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CLUSTER EVALUATION OF FOUR DIVERSION PROJECTS

STATUS REPORT

October 29, 1973

California Taxpayers' Association
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Sacramento, California 95814

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Pursuant to the contract agreement dated September 24th between California Taxpayers' Association and CCCJ for the cluster evaluation of four diversion projects the consultants are pleased to submit the following status report in accordance with item four of the contract.

Of the 23 working days since the inception of the evaluation the study team has spent 16 days in the field among the four different projects. The bulk of our work, however, has been concentrated in the Yolo and Richmond projects.

The purpose of these initial field visits was to introduce the study team to the project personnel and orient them to the purpose and objective of CCCJ's evaluation effort. The study team is pleased to report that our on-site work over the past month has largely validated the early observations and assessments which we made of the projects prior to the award of the contract. Except for the changes discussed in this report the study team does not foresee any major problems in carrying out the assessment methodology we outlined in our July 11th detailed amendments.

We have spent a considerable amount of time with each project director and have managed to interview most of the full-time personnel in every project. It is our impression that our research team is well accepted in the projects and that the project personnel understands the necessity for the evaluation. In every case we have found the project personnel completely cooperative and willing to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their various programs in a frank and honest manner.

We are thoroughly familiar now with the content, procedures, and deficiencies in the record systems of each project. In no instance have we encountered any reluctance about giving us access to individual case records or any other material that we have requested. During this period we have also collected and done some very preliminary evaluation of some administrative reports, monthly activity reports, and other studies which have been done by the projects.

Some of the early reservations we had about our proposed research design involved questions about whether or not enough data was available in Richmond and Yolo on individual cases to permit an assessment of program accomplishment. This was the primary reason for concentrating most of our time in this first phase of the study in these two places. Based on the abstracts that we have already made of several hundred individual case records the study team is of the opinion now that, at least, the police and probation referrals have been documented to the extent necessary for us to make certain reliable key judgments about each case that will be extremely important in assessing project's program. For all of the law enforcement and probation referrals the case records do show:

1. Dates of referral.
 2. Reasons for referrals.
 3. Term of treatment or service.
 4. Intensity of treatment or service (measured by the number of contacts).
 5. Termination date.
 6. Final disposition of case (in Yolo and Richmond
- we have found that the final dispositions on all

the cases were consistent enough to enable us to classify all the cases in one of about 10 categories of outcome).

In light of the existence of this data the study team now feels that the evaluation can proceed with a heavier reliance on internal data actually developed from the projects rather than solely on comparisons to outside, indirectly related reference groups. It is still our plan to make the comparisons we outlined in our proposal but we would expect our final report to also include certain analytical information about the characteristics of casework practices in these projects that was not originally anticipated.

Beyond this statement of our progress to date we believe it is preferable to discuss our progress in terms of what we have accomplished in each project.

YOLO YOUTH SERVICE BUREAU

To spare the small Yolo bureau the disruption of having us in their crowded headquarters any more than necessary we concentrated on making our primary file search as rapid as possible. We were also concerned with finding out as much as we could about the extent and quality of the data in order to alert CCCJ to any changes in the proposal that may be necessary due to the lack of data. In a week the research team, with two assistants, were able to collect for every law enforcement and probation referral the six points of information mentioned on page two.

There were 225 law enforcement and probation referrals which was about the number we had estimated in our July 11th amendments. The

data cards, like the one attached, are now completed on every law enforcement probation referral and are ready to be keypunched, coded and turned over to the sheriff's department for the file search we outlined in our original plan. We do not anticipate having to make any changes in the methodology that we have described for assessing the segment of the referrals which have come from law enforcement and probation agencies.

The remainder of the total caseload handled by the Yolo bureau since its inception consists of 468 school referrals and 187 miscellaneous referrals represented by a mixture of self, parent, and other agencies. To follow our original proposal we would now have been ready in the Yolo project to select a sample of these school and miscellaneous referrals and would have conducted an in-depth follow-up study of the case outcomes with schools, parents, and other agencies.

For reasons which we believe are understood by CCCJ the Project Director is very reluctant to have us proceed with the part of our proposal which called for direct follow-up contact with schools, parents, or even public agencies. The non-law-enforcement referrals comprised 70% of the bureau's workload over the past three years. Recent changes in the bureau now concentrates attention on programs almost exclusively concerned with counselling and tutoring in the school setting rather than on law enforcement referrals. One of the main reservations that we have about not being able to follow-up on the school referrals is that it will place most of the study effort on evaluating a type of referral which has largely been abandoned.

To preclude us entirely from direct access to the schools and other agency sources which we considered necessary in evaluating this important component of the project simply means that the major part of the bureau's past program cannot be evaluated.

