



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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Date: May 5, 2023

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CARE FIRST, JAILS LAST: HOLDING THE PROBATION DEPARTMENT ACCOUNTABLE & ADVANCING YOUTH JUSTICE REIMAGINED (ITEM NO. 6 OF MARCH 21, 2023 AGENDA)

On March 21, 2023, the Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted a motion titled, "Care First, Jails Last: Holding the Probation Department Accountable and Advancing Youth Justice Reimagined." Directive 6 of this motion tasked the Department of Youth Development (DYD), in consultation with the Youth Justice Advisory Group (YJAG) and County Counsel, with developing a proposed concept for Safe and Secure Healing Centers (SSHCs) that serve pre-adjudication and post-disposition youth who would otherwise be detained in juvenile hall and camp, as well as a first phase of implementation that is feasible and permissible under existing law.

Background

The collaboratively developed "Youth Justice Reimagined" (YJR) report recommended SSHCs as part of the foundation of a new, care-first youth justice system that would be meaningfully different in operations and outcomes from the current system. Informed by promising practices in youth justice reform and transformation nationally and internationally, the SSHC concept was envisioned to fill an important role in the continuum of care needed for justice-involved youth by creating spaces for youth who must be removed from home to receive trauma-responsive support in home-like environments grounded in a youth development framework.

The County is now in the second phase outlined in the YJR report, including building on additional collaborative research and design to support demonstration projects and early implementation of key elements of the YJR vision. The YJR consultant team and DYD have since been co-facilitating a working group of the YJAG focused on further research and design for the SSHC concept. Over the last two years, the working group has included membership from community-based residential and service providers, directly impacted youth, probation, legal agencies, and health and mental health departments. DYD consulted with County Counsel and will continue to do so as we advance this concept and first phase of implementation.

Overview of Proposed Concept

The SSHC concept is informed by evidence that: A) every aspect of a young person's environment impacts their ability to successfully engage with therapeutic or rehabilitative interventions and B) environments of punishment, isolation and institutionalization negatively impact youth, staff, and community well-being. The theory of change that guides this concept is that when a young person must be removed from their home for their safety and/or the safety of others, an environment and approach rooted in youth development and healing to ensure they feel calm, supported, and loved substantially increases the likelihood that they will stabilize, be able and willing to engage in supportive services, learn and improve, and be ready to safely reintegrate into the community.

A SSHC is a small, community-based therapeutic home with a range of non-law enforcement staff and facility security, designed to ensure a home-like experience for justice-involved youth who require removal from their home for their safety or the safety of others. In this context, "home-like" refers to the physical space, geographic setting, staffing, and operation (i.e., schedules, routines, clothing), all designed to ensure that youth and their guardians have as much developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive dignity, support, and autonomy as possible to safely manage their own routines and environment.

The SSHC concept is intended to be a less restrictive placement in contrast to carceral facilities that are institutional, isolating, and far from the home communities of youth most impacted by justice system involvement. This concept is envisioned to be able to support youth pre-adjudication as a replacement for Juvenile Hall detention, post-disposition as a replacement for Camp placement, or as a less restrictive placement from Secure Youth Treatment Facility.

See Attachment A for additional details of proposed concept and first phase of implementation.

First Phase of Implementation

DYD and the YJAG's SSHC working group have identified a demonstration project designed for post-disposition youth (though open to pre-adjudication youth, where appropriate) as ideal for a first phase of implementation under existing law. Dependent on partnership and funding feasibility, this first phase of implementation will focus on two SSHC demonstration projects housing 5-6 girls and gender expansive youth at a time that will be operated by a community-based provider and licensed as a Short-Term Residential Treatment Placements (STRTPs) with oversight from the California Department of Social Services. This approach would allow the County to address urgent needs without immediate legislative change and to assess what works and what needs improvement in order to inform future efforts to scale. DYD would play a meaningful role in coordination, oversight, and evaluation of the demonstration projects and the entity holding the contracts with community-based providers will depend on funding and licensing considerations.

The proposed SSHC demonstration projects are informed by:

1. The urgent need for increased availability of residential placement options accessible for youth charged with serious offenses and/or justice-involved youth with complex needs.
2. The urgent need for innovative less restrictive placements to address the current crisis and conditions of the County's juvenile justice facilities, particularly the Juvenile Halls.
3. The need for increased access to developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive youth development environments, staffing, activities, and services for this population.
4. Efforts undertaken by the YJAG to respond to a motion adopted by the Board on November 30, 2021, calling for the decarceration of girls and young women.

