

A RECLAIMING FUTURES  
NATIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

# Organizing for Outcomes

MEASURING THE EFFECTS OF RECLAIMING FUTURES IN FOUR COMMUNITIES

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Reclaiming Futures is a National Program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation®



**RECLAIMING FUTURES**

Communities helping teens  
overcome drugs, alcohol and crime

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# Executive Summary

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) Reclaiming Futures initiative was designed to increase positive outcomes for youth involved with drugs, alcohol and crime by shifting the efforts of the juvenile justice system and the substance abuse treatment system to incorporate strategies that are more community oriented, family focused, and closely coordinated. The Foundation launched Reclaiming Futures by awarding project grants to ten communities in 2002. In four of these communities, researchers tracked the efforts of local Reclaiming Futures projects as they worked to improve the effectiveness of interventions for young offenders. The four communities included Santa Cruz County in California, Cook County (Chicago) in Illinois, a multiple-jurisdiction project in the state of New Hampshire, and King County (Seattle), Washington.

The four local evaluation projects assessed the influence of Reclaiming Futures on the actual experiences of youth involved in the juvenile justice and substance abuse treatment systems. The studies examined whether youth received substance abuse screening and assessment more often and more quickly after the implementation of Reclaiming Futures. They asked whether youth participated more frequently in

treatment programs and received more support services as a result of Reclaiming Futures. Finally, they examined case processing and case referral patterns to determine whether Reclaiming Futures was associated with changes in youth behavior, as measured by recidivism, or the prevalence of new contacts with law enforcement and the courts.

Each Reclaiming Futures project pursued a unique reform strategy, depending on the circumstances of the community. Thus, the four local evaluations were not able to measure youth outcomes in exactly the same way and their findings cannot be compared directly. Their findings also vary greatly.

In general, however, the studies suggest that Reclaiming Futures had a real impact on intervention systems for justice-involved youth with substance abuse problems. The efforts undertaken by local communities as part of the Reclaiming Futures initiative appeared to change the day-to-day business of service delivery in ways that could produce better outcomes for youth. Whether these changes actually led to better outcomes, however, is a question that must be answered by more detailed studies with longer time frames.

# Introduction

The Reclaiming Futures initiative is an effort to reinvent how communities respond to young people involved with drugs, alcohol, and crime. The initiative began in 1999, when the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) approved more than \$20 million in grant funding for an effort to develop new community-based solutions to juvenile drug use and delinquency. In its early documentation of the initiative, the foundation described Reclaiming Futures as a “collaborative partnership between juvenile justice practitioners, treatment providers, and communities,” that would develop “comprehensive, integrated community systems of care for substance abusing youth.”

For more than a decade before the start of Reclaiming Futures, RWJF had sponsored projects to reduce substance abuse and improve the health and well-being of families and communities, particularly among vulnerable populations and high-risk groups. Reclaiming Futures was a logical extension of those efforts, designed to change the manner in which interventions are planned and implemented for youth involved with the juvenile justice system.

The five-year pilot phase of Reclaiming Futures (2002-2007) targeted the impact and effectiveness of community responses to drug-involved juvenile offenders in 10 locations:

- Anchorage, Alaska
- Santa Cruz County, California
- Cook County (Chicago), Illinois
- Southeastern Kentucky
- Marquette, Michigan
- State of New Hampshire
- Montgomery County (Dayton), Ohio
- Multnomah County (Portland), Oregon
- Sovereign Tribal Nation of Sicangu Lakota in Rosebud, South Dakota
- King County (Seattle), Washington

Each community worked to improve its methods for tracking drug-involved youthful offenders through its multiple services systems, including juvenile courts, probation, mental health assistance, and drug treatment. In addition, each community sought to create and expand the organizational networks that serve youthful offenders, to enhance their accountability, and to broaden and strengthen their leadership.

The ten Reclaiming Futures projects began by identifying policy and practice obstacles that were hindering the effectiveness of juvenile justice services. Next, they designed and implemented reforms that could address those obstacles. Each project team started out with a unique constellation of resources, challenges, and past experiences. As a result, their efforts varied greatly. Some communities worked to settle long-standing turf battles and to resolve fundamental policy conflicts that prevented effective agency coordination and service delivery. Others addressed administrative procedures and case management arrangements.