We are entirely sympathetic to the Director's concern about protecting the bureau's delicate standing in the community at the moment and she would also like to spare school officials any unnecessary involvement with a bureau matter. We are, however, unable to think of a substitute methodology for evaluating this important phase of the bureau's program if we are precluded from following the methodology in our original proposal.

There are at least two principal reasons why we think it will be almost impossible to assess school and miscellaneous referrals without the benefit of some direct contact with schools, agencies and possibly a select sample of parents. The first is that, unlike the law enforcement and probation referrals, the case documentation on school referrals is extremely limited. Many of the school referrals, we think, were handled as group situations without the benefit of case write-up. Secondly, in considering the possibility of trying to reconstruct case outcomes through the case aides we find that it would be virtually impossible to determine what cases have been assigned to particular case aides. Additionally, there is the problem of locating the case aide who most probably has finished school and moved from the area.

Our thought about interviewing parents for their observations on the bureau's effort was frustrated because many of the children were counselled by the bureau without any knowledge of the parents. It is the

feeling of the project staff that to inquire about juveniles through the parents would breach an informal understanding between case aide and the student which would undermine the confidence and trust in the bureau's counsellors.

RICHMOND INTERVENTION UNIT

The total number of referrals we will have to consider in the intervention unit of the Richmond youth services program will be 134 closed cases. This represents all referrals handled by the unit since its inception February, 1972 through January, 1973. This cutoff date was selected because it allows for an eight-month follow-up on each case. The same data card with the same basic information which we used for police and probation referrals in Yolo has now been completed for this unit of the Richmond project. Data on these referrals is now in a condition to be keypunched, processed, and turned over to police departments for the pre- and post file search we described in our original methodology.

The director of the unit and a staff of three deputy probation officers have been interviewed at length. We have also had occasion to talk to the chief of the western division of the probation department who is technically in charge of the youth services program.

After several days work in this project we find that our description of the unit as stated in our July 11th amendments was essentially correct. The case files and documentation about the case work is excellent. We had no difficulty whatsoever in searching the individual case files for any of the key points of information needed for our analysis. In many instances complete police and probation histories have been

maintained by the probation officers. To a large degree we attribute the high quality of the documentation in the records to the fact that the entire caseload is handled by trained, full-time professional deputy probation officers. At this point we can foresee no difficulty in carrying out the methodology described in our research plan for the police and probation referrals to the Richmond project. The staff of the unit has been completely cooperative and seemed to welcome some outside examination which might lead to some further improvements in their program.

RICHMOND OUTREACH UNIT

The principal staff in the two units of the youth services program we are evaluating have administrative responsibilities to both projects. Consequently, the reception and assistance extended to us in this unit was just as good as it was in the intervention unit. The staff is friendly, cooperative and quite candid in discussing all facets of the outreach program. They have given us every assistance in opening up the project for evaluation.

We have, however, encountered what we think is an almost insurmountable problem in trying to conduct a quality assessment of the program's effectiveness. Because of the way this unit has documented their case files we are of the opinion now that the assessment which can be carried out on the outreach unit is likely to be the lowest in the entire cluster of projects. We reached this conclusion after working with the project staff and reviewing their cases over a five-day period.

These are the major deficiencies we find in the unit's records:

1. Absolutely no case files exist for referrals handled by outreach before August, 1972.

2. Most of the referrals taken after January, 1973 seem to still be in active status.
3. Even the documentations on cases closed between August, 1972 and January, 1973 is poor. Case workers have not consistently recorded even such fundamental actions as termination date or reasons for referral; few contain any statement about outcome and in most instances very little information is indicated about the nature of the service provided.
4. A very high percentage of the referrals (probably 40%) are for employment which we think at the moment should more accurately be considered as job applicants rather than bonafide service referrals.
5. The effect of this latter problem is to distort, or at least interfere, with an accurate account of the overall number of referrals which can properly be considered service cases.
6. Case files are not kept on recreation or activity referrals. These referrals probably account for about 30% of the project's workload. Recognizing again that another 40% of employment cases on which very little analysis can be done we are left with only 40 to 50 counselling and tutoring cases which are subject to analysis.

7. Unless special justification is given, a case is normally closed in six months. We find, however, that most of the referrals received between January and June are still in an active status.

Unless we can get the unit to close the cases they have handled between January, 1973 and June, 1973, which have not been closed, the cases available for analysis is going to be extremely small (100 to 125). If the January to June cases can be closed the sample can be expanded to perhaps 200.

Offsetting our disappointment about the condition of the regular cases, we have found some monthly activity reports which seem to have been kept rather faithfully by the unit's staff since August, 1972. Although we have some reservations about the validity of the reports, at the moment it appears that they might provide some of the best information we have for analytical purposes. These might provide better insight into the unit's program and what they have tried to accomplish as any assessment that can be made by working with individual case record information.

