ Program staff, in collaboration with the youth and family team, will monitor the appropriateness of service delivery and assist in adjusting the plan as needed.

CORE VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ◆ Cross-system collaboration will form the basis for all solutions.
- ◆ Families, especially parents, will be seen as full partners in developing, delivering and implementing interventions to ensure that services respond to the real needs and concerns of youth and families.
- ◆ A strength-based approach will be embraced to work with youth and families. A holistic assessment will bring together information that identifies the specific strengths and needs of the youth within all of the relevant community environments. Whenever possible services will be provided within the most family-like environment.
- ◆ The program will be culturally competent, community based and needs driven; services as well as management and decision-making responsibility will rest at the community level.
- ◆ Program youth will receive services that are integrated with linkages between youth agencies and programs, and with mechanisms in place for creating, planning, developing and coordinating services. Services will be created to address specific needs as identified by the team.
- ◆ Program youth will be provided with services that enhance the possibility for multiple service delivery in a coordinated manner to better ensure that they can move through the system of services in accordance with their changing needs.

- ◆ Program youth will receive services without regard to race, religion, national origin, or gender; services that are sensitive and responsive to cultural uniqueness and special needs.

REFERRAL

- ◆ Youth must reside in Clark County, be on Community Supervision, at moderate or high risk to re-offend as determined by the Washington State Juvenile Court Risk Assessment, and have a score of one (1) or greater in the Mental Health Section of the assessment indicating mental health issues.
- ◆ Youth must have a diagnosed or diagnosable behavioral health disorder and be receiving services in more than one system.

FUNDING

Connections is funded with Juvenile Department general revenue funds and mental health dollars from the Clark County Regional Support Network and Children's System of Care Federal Grant. An inter-local agreement outlines resource commitment, management process and protocol for adapting the service.

PROGRAM STAFF

In addition to a program manager and a legal secretary, four teams of four with a joint caseload of approximately 30 youth each and their families are configured to staff Connections. In the Wraparound model, team members participate in the development and implementation of individualized service plans in collaboration with youth and family. They attend youth and family team meetings and are active participants, working collaboratively with families to achieve program goals. Each team consists of a:

- ◆ Probation Counselor - responsible for providing probation services that promote community safety, provide services to victims, increase youth competencies and provide offender accountability. Probation Counselors are responsible for carrying out the legislative intent of the law.

- ◆ Care Coordinator/ Therapist - makes certain that youth meets program criteria as determined by a mental health assessment, assists the youth and family in identifying both formal and informal supports, assembles the youth and family team, helps determine needs and resources, schedules and facilitates ongoing team meetings, and monitors the implementation of the team's plan. Care Coordinators provide crisis counseling to program participants as necessary.
- ◆ Juvenile Services Associate - works with each assigned youth to set goals and develop individual action plans to meet Court and individualized service plan requirements. They serve as a resource, mentor and role model to program youth providing advocacy, teaching skills, increasing competencies, supervising restorative community service activities and assisting youth in becoming involved in positive activities.
- ◆ Family Assistance Specialist - conducts strength assessments, provides support and advocacy, teaches skills, and assists with system navigation. He/she helps family members identify informal resources and supports, such as relatives, friends, teachers, or church volunteers that can assist the family and be part of their own team. As advocates, family assistance specialists help families voice their needs and requests for services.

A staff clinical psychologist provides twenty professional hours a week to the program. The Juvenile Department contracted out for psychiatric and medication management services. In addition to Juvenile Department staff, the Clark County Department of Community Services provides a part-time staff that serve as a program resource and liaison between juvenile justice and mental health.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- ◆ Reduce recidivism, decrease probation violations and decrease detention days.
- ◆ Reduce the episodes and length of time in out-of-home care.


- ◆ Increase protective factors in the area of increased positive relationships.
- ◆ Increase family stability and capacity to provide adequate supervision and supports.
- ◆ Integrate Probation and Mental Health services so that families experience seamless care and response across systems.
- ◆ Create a practice model which can be used for system improvement and modeling in both systems.

RESEARCH

Portland State University is conducting research and program evaluation as part of Clark County's System of Care Federal Grant. The following research information on Clark County Connections and System of Care youth served in other programs was presented at the Building on Family Strengths Conference on May 31, 2002.