Each Reclaiming Futures community relied on systemic change to improve the coordination of juvenile justice and adolescent substance abuse treatment services. Their efforts were guided by the Reclaiming Futures Model, a relatively simple, six-step, performance management model developed by the Reclaiming Futures National Program Office in collaboration with the Reclaiming Futures national evaluation team (for more information, see <http://www.reclaimingfutures.org>).

The national evaluation of Reclaiming Futures suggested that the ten communities were generally successful in their efforts to implement meaningful system change. The study was based at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C., but included collaborating researchers from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. The evaluation team measured system change in each community by

conducting biannual surveys that tracked how and whether the processes, policies, and leadership dynamics inspired by Reclaiming Futures led to perceived improvements in juvenile justice and drug treatment programs. The findings of the study showed significant improvements in the ten project sites.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to funding the national evaluation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded evaluations in several local communities. This report describes the key findings from four such projects: Santa Cruz County in California, Cook County (Chicago) in Illinois, a multiple-jurisdiction project in the state of New Hampshire, and King County (Seattle), Washington. A fifth project, located in Southeastern Kentucky, was unable to collect sufficient data from the many state and local agencies involved in its Reclaiming Futures initiative to produce meaningful findings and its results are not presented here.

Each of the four studies described in this report measured the extent of system changes that occurred after the launch of Reclaiming Futures. Next, they tracked the impact of those system changes on case processing and service delivery, and compared outcomes for youth affected by Reclaiming Futures with outcomes for youth not affected by the initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> See Butts, J. A., & Roman, J. (2007). *Changing systems: Outcomes from the RWJF initiative on juvenile justice and substance abuse*. Portland, OR: Reclaiming Futures, Portland State University.

The local evaluation studies had to adjust their goals and methods to fit the unique configuration of their own initiatives. They also had to accommodate their plans for data collection and measurement to the information that was already available from local agencies. As a result, the designs of the studies varied considerably. Each team, however, compared case processing patterns for youth affected by Reclaiming Futures with patterns for similar youth not affected by Reclaiming Futures. In most cases, the evaluators relied on a pre-post comparison design in which delinquent youth handled by the juvenile justice system prior to Reclaiming Futures served as a comparison group.

In the following sections of this report, the researchers who conducted the four local evaluations of Reclaiming Futures describe the methods they used and the conclusions they reached in their respective jurisdictions. When their findings are considered as a whole, it appears that Reclaiming Futures affected service delivery patterns in ways that should lead to improved outcomes for youth. Even in jurisdictions where youth recidivism did not change in the short-term, the initiative appeared to be increasing the efficiency and thoroughness of the juvenile justice and substance abuse treatment process.

## New Hampshire

The mission of Reclaiming Futures in the state of New Hampshire was to integrate the Reclaiming Futures model into existing juvenile drug court programs. One of the main challenges was to standardize the implementation of the Reclaiming Futures six-step model across independent court districts with varying resource levels and differing workplace cultures. In each New Hampshire district, the courts and the juvenile justice agencies operate somewhat independently, with neither having total authority over the other, which creates barriers to collaborative efforts between organizations. Reclaiming Futures helped these agencies to overcome many barriers, but the interorganizational emphasis of the Reclaiming Futures model was a constant challenge.