The other factor that seems to be emerging as being very important in assessing the impact of these volunteer programs like the one in Yolo and Richmond outreach, which we had never taken into account, is that the primary group of services of a direct nature are to a very large extent dependent on the number, training, and availability of volunteers and not the core staff employed by the projects.

Neither Yolo nor Richmond outreach have their corps of volunteers put together for this year. The availability and terms on which they get their volunteers is more important to these community type efforts than what is done by the full-time coordinators. This was a problem never mentioned in any of the original grant proposals but from our observations so far it is becoming one of the key issues to be accounted for in our evaluation as well as building the evaluative model for funding future projects.

To summarize the main problems we foresee in carrying out the research contemplated in our proposal is getting the unit to bring their files up to date in order to expand the sample to a meaningful size. The second is that we are essentially dealing with a type of program where the largest number of the referrals are for employment or recreational activities which are hardly appropriate for the kind of analysis called for considering the project's main objective of "preventing delinquency."

ALAMEDA COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT DELINQUENCY PREVENTION PROGRAM

Because of the initial problems we encountered in the Yolo project and the excessive amount of time required in reviewing and initiating data collection in both the Richmond and Yolo county projects the study team has only been able to spend two days in the Alameda project. In these two days, however, we have interviewed all the principal personnel in the project and have been able to make a thorough review of existing project data.

We have had occasion to talk to the chief of the juvenile division of the probation department who has direct supervisory responsibilities for all facets of the program, the unit supervisor, as well as the in-house

staff evaluator. The project personnel have been completely cooperative and as in the case of the Richmond project seemed to welcome an outside assessment of their unit's activities.

The staff has furnished us direct access to all individual case files. In addition, they have supplied a variety of supporting monthly summary case reports, including all evaluative data collected to date on the project.

With this information and a review of several case files we are confident that the documentation that has been maintained on an on-going basis for each case in the project will furnish most of the data necessary to complete the data requirements that we have specified in our original evaluation plan. Initially, we felt we could rely strictly on summary EDP reports available for each individual referral. However, in reviewing the several case files that we have seen and comparing them with these summaries it is obvious that we will still need to correlate these computer summaries on each case with the original individual case record. In a couple of instances complete probation histories that have been documented in the case folder do not appear on the summary EDP sheets kept on each referral.

More importantly, in reviewing individual case files it is apparent that project staff have not documented the frequency with which they have counselled each family included in the program. Because of the specific design and goal of the project the absence of such an important descriptive characteristic could very likely prove to be a limiting factor in our assessment of the program's effectiveness. In discussing this particular point with the unit supervisor he has indicated that because of

the small caseloads handled by his two probation deputies this problem can be alleviated by an individual case-by-case review with the deputy who has provided the counselling service to each family.

The main problem we have found in this project which may affect the quality of the evaluation is that out of the total caseload handled in the project since its inception only 30% of the cases have been closed. In 2½ years 130 families have been referred to the project. Out of these only 34 families have been accepted for the program. Of these 34 families, 20 still remain in active status. Because of the long-term, intensive casework conducted on each referral we will be forced to limit our review of case outcomes to less than one-third of the total cases included in the treatment population. A sample of this size will undoubtedly restrict a great many of the generalizations that can be made about the project's effectiveness. Even more importantly, a good possibility exists that with such a small sample in the Alameda project that the quality of any cross-project comparisons that could be made in the cluster will be significantly reduced.

SACRAMENTO COUNTY 601 DIVERSION PROJECT

After interviewing project personnel and reviewing a variety of evaluative data that has been maintained on the Sacramento diversion project, the study team is completely confident that all the base-line data necessary to carry out our original research methodology does exist.

The case documentation that we have found in a selected sample of individual case files is undoubtedly the best of any of the projects in the cluster. The project staff has made a systematic effort to completely document all case activity and progress of each referral.

In the short time that we have been able to spend in the project, we have had the opportunity to interview all key administrative personnel as well as five of the nine full-time probation officers who conduct the short-time family crisis counselling in the unit. As in the case of the Richmond and Alameda projects the staff of this project have displayed a complete willingness to assist in this evaluation effort.

In our original plan for evaluating this project we indicated that we would include all the first year's referrals to the unit in our police department file search. After considering the problems we have encountered in way of availability of data for two of the projects in the cluster, and in light of the volume of referrals that have been handled in this project the study team is now of the opinion that the best approach for completing our assessment of this project will be to conduct a random, selected sample of first year referrals for the police file search. We have discussed this with the project's unit supervisor and he is in complete agreement with substituting this procedure.

In addition to substituting a random sample procedure in the project we are forced to forego the possibility of collecting sibling data on referrals to the unit. In discussions with project staff they have indicated that sibling data has not been collected on a regular basis for any of the three years of referrals to the project and that when it has been collected no effort has been made to verify its accuracy.