Although the initial SSHC demonstration projects are proposed to be licensed as STRTPs, SSHCs would be distinct in that they would:

1. Amend (or create) a program statement (under 87022.1(b) of STRTP Licensing Standards) to specify that the focus population includes youth accused of serious offenses to prevent net widening, including screening criteria that is responsive to the needs of this population to avoid rejection and ejection of youth to the extent possible.
2. Implement solutions to barriers that prevent individuals with lived experience (e.g., Credible Messenger mentors) from staffing and/or providing services to youth in a SSHC.
3. Integrate holistic youth development programming as co-designed by the Community Based Organization (CBO) and DYD.

The SSHC should ensure ready availability of meaningful grievance processes, assessment tools, and proper data collection to create feedback loops. SSHC staff and management would be responsible for promoting safety through restorative practices and positive youth development mechanisms integrated into daily interactions and activities to facilitate an atmosphere for learning and recovery. Based on consultations with other jurisdictions and local subject-matter experts, physical interventions should be used only for immediate threats to youth and staff and should not be used to keep a youth at a SSHC. Instead, the SSHC will be designed such that staff are trained in restorative de-escalation and youth have access to trauma-responsive spaces to calm down peacefully and participate in restorative practices to repair harm.

Next Steps

In order to realize the above-described first phase of implementation, DYD will collaborate with relevant partners to prioritize the following next steps: (*See Attachment B for additional details*)

1. Convene partners from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Probation, the Juvenile Court to determine placement options and implications for funding and oversight between: A) placement order through DCFS, B) placement order through Probation, or C) Home on Probation order with condition of placement through DYD.
2. Reconvene YJAG SSHC workgroup as well as other stakeholder and subject-matter experts to answer outstanding questions and refine details, including targeted outreach and engagement with system-impacted youth and stakeholders.
3. Refine structural design and geographic locations, programming design, staffing model, budget and funding options, regulatory and liability framework, to inform a Scope of Work and contracting structure for the SSHC demonstration projects.

Should you have any questions concerning this matter, please contact me at (213) 584-4331 or dcarroll@dyd.lacounty.gov.

DC:ts:zr

Attachments

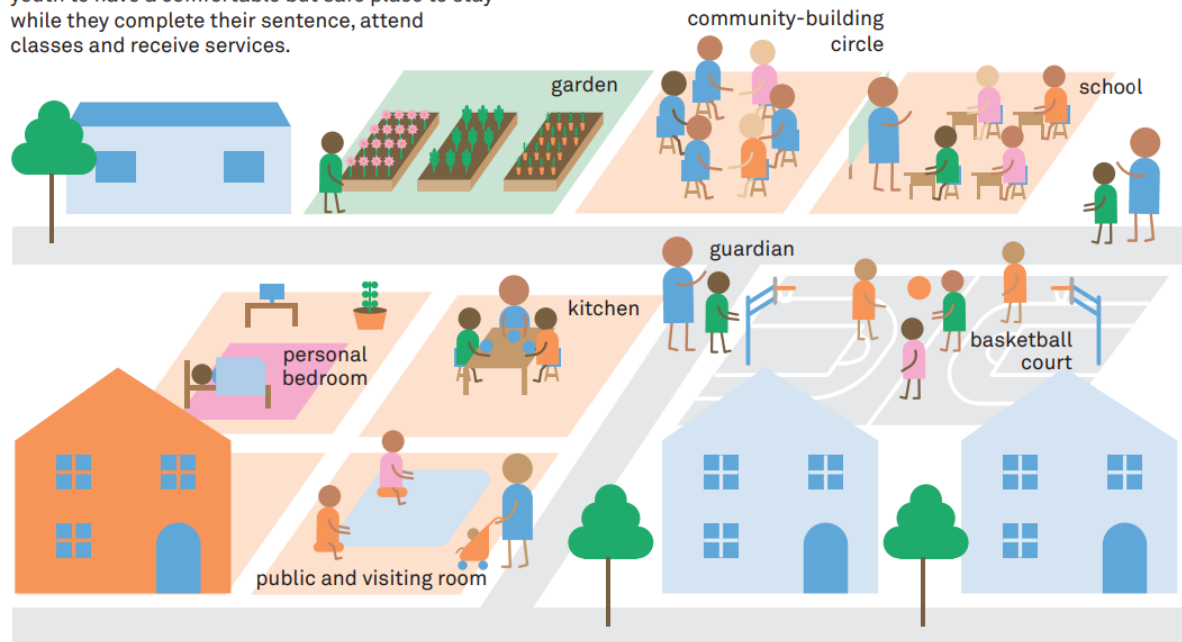
c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors
County Counsel
Department of Children and Family Services
Probation Department