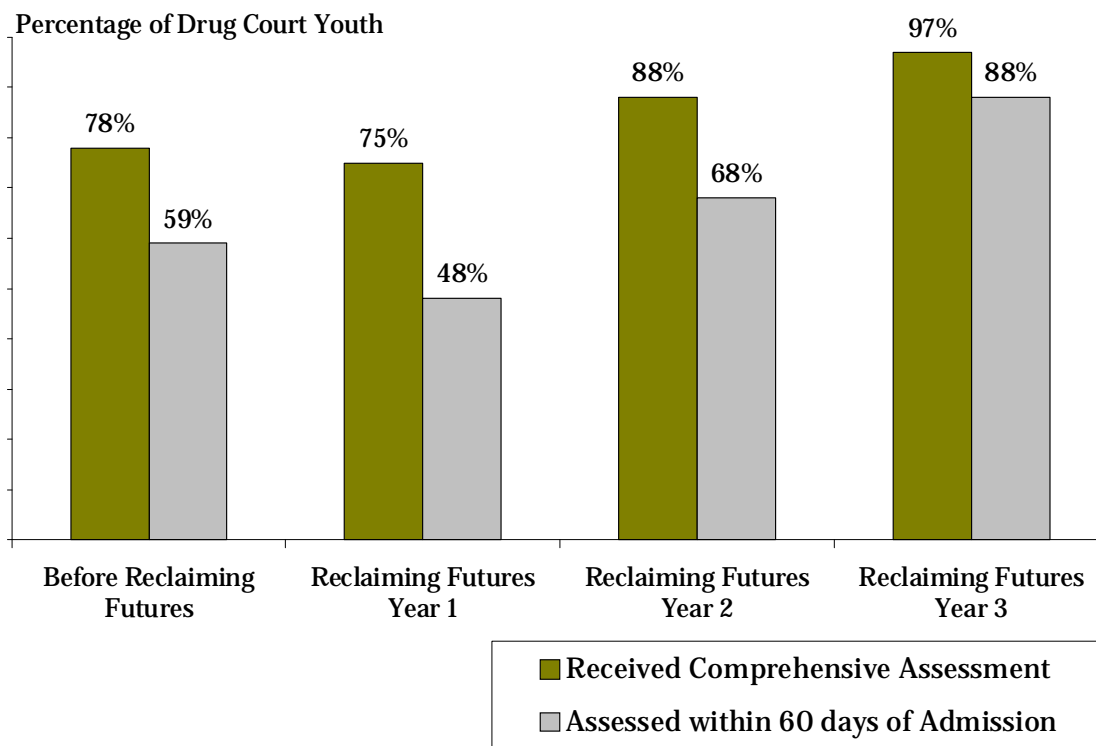
Before Reclaiming Futures began, juvenile drug courts in New Hampshire had no written guidelines or standards and no way to aggregate or share information about program operations. There were no consistent methods for tracking youth progress, either for individual youth or for the program as a whole. One drug court case manager was responsible for the clinical supervision of all programs. Reclaiming Futures devoted considerable resources to remedying these shortcomings by

focusing on improvements to administrative structures. The tools Reclaiming Futures put into place—including the development of a drug court manual, the institution of a data-driven case management system, and the provision of a central administrative staff—helped to implement and sustain the drug court model in the original four courts and to expand it in three other jurisdictions.

These tools also supported the Reclaiming Futures coordinated treatment approach by helping to guide drug court staff in program operations and by providing better program oversight. Furthermore, the data-driven management system was helpful in individual case coordination and ongoing program evaluation. With the implementation of the Reclaiming Futures model, drug court staff could more easily track a youth's individual progress and create reports to track the overall performance of a drug court program. Through administrative improvements, drug courts were better able to coordinate their services for youth, including comprehensive substance abuse evaluations. The number of youth receiving timely, comprehensive assessments for alcohol and drug issues also improved over the course of Reclaiming Futures (Figure 1).



**Figure 1—Administration and timing of assessments**



**FINDINGS**

Reclaiming Futures had considerable effects on substance abuse treatment across the state. The project’s success in introducing the Global Assessment of Individual Needs (or GAIN) enhanced the use of comprehensive, evidence-based assessments by providers. The GAIN measures the timing, scope, and frequency of problems related to substance use and other health factors, which allows treatment providers to match each youth with appropriate services. Reclaiming Futures worked with a statewide adolescent treatment improvement project to require all

affiliated providers to use the GAIN, thereby expanding its application to a broader group of youth. Most important, Reclaiming Futures was instrumental in having the GAIN approved as a reimbursable service for Medicaid-covered youth in New Hampshire. By the third year of the initiative, nearly half (45 percent) of youth in Reclaiming Futures were assessed with the GAIN.

Reclaiming Futures fostered open and regular communication between courts and the larger juvenile justice system. Through the Reclaiming Futures advisory board, court staff and

probation workers gained an open forum in which to discuss issues of substance use among youth and to address practice issues collaboratively. One of the greatest outcomes of this effort was the implementation of targeted screening for youth across all districts in New Hampshire. Prior to Reclaiming Futures, New Hampshire's juvenile justice system had no standardized procedure for determining whether youth entering the court system were affected by substance abuse problems or if they were in need of treatment. Admission criteria for drug court were based largely on the opinions of the juvenile probation staff and the presiding judge. Reclaiming Futures succeeded in bringing courts and juvenile justice agencies together to create a standardized screening process.

