



A Case for CAFA: Innovation Meets Impact

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Introduction:

For the past three years, Juvenile Justice System and Community Leaders in Santa Clara County have come together to develop an innovative approach to responding to the needs of youth who find themselves in court before a judge with very little support and advocacy from the community. The Court Appointed Friend and Advocate (CAFA) program is a truly collaborative and community-based approach to supporting some of our most vulnerable and marginalized youth. It leverages systems leadership with community compassion in an evidence-informed framework for supporting our youth to become more than their past mistakes.

History of CAFA:

In 2013, Santa Clara County's juvenile justice systems leaders and community based organizations came together to pilot CAFA. Identifying the glaring similarities between dependency youth and juvenile justice youth, these partners began a collaborative initiative to provide juvenile justice-involved youth the court advocacy support that dependency youth receive through CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate). Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY), in partnership with the at-the-time Supervising Judge of the Juvenile Justice Court, Patrick Tondreau, and the District Attorney's Office, leveraged a two-year state grant to pilot the Court Appointed Friend and Advocate (CAFA) mentoring program, a variation of FLY's existing mentor program that incorporates court reporting and court advocacy into FLY's evidence-informed approach to blending case management with volunteer mentoring for a year long period of support. The new model trained CAFA mentors on the juvenile justice system and how to write court reports to provide greater context on youths' struggles and successes in the community.

Piloting the CAFA model meant that adjudicated youth in the program would not only have the normal players in the court representing their interest, but a court-appointed, caring adult that is independent from the justice system present in court when key decisions about the youth's future are made. While FLY led efforts to design the new model and deliver the services, the development and evaluation of the pilot was collectively managed through a CAFA Oversight Committee chaired by Judge Tondreau and staffed by representatives from juvenile justice systems partners as well as other community service providers. This committee met regularly to discuss the successes and challenges to the model, to remove systemic barriers to its success, and make adjustments as needed.

In 2015, when the state grant ended, the Probation Department stepped in to ensure the important work of the CAFA pilot would be sustained. Probation entered into an agreement with FLY to utilize the CAFA model to help reduce Disproportionate Minority Contact, particularly with youth in the Deferred Entry of Judgement (DEJ) program—a program that saw approximately two-thirds of its African American participants fail primarily due to technical violations connected to truancy or substance use.¹ Seeing early returns on the model's impact on the DEJ program for African American youth, the Probation Department renewed its contract with FLY to expand the model to Latinx youth in the DEJ program for 2016. The program served 25 African American youth in 2015/16 and will serve another 25 African American and Latinx youth in 2016/17.



The CAFA Model:

FLY's CAFA Program prides itself on being innovative, evidence based/informed, and responsive to community needs. We demonstrate this by blending evidence-based mentors (volunteers) with evidence-informed case management (staff), and leveraging our 15+ year track record for justice systems partnership and systems reform to develop a model that further leverages the collective power of Santa Clara County's systems leadership and commitment to community impact. In short, the CAFA model is a year-long program that provides support for persistently court-involved youth both in the community and in the court room through a combination of case management, mentoring, and court advocacy. Youth who complete the CAFA program not only successfully complete their probation or court conditions, they have a positive adult role model who supports them for life.

Evidence-based Mentoring: FLY grounds the CAFA Program in an evidence-based approach to mentoring that closely follows six principles outlined in MENTOR's *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*. This guides how we do 1) mentor/mentee recruitment, 2) mentor/mentee screening, 3) mentor training, 4) mentor/mentee matching, 5) monitoring and support of the relationship, and 6) closure of cases. CAFA mentors are asked to spend 2-3 hours per week with their mentees, with the first 12 months of the relationship monitored and supported by a FLY staff (a case manager). Mentors spend time one on one with their mentees and in group settings, participating in prosocial activities facilitated by FLY and at no cost to the mentor or mentee. Each month, FLY plans an event to help facilitate the relationship between the mentor and mentee by creating lasting memories. Examples of activities are: go-kart racing, white water rafting, and horse-back riding.

Evidence-informed Case Management: We enhance the model through the use of an evidence-informed case management approach. FLY uses *Critical Time Intervention (CTI)*, which is a case management model geared toward helping individuals transition out of institutions into the community. FLY uses this approach to help transition support from the FLY Case Manager and off probation to a positive adult role model in the community who serves as an advocate and friend, hopefully for life! All youth receive intensive case management at the beginning of the program before being matched with a mentor. Case managers assess for compatibility before facilitating a match between a youth and a volunteer. Once the match is made, the case managers support the relationship as it moves through three phases to ensure the bond established between the mentor and mentee is authentic and lasting. Once a case manager has determined that the relationship is solid independent of the case manager's role (and usually well after all court or probation conditions are met), the case manager closes the case and the mentor and mentee continue to enjoy a positive relationship. The combination of case management and mentoring ensures that youth receive academic, behavioral, probation, employment, and family support.

Court Advocacy: CAFA Mentors go through extended training to understand the juvenile justice system and develop skills around court advocacy. CAFA Mentors write court reports for mentee court dates, appear in court and sit alongside their mentees, and often speak on their mentee's behalf. This component is vital to ensuring that some of our community's most vulnerable youth receive support outside of the courtroom through mentoring and have an advocate inside of the courtroom who are able to offer a strength based perspective of the youth's successes and challenges in the community for the judge.