Additional Details of the Safe and Secure Healing Center (SSHC) Concept

Figure 1. Illustration of SSHC Concept from the Youth Justice Reimagined Report

Safe and Secure Healing Center

Small residential home option would allow most youth to have a comfortable but safe place to stay while they complete their sentence, attend classes and receive services.



Purpose

SSHCs are seen as part of a continuum where the vast majority of youth will remain in their communities, and for those who it is determined need to be outside of their home, the goal is that most would be placed at SSHCs that provide comprehensive reentry and trauma-informed youth developmental services in a culture of care rather than one of control and punishment. Safety is primarily achieved through positive mechanisms, such as a home-like physical space, credible messengers and behavioral health staffing at the core, and holistic youth development programming.

The purpose of a SSHC is to provide a supportive and collaborative learning environment where youth develop interpersonal, educational, career, and life skills; create healthy, positive, and supportive relationships with staff, other adults, and peers; and address their underlying needs and/or trauma to prepare for reintegration into their community. SSHC's would be accountable for providing a continuum of care for youth through comprehensive trauma-responsive youth development services that are rooted in a cohesive culture of care. Staff would include credible messengers and mental health/restorative practitioners at a minimum.

Geographic Location and Physical Environment

Ideally SSHCs would be located in areas of the County where justice-involved youth live in order to support the maintenance of healthy community and family ties and ease the eventual reentry transition. Placement decisions should account for the expressed desires of the young people.

Additionally, the demonstration projects are proposed to be open (not locked) facilities. The YJAG has recognized that a range of security levels in SSHCs may be needed, including a closed, “not free to leave” option, but believes most youth should be served in an open SSHC and that this is the appropriate approach for a demonstration project given consistency with YJR. Future exploration for what a closed, or “not free to leave” SSHC may look like will be important for future phases of implementation.

Goals for Later Phases of Implementation

The proposed implementation plan assumes we pilot a SSHC model with no legislative changes as we investigate the most sound approach for full facility replacement. Options for the ideal structure will be refined and informed by learnings from the initial demonstration projects by may include: licensed under a different division of the California Department of Health and Human Services (i.e., not licensed under Community Care Licensing), or licensed and regulated by the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR).

Since the initial demonstration projects are envisioned to be open (i.e., not locked), future phases will also include further exploration of the concept of a “Stabilization and Wellness Center,” a version of a SSHC that is currently a placeholder for the more complex concept of a closed facility.

ATTACHMENT B

Table 2. Draft Options of Placement Pathways

Considerations	DCFS	Probation	DYD
Legal mechanism for post-disposition	Charter county authority may allow DCFS to place non-dual-status WIC 602 youth	WIC 727	WIC 727(a)(2) with condition that youth go to a SSHC Would also need WIC 827 amendment / waiver
Legal mechanism for pre-adjudication	Charter county authority may allow DCFS to place non-dual-status WIC 602 youth	WIC 636	WIC 636 Would need WIC 827 amendment / waiver
Opportunities	Department engaged in reimagining child welfare efforts Holds contracts with STRTPs	Clear legal mechanism Holds contracts with STRTPs	Prevents involvement with either delinquency or dependency Commitment to equitable contracting practices may be a good fit to support the SSHC concept.
Challenges	Introducing DCFS involvement for a population where it does not already exist	Need to ensure court order specific enough to ensure the SSHC STRTP placement since court orders and probation finds suitable place	Need for additional staffing, infrastructure DYD would be involved in removing youth from their homes even temporarily, and this role could corrode community trust in agency.
Role of DYD	On-site and off-site staffing for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative decision-making team and reentry support • Programmatic lead for SSHC • Credible Messenger training and support 		In addition, would be responsible for oversight as holder of the contract
Outreach needed	DCFS, OCP, Courts	Probation, Courts	Courts
Long-term role	Open question of whether DCFS or DYD should ultimately be the placing agency.		