### **New Hampshire's Reclaiming Futures project succeeded in bringing courts and juvenile justice agencies together to create a standardized clinical screening process for youth.**

After the implementation of Reclaiming Futures, out-of-home placements declined, and more drug court youth were supervised and/or treated in community settings. The proportion of drug court youth placed in secure confinement decreased by almost a third, from a high of 73 percent in the first year of Reclaiming Futures to 42 percent by the third. There was also a reduction in the use of residential

treatment—from 27 percent in Year 1 to 6 percent in Year 3. Alternatives to secure detention were better integrated into drug court practices. A more elaborate admission process identified the youth most likely to benefit from the program, staff received training on substance use issues with youth, and the introduction of graduated sanctions helped to reduce the use out-of-home placement and secure confinement.

To increase opportunities for youth to engage with their own communities, Reclaiming Futures built a network of volunteer groups to develop activities for youth. By Years 3 and 4 of Reclaiming Futures, 92 percent of drug court youth were involved in some type of prosocial activity and/or employment at some time during the program. Twenty-three percent of youth participated in an activity or worked every week during the program, and 86 percent of youth participated in at least one prosocial activity during their time in drug court. On average, youth participated in one prosocial activity every two weeks. Moreover, 64 percent of youth were employed for at least some time during the program. Reclaiming Futures worked closely with local treatment teams to include activities based on a youth's interests and strengths as a routine part of treatment plans.

Connecting youth with vocational or prosocial activities that reflect their interests remains a challenge for drug court staff and probation. Probation workers continue to rely on the help of outside agencies to connect youth with

**Table 1– Drug court outcomes**

	New Hampshire Court District			
	Concord	Laconia	Nashua	Plymouth
Percentage of cases with a drug charge within one year of program admission	65%	44%	28%	68%
Percentage of cases with a new drug charge during program	18%	20%	17%	18%
Percentage of cases with a new drug charge within the first year after drug court program	40%	35%	50%	24%
Percentage of cases in which youth is placed in secure confinement	58%	53%	76%	36%
Percentage of youth graduated from drug court program	48%	38%	54%	73%

prosocial activities, since, as State employees, they are unable to solicit donations. The efforts of Reclaiming Futures community liaisons were critical to overcoming this barrier, but funding for these positions was not guaranteed to continue after the pilot phase.

One of the biggest struggles faced by Reclaiming Futures and the drug courts was the standardization of programs across different jurisdictions. Even with the development of new drug court operations manuals, each jurisdiction in the initiative was strongly influenced by the decisions of its local judges, particularly regarding admissions, graduations, and the use of secure confinement as a sanction for program violations.

The characteristics of drug court youth varied considerably from one

jurisdiction to the next. For example, Plymouth had a higher percentage of youth entering drug court with a drug charge as opposed to other offenses (Table 1). The Plymouth court also had the fewest youth placed in secure confinement, and, after one year out of the program, these same youth had the lowest drug charge recidivism of all drug courts. The opposite pattern was observed in Nashua, which had the lowest proportion of youth with drug charges upon entering drug court. One year after beginning the program, Nashua youth had the highest recidivism rate. Moreover, Nashua had the highest percentage of youth placed in secure facilities. The other two jurisdictions involved in the initiative exhibited more modest use of secure placement and had similar reductions in drug charge recidivism compared with one year before entering drug court.

## DISCUSSION

The jurisdictional differences seen in Reclaiming Futures New Hampshire raise several important issues. First, the role of the judge is often cited as an important determinant of a youth's success in drug court, as the judge is the final decision maker in ordering what services a drug court youth will receive. Second, the differences in drug charge recidivism raise questions about the necessity of secure placement in a drug court program and its impact on rehabilitation. And, third, these differences highlight the importance of admission criteria, as drug courts function best when they admit only youth who are likely to benefit from the intensive supervision and services of the program.

Despite the successful efforts of Reclaiming Futures to create consistency across jurisdictions, fidelity to the program model remains a challenge. It is important, however, to note the 31 percent reduction in the use of secure confinement over the course of Reclaiming Futures as well as other program improvements, such as the introduction of the GAIN and more targeted screening for all youth in the juvenile justice system.

