

## ***Executive Summary***

### **Implementation of the CYA-RSAT**

#### *A Process Evaluation of the California Youth Authority's Residential Substance Abuse Treatment (RSAT) Programs*

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This report summarizes findings of a process evaluation of the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment (RSAT) Program of the California Department of the Youth Authority. Funded by the Office of Criminal Justice Planning, the CYA-RSAT program is operated at three institutional sites: (1) the Karl Holton Drug and Alcohol Abuse Treatment Center in Stockton, (2) the Heman G. Stark Youth Correctional Facility in Chino, and (3) the Ventura School in Camarillo. As a result of the RSAT funds, each of these institutions has been able to enhance the treatment components of its existing Formalized Drug Programs (FDP).

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#### **PROPOSED PROGRAM ENHANCEMENTS**

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As a result of the RSAT funds, CYA was able to enhance its FDPs at Holton, Ventura, and Stark as follows:

- Improve the programs' screening and assessment process by designing and implementing a standardized, sequential assessment system to determine wards' eligibility for the programs and likelihood of completing the program. These data will also form the basis for individualized treatment programs for each ward.

- Increase the frequency and regularity of drug testing by purchasing testing supplies and equipment, paying salaries of staff responsible for collecting urine specimens, performing laboratory testing and maintaining test results data, and conducting mandatory drug testing of all wards within 72 hours of arrival to program, weekly random drug testing of 10% of all wards in the FDP, mandatory testing of all program participants within 30 days of release to parole and reasonable suspicion testing of those suspected of drug use.
- Increase the knowledge level of counseling staff by developing a competency-based in-service training curriculum.
- Enhance the capability of staff to deliver treatment core components within targeted timeframes.
- Increase the number and improve the quality of treatment services provided during the pre-release phase.

Each of the proposed enhancements was to be implemented across the three program sites (unless otherwise indicated below). Hence, the existing FDPs at Holton, Ventura and Stark were to undergo modifications in order to achieve the goals outlined in the CYA-RSAT proposal. It should be noted that each of the original FDPs at Holton, Ventura and Stark has been developed to address the unique needs of its ward population. As a result, the three programs have also evolved differently with respect to the use of the RSAT funds.

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## **IMPLEMENTATION OF KARL HOLTON RSAT ENHANCEMENTS**

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The RSAT grant at Holton was used to enhance their drug testing program, to increase staff training and competency, to pay for back-up relief so counselors could spend more time providing individual and group counseling to wards (as opposed to performing custody duties), and to begin a graduate intern program to provide additional psychological screening and assessment. In

the process of conducting the study at this site, important themes emerged regarding intensity of treatment and staff training. Focus group interviews with a random sample of wards revealed a strong desire on the part of wards for greater intensity of individual and group counseling sessions and for more exposure to either paid staff or volunteers in recovery. Additionally, there was a consensus among the staff that current funding levels did not support comprehensive, ongoing staff training. Another issue is that the psychological assessment component at Holton has not been sufficiently supported to facilitate communication between psychologists and other treatment staff to guide treatment services more effectively.

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## **IMPLEMENTATION OF VENTURA RSAT ENHANCEMENTS**

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The RSAT grant at Ventura was used to hire a psychologist to provide screening and assessment, to increase staff training, to enhance its drug testing program, and to pay for back-up relief to allow counselors to spend more time with wards. Funds were also used to hire a pre-release coordinator to facilitate communication between institutional and field parole staff and to plan for the wards' release to parole. Wards at this site expressed a desire for more peer-led support groups, as opposed to the more didactically oriented groups led by counselors. Issues identified in the formal and informal interviews with staff included: a desire for additional training for counseling staff, training and mentoring in the area of screening and assessment for staff, institutional policies regarding ward placements that can disrupt continuity of treatment, and the growing problem of staff turnover.

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## **IMPLEMENTATION OF HEMAN STARK RSAT ENHANCEMENTS**

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The RSAT grant at Stark was used to hire a staff psychologist to conduct screening and assessment, to establish a graduate intern program, to enhance its drug testing program, to hire a pre-release coordinator, to improve staff training, and to pay for back-up relief

for counselors. Important themes that arose among wards at this site included: a perceived absence of adequate substance abuse counseling by staff and an over-emphasis on custody, rather than treatment issues. Staff issues highlighted at this program site were: behavior problems that interfere with program compliance, staff security needs related to the high incidence of violence within the program, and institutional policies that frequently place more value on educational than on treatment needs.

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## **WARD CHARACTERISTICS**

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The typical ward in these programs was approximately 19 years old, Hispanic, unmarried, with parents who were separated or divorced. The female wards (at Ventura) were more likely to be white and less likely to be Hispanic, than the male wards. Likewise, the female wards were more likely than the male wards, overall, to have children of their own. Almost all of the wards had at least one brother or sister, with an average of more than three.