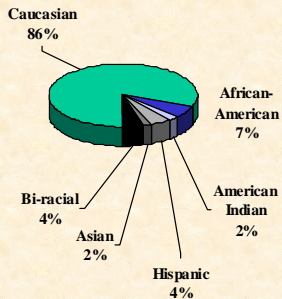
National Outcome Evaluation

- Taking place at 43 currently funded CMHS grantee sites across the country
- Approximately 120 new families this year from Clark County
 - 50 interviews from Connections (36 so far)
 - 70 interviews from Mental Health agencies



Youth Descriptive Information

Information from DIQ at intake



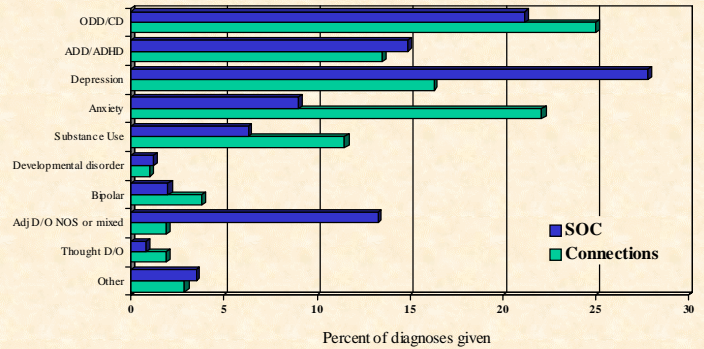
- Male: 69%
- Average age: 15.7
- Average number of children per household: 2.3

N ~ 49

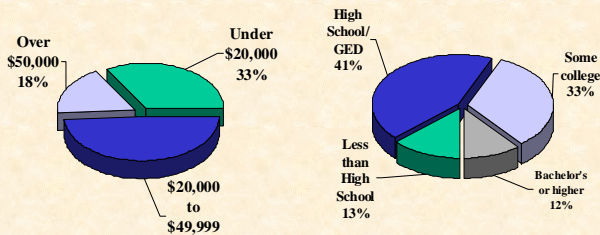
Youth Diagnoses

Among youth older than 12.5

Number of Youth: Connections (N= 47); SOC (N= 181)



Caregiver Demographics



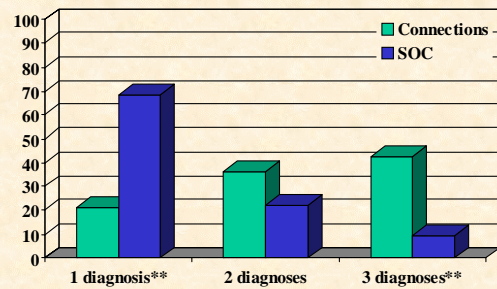
- Average age: 43.2
- Average number of people in household: 4.1
- Medicaid Eligible: 58.3%

N = 45-46

Number of Axis I Diagnoses

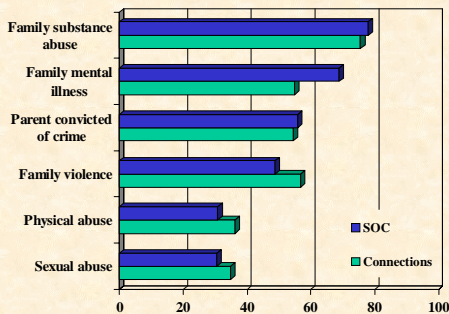
Among youth older than 12.5

Connections (N= 47); SOC (N= 181)



**p < .01

Youth and family history



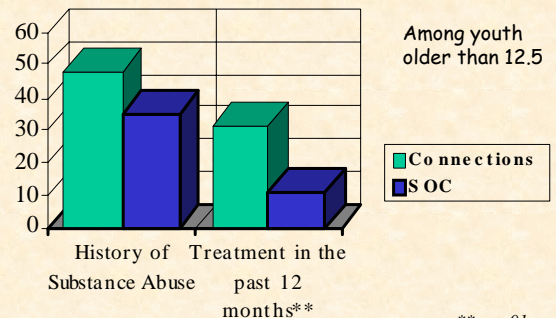
Any history of...