Reclaiming Future's introduction of targeted screening and evidence-based practices could have a broad impact on the provision of substance use and mental health treatment for all youth across the state. Many of the changes inspired by Reclaiming Futures, however, such as fostering open communication between State agencies, community partners, and treatment providers; administrative supports and clinical management for the drug courts; and community outreach, may be difficult to sustain without continued commitment and resources. Leadership and staff from justice and treatment agencies agree that centralized management and designated case coordinators are critical to the success of the drug court model. In the absence of resources, the demonstrated advantages of the model could easily deteriorate.

## Cook County (Chicago), Illinois

Prior to the implementation of Reclaiming Futures in Cook County, screening for substance abuse treatment among juvenile offenders was neither systematic nor standardized.

Identification of treatment needs was at the discretion of probation officers, who relied upon information obtained during presentencing investigations or upon direct observations of youth during probation. Youth suspected of having substance use problems would then be referred to Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities for full assessments that may have included drug testing. This service model meant that the need for treatment could go undetected for long periods of time. No formal mechanism existed for coordinating the efforts of drug treatment providers and probation officers in planning or delivering treatment. No routines were established for treatment providers and probation staff to meet jointly with family members to develop treatment plans or to monitor a youth's progress.

The Reclaiming Futures project in Cook County sought to change these systemwide service gaps for youth adjudicated in the community of North Lawndale. North Lawndale, located on Chicago's west side, was selected as the target community because of its historically high crime rates, particularly

drug trafficking and gang activity, and the prevalence of drug use among its juvenile probationers relative to other Chicago communities. Selecting this impoverished and crime-ridden community provided an especially stringent test of the Reclaiming Futures model in Cook County.

As part of Reclaiming Futures in Cook County, all young offenders in North Lawndale were to be screened for substance abuse problems as soon as possible (typically on the same day) after being adjudicated and placed on probation. The screening process relied on a standardized tool. Initially, this was the Global Appraisal of Individual Needs—Quick (or GAIN—Q), but Cook County officials later opted for the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI) because it allows for standardized screening of co-occurring mental health conditions.

Every youth who screened positive for a substance use problem was to be given a follow-up appointment for a full assessment with a treatment provider in the North Lawndale community. Youth who kept their assessment appointment and who evidenced substance use problems were admitted to the treatment program. The regimen for youth in Reclaiming Futures was

enhanced through the inclusion of “evidence-based practices,” such as Multi-Systemic Therapy. For youth at high risk for continued drug use and delinquency, the Reclaiming Futures process included “coordinated care plans” involving a treatment provider and a probation officer, along with the youth and family members. Coordinated care meetings were held to plan each youth’s course of treatment and to integrate the criminal justice process and support services for the family.

#### **STUDY APPROACH**

The evaluation of Reclaiming Futures in Cook County examined these revisions to the case handling process as well as changes in probation outcomes that could be attributed to Reclaiming Futures. The study’s main goal was to determine if youth were indeed being screened shortly after adjudication and referred to treatment on the basis of the screening results and to track their progress through assessment, treatment initiation, engagement (i.e., attending at least three treatment sessions), and discharge from treatment. Researchers collected process-related data on all youth from North Lawndale who were adjudicated to probation between November 2003 and March 2007.