Violent crimes accounted for nearly half (48%) of the commitment offenses; property crimes accounted for slightly under a third (32%). The remaining commitment offenses fell evenly between drug (7%) and other (7%) categories, with sex-related crimes accounting for less than 3%.

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## **INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT**

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One of the presumed effects of an intensive, corrections-based drug treatment program is improved daily functioning and inmate management. The present study examined two indicators of daily institutional functioning for the three RSAT-enhanced drug programs: (1) the prevention of ward drug use, and (2) the promotion of a therapeutically oriented environment.

### **Ward Drug Testing**

Across all three programs, rates of positive drug tests were extremely low. At Karl Holton, out of a total of 2,305 urinalyses conducted, 25 (1.1%) were positive. At the Heman G. Stark program, a total of 289 drug tests were conducted. Out of these, 3 (1%) were “undetermined,” 3 (1%) had been altered in some way, and 4 were positive (1.3%). Finally, at the Ventura School, a total of 305 wards were tested during the specified period. Of these, 4 (1.3%) tested positive. THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, accounted for all of the positive tests where the substance was reported.

### **Correctional Institution Environment Scale (CIES)**

To assess the perceptions of correctional officers at the RSAT programs versus those at other youth correctional institutions, the CIES was administered to correctional counselors at the three programs and compared with national norms from custody staff at non-treatment correctional facilities for youth. The analysis revealed that youth correctional counselors (YCCs) based at the Holton and Ventura RSAT sites tended to perceive their institutions as being *at least* as treatment oriented as do correctional officers at other youth correctional facilities in the U.S. Ratings from Holton and Ventura staff were particularly high for the Order and Organization dimension.

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## **RELAPSE PREVENTION TRAINING**

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The CYA Institutions and Camps Branch, in conjunction with the Parole Services and Community Corrections Branch, hosted a series of relapse prevention training sessions across the state. The training curriculum was based on the Hazelden module on managing high-risk situations, the first of six relapse prevention lessons in a package CYA has purchased for distribution system-wide. From the observations of the training by UCLA Drug Abuse Research Center (DARC) evaluation team members, and from feedback from program participants, the training appeared to be designed as an introductory session to the terminology and concepts of relapse prevention, to introduce the RSAT grant to

parole staff, and to communicate the desire to have CYA personnel within the institution and the field use relapse prevention as “the common language” linking critical components of treatment and aftercare. Overall, the response to the training was positive from the majority of those responding to the post-test questions. Participants stated that they agreed that relapse prevention is an important new strategy for supporting recovery, and they were interested in having more training in this area.

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## **REVIEW OF CRITICAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS**

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A review of the correctional program literature suggests several key components for effective treatment. A critical foundation for effective substance abuse treatment is thorough and comprehensive screening and assessment using valid and reliable instruments. Comprehensive assessment is essential for the identification of crucial physical and mental health needs, social problems, as well as substance abuse treatment needs. Effective treatment programs are holistic, highly structured, and use a number of strategies to provide substance abuse treatment. Treatment is delivered by non-correctional staff (i.e., outside contractors who provide treatment services within the institution) who are empathetic and committed and who provide individual, group, and family counseling using cognitive-behavioral and other intensive treatment approaches.

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## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The primary goal of the first year of this research was to document the implementation of the RSAT service enhancements at the Holton, Ventura, and Stark FDPs. Overall, the evaluators found that the three programs demonstrated fidelity to their original plans for program implementation. From our formal and informal interviews with administrators, counselors, parole agents, and wards regarding the enhanced programs, it is clear that there is a great deal of enthusiasm and optimism about the potential

contribution the grant could make to reducing recidivism and relapse among drug using wards when they are released to parole.

While the programs have achieved many successes with the RSAT enhancements, there are a number of important challenges that lie ahead as they enter the second year of the grant. These include:

- Lack of uniformity of the screening and assessment process, both within and between institutions.
- Inadequacy of staff training.
- Frequent turnover among key program staff in all three programs due to promotions, voluntary separation, and retirement.
- Concern about maintaining current levels of RSAT grant funds at each program site.
- Heavy caseloads and competing custodial responsibilities for counseling staff.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend the following:

- Initial and ongoing screening and assessment need to be standardized and adequately funded. Procedures should also be in place to ensure that assessment results are taken into consideration when developing individual treatment plans.
- Funding should be dedicated to providing high-quality, comprehensive, and ongoing training for all staff providing treatment to wards in FDPs (see Staff Development Checklist in Appendix H).
- The intensity of individual and counseling services should be increased to recommended standards.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on recruiting staff with prior experience and/or formal training in substance abuse or a related field in health or social services.

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- Additional staff (counseling and/or custody) should be hired to reduce YCC caseloads.

The three FDPs currently receiving the enhanced funding under RSAT should be fully funded so that an adequate program evaluation can be conducted and important questions about what works, for whom, and under what circumstances can be answered. As the only RSAT-funded program for juvenile offenders, these answers will be critical to developing drug abuse treatment programs for young, drug-involved offenders in California as well as throughout the nation.