- Substance abuse in the child's biological family
- Family violence where the child was not a target
- Mental illness in the child's biological family
- A biological parent being convicted of a crime
- Physical abuse or sexual abuse of the child

Connections (N = 40 - 47)
SOC (N = 421 - 434)

Youth substance abuse history & treatment

Connections (N= 44); SOC (N= 184 - 187)

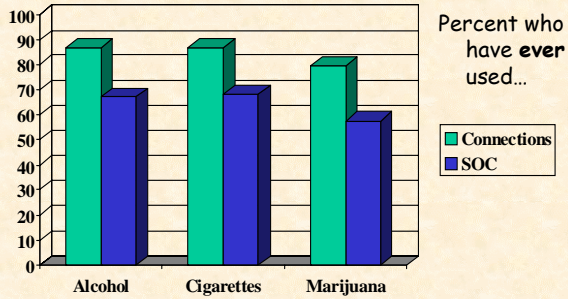


Among youth older than 12.5

**p < .01

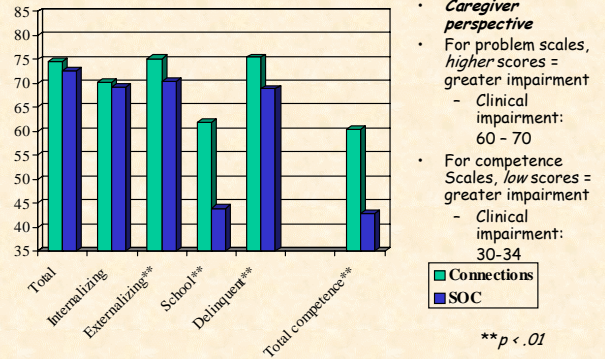
Youth substance use

Among youth older than 12.5
Connections (N~30); SOC (N~88)



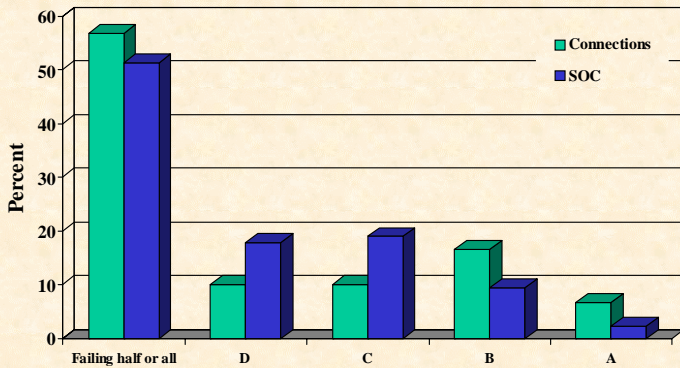
Child functioning (CBCL)

Connections (N = 35); SOC (N = 203)



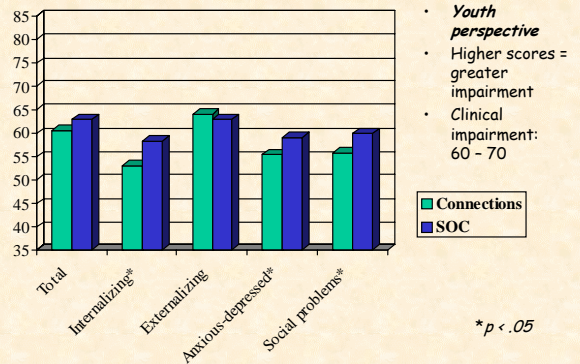
Grade averages at baseline

Among youth older than 12.5
Connections (N = 30); SOC (N = 84)



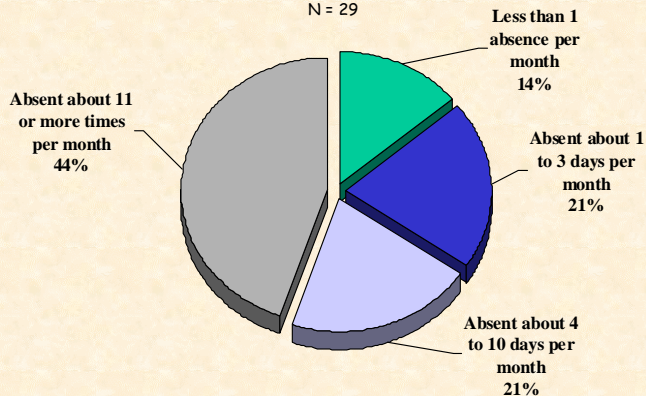
Child functioning (YSR)

Connections (N = 30); SOC (N = 102)