Cross-systems Collaborative Approach to Community Need:

The program continues to be developed under the supervision of a CAFA Oversight Committee made up of juvenile justice system and community partners. Juvenile Justice Court judges, representatives from the District Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office, the Alternate Defender's Office, the Independent Defender's Office, the Probation Department, as well as FLY leadership and other Community Based Organizations meets quarterly to evaluate the program's performance and discuss strategies to institutionalize findings into systems practice. This ensures that the program is used to be responsive to the community's needs.

The CAFA program's focus on African American youth was in response to community needs identified by the County's Juvenile Justice Systems Collaborative (JJSC). Over the past several years, Santa Clara County has had huge success in reducing juvenile arrest and incarceration. Despite this, we also know that disproportionality persists at every decision point for African American youth in our county. In 2013, African American youth made up 3% of the youth population in Santa Clara County and yet, they were 9% of youth arrests and 11% of our youth admitted to juvenile hall.ⁱⁱ

The Cases, Systems, and Process (CSP) Work Group (a committee of the JJSC) determined that one approach to addressing this racial disparity was to focus on one of the county's diversion programs, Deferred Entry of Judgement (DEJ). The DEJ Program in Santa Clara County is a program for first time felony offenders (with the exclusion of some types of charges). It is a year-long program geared toward helping youth get back on track. Youth who successfully complete the program will have their record sealed. Rates of failure for Latinx and African American youth from this program have historically been higher than their white counterparts. The CSP Work Group found that 63% of the failure rate for African American youth was due to technical probation violations (i.e. missing curfew, not going to school, testing positive for substances, not meeting with their probation officer) rather than due to committing new crimes.ⁱⁱⁱ In 2016, the CAFA program focused on both African American youth and Latinx youth in the DEJ program.

Early Results on Impact:

It is still early in the evaluation of CAFA's focus on DEJ youth of color, however preliminary results suggest the program is having a positive impact for justice involved African American youth. In 2015, the success rate for AA youth in the program improved to 60%, compared to 33% the previous year. While population numbers for DEJ are down, likely due to recent legislation, in 2016, the success rate of African American youth on DEJ was 100%. Within the past year, almost two thirds of the youth enrolled in CAFA jointly have completed probation and zero youth have failed DEJ. Among the remaining third, most are still enrolled are engaged and doing well in CAFA, and are on track to complete their DEJ or general probation.

Because FLY is interested in long-term impact, FLY measures its programs' effect on other indicators of long-term success. We analyze data that will give us more information around match quality, substance use, and developmental assets for youth who complete CAFA—all indicators of positive youth development and long-term success. At the end of the Mentor Program, a program in which CAFA has historically been a subset of, matches rate the quality of their relationship as being an average of 80%, meaning that the majority of mentor-mentee



matches exiting the program feel like that have a strong relationship. In addition, 82% of youth who were assessed as being high risk for substance abuse at the beginning of the program, reported a reduction in substance use by completion.

In the CAFA program, we are seeing even more of an impact in helping youth build developmental assets. While still early in the data analysis, we are seeing that youth are experiencing an average of 75% increase in asset building across eight domains. More specifically, CAFA is showing promising results with 100% of youth reporting an increase in support and positive values, while 80% of youth are demonstrating an increase in empowerment, boundaries/expectations, and commitment to learning. These exciting results relating to positive youth development along with system level advocacy make it no surprise that we see this manifest in young people successfully completing probation.

Case for Expansion:

FLY currently serves youth in three jurisdictions: Santa Clara County, San Mateo County, and Alameda County. In all three of these counties FLY has built strategic and strong partnerships with a variety of system stakeholders to create the most effective support networks for our youth. These partnerships, combined with FLY's innovative approach to implementing CAFA in a way that responds to community need places FLY in a high impact position.

More specifically, the CAFA program is unique in that its history is rooted within an equity framework and was designed to be responsive to community need. CAFA's focus on disproportionate minority contact means the program's strategies are crafted toward some of the most vulnerable youth in the Juvenile Justice System. Even when made available to a more broad range of youth, CAFA's strategies ensure that the most vulnerable do not get left behind.

Because of this history, CAFA is well positioned to expand into new jurisdictions and equipped to be responsive to the most vulnerable populations within the Juvenile Justice population. Along with continuing to be an effective intervention to reduce disproportionate minority contact, CAFA's dynamic approach is well suited for other youth who are touched by the Juvenile Justice System including Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC), girls, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) youth.

FLY is eager to engage in conversations around expansion of the program so that more young people have access to the support that will help them successfully complete probation through the development of a long term positive adult relationship.

For more information about FLY's CAFA Program, please contact: Cassidy Higgins, Director of Innovation and Growth, cassidy@flyprogram.org or 408-504-5705.

ⁱ2014 Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice System Annual Report, Page 32.

ⁱⁱ Strategic Plan for Cultural Competency and Family, Children, and Youth Development in Santa Clara County. Spring 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ JJC CSP Workgroup Presentation. March 2015.