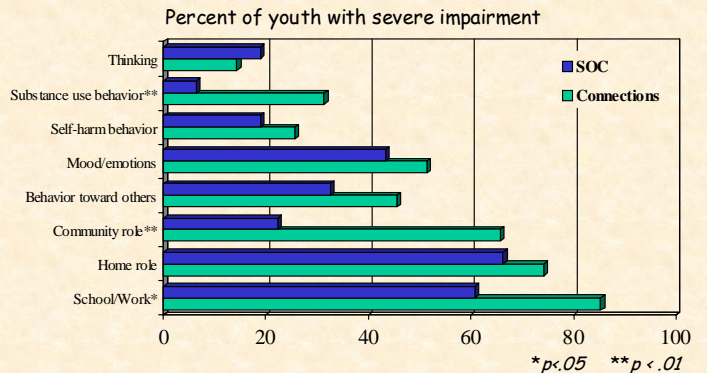
Excused & Unexcused Absences at Baseline

N = 29



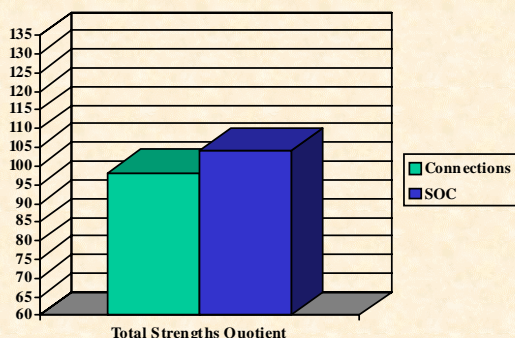
Child functioning (CAFAS)

Connections (N ~ 35); SOC (N ~ 200)



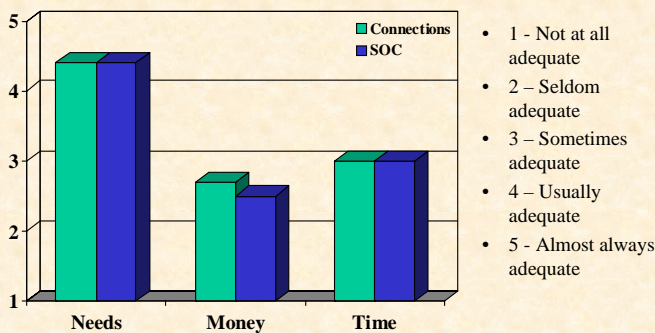
Child Strengths (BERS)

Connections (N = 32); SOC (N = 187)



Family Resources

Rates the adequacy of resources on a 5 point scale



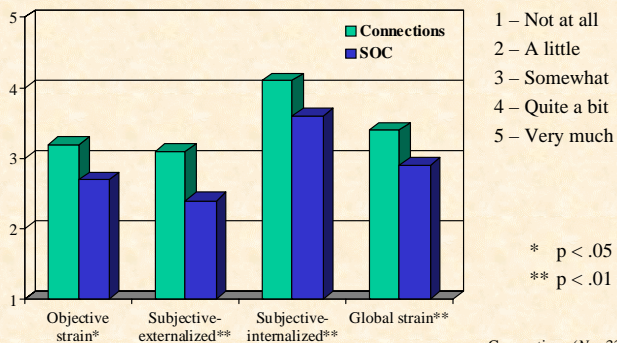
Connections (N = 31 – 34)

SOC (N = 199 – 206)

- 1 - Not at all adequate
- 2 - Seldom adequate
- 3 - Sometimes adequate
- 4 - Usually adequate
- 5 - Almost always adequate

Caregiver Strain

Rates level of strain families face on a 5 point scale



Connections (N = 33 – 34)

SOC (N = 203 – 206)

- * p < .05
- ** p < .01

CONCLUSIONS

All youth in the Clark County System of Care have serious emotional and behavioral disorders and a high need for services and supports. Compared to youth from the rest of the system, youth in Connections seem to:

- ◆ Have more problems with substance abuse.
- ◆ Have more difficulties in school.
- ◆ Have more diagnoses per child.
- ◆ Have more behaviorally oriented difficulties, while general System of Care youth tend to have more troubles with internalizing/mood difficulties.

Compared to families involved in the rest of the system, families whose children are in Connections indicate the same level of resources as other families and are experiencing greater levels of strain related to the care of their children.

For more research information, visit the evaluation's website at <http://www.rri.pdx.edu/ClarkCo/>.