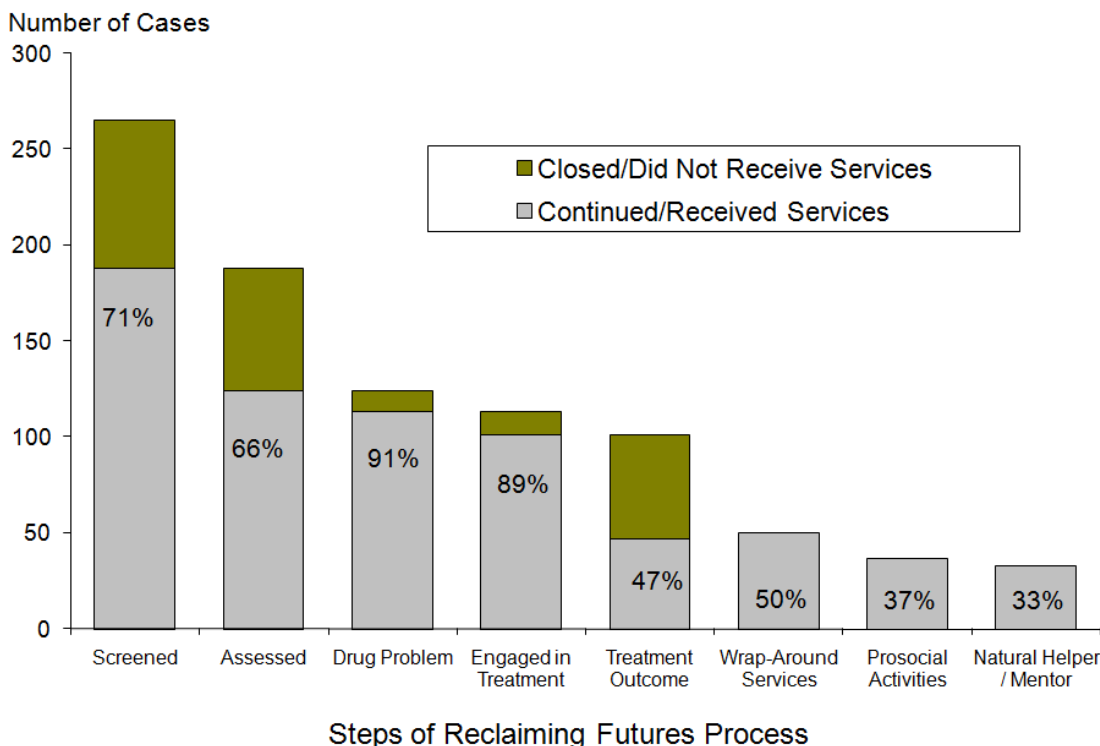
More than 260 youth were screened by juvenile probation during the study period, with 71 percent screening positive for substance abuse and being referred to local providers for fuller assessments (Figure 2). The mean time that elapsed between adjudication and screening was 16 days, with 78 percent

of all youth being screened within one week. Screening times improved during the project. By the end of the evaluation period, the average time between adjudication and screening decreased to 10 days. Of all youth referred for full assessments, 66 percent kept the assessment appointment. About nine in 10 of these assessments indicated that the youth had a substance abuse problem that required treatment. Of youth referred to treatment, about 90 percent became sufficiently engaged in treatment, with 47 percent either completing treatment successfully or continuing in treatment at the end of data collection. Substantial proportions of the Reclaiming Futures youth who became engaged in treatment received other services as well, such as wraparound conferences (50 percent), prosocial activities (37 percent), and mentoring (33 percent).

Using data from the automated data systems of Cook County, the evaluation compared youth services and outcomes for three subsamples of juvenile probationers:

- Pre-Reclaiming Futures, or North Lawndale youth adjudicated to probation in the three years prior to the launch of the Reclaiming Futures project (N = 67)
- Early Reclaiming Futures, or youth adjudicated in the first 18 months of the project (N = 66)
- Later Reclaiming Futures, or youth adjudicated in the second 18 months of the project (N = 55)

**Figure 2—Cook County Reclaiming Futures process steps and client flow rates**



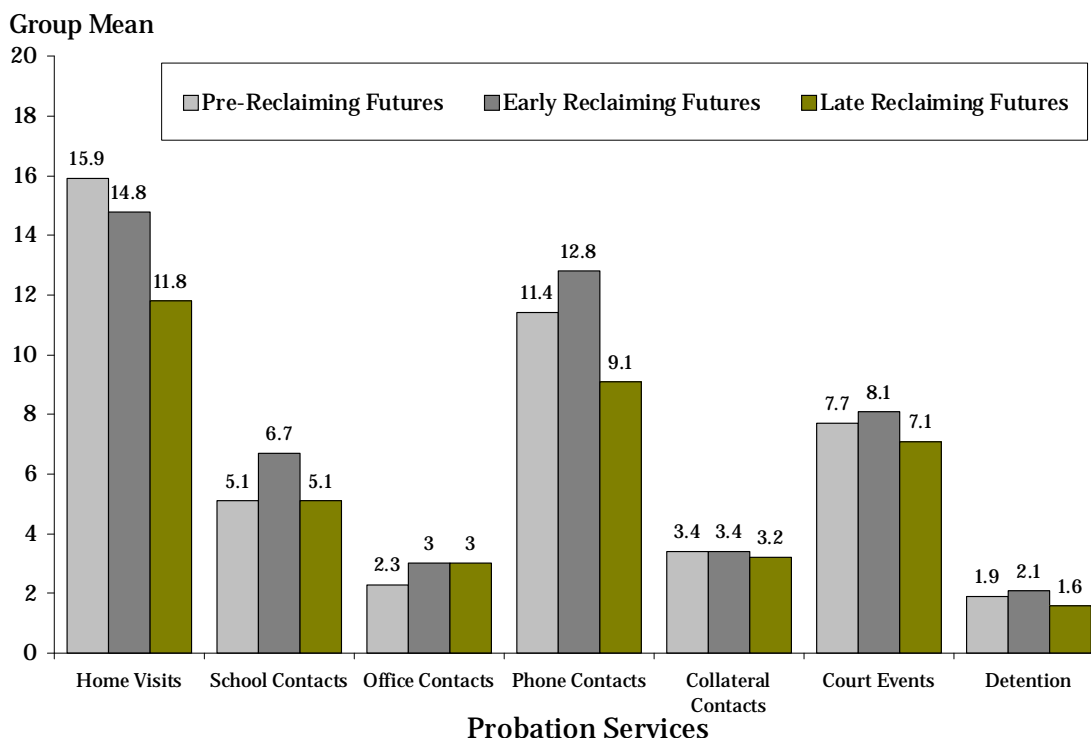
Note:

Data on process steps were obtained from the Cook County Juvenile Probation Department records and from the community treatment providers serving North Lawndale youth over the course of the Reclaiming Futures project. Data shown are for all North Lawndale cases (N = 265) adjudicated to probation between November 2003 and April 2007. The percentages shown for assessment through treatment outcome are conditional and based on the number of cases completing the preceding step. For instance, the percentage assessed is based on the number of cases (71% of 265) that screened positive for a substance use problem and who completed an assessment. The percentage shown for number screened is unconditional and reflects solely the number who screened positive for a substance abuse problem. The percentages for wraparound services, prosocial activities, and natural helpers or mentors are based on the number of cases that became engaged in treatment.

The probation service measurements are considered proximal outcomes in the study, as the enhanced detection and treatment of drug abuse among North Lawndale youth at the front end of the justice process is expected to influence

events later in the process. Other outcomes are considered distal in the sense that processing enhancements across the full juvenile justice spectrum are expected to result in a greater likelihood of probation completion and

**Figure 3—Mean number of probation services by Reclaiming Futures cohort and service type**



**Note:**

Data on sentencing and services were obtained from the Cook County probation family folders. All numbers, except those for detention, reflect the mean number of contacts for cases discharged from Cook County probation over the study period. The numbers for detention reflect the average number of months the youth spent any time in the detention center. Pre-Reclaiming Futures cases (N = 61) were sentenced to probation between January 2002 and October 2003; early Reclaiming Futures cases (N=55) between November 2003 and March 2005; and late Reclaiming Futures cases (N = 41) between April 2005 and February 2007. No differences reached statistical significance.

lower rates of rearrest. The researchers hypothesized that Pre-Reclaiming Futures cases would have the lowest probation service rates and poorest outcomes and that youth seen in the last 18 months of Reclaiming Futures would have the highest service rates and best outcomes. Youth entering the probation system at the start of Reclaiming

Futures were expected to have intermediate service levels and moderately improved outcomes.

**FINDINGS**

The analysis indicates mixed results (Figure 3). The data do not indicate any clear trends over time for probation service contacts or for time spent in the



juvenile temporary detention center. None of the differences were statistically significant. Although the group sizes were small and statistical power low, none of the differences revealed by the analysis were very large in absolute terms, suggesting that even if the sample sizes had been larger and the differences reached statistical significance, any effects would not likely have been clinically meaningful.

Of course, the services data shown in Figure 3 do not include visits with youth (and parents) that took place at treatment provider facilities. It is possible that the trend toward reduced probation contacts is a result of better coordination of services between probation and providers, reducing the need for duplicative service contacts.

As with the services data, there were no statistically significant differences in outcomes (Figure 4). The lower rate of sentencing to adult correctional facilities among later Reclaiming Futures youth, however, did approach significance ( $\chi^2 = 4.7, p = .09$ ). Several multivariate models were used to test the relationships between study cohort and rearrest rates controlling for age, prior arrests, and the likelihood of a drug problem (as indicated by two or more drug-related arrests). The multivariate models were generally consistent with the bivariate analysis: No statistically significant effects appeared among the three cohorts. The multivariate models, however, did reveal that, across the study groups, youth with drug problems and a higher number of prior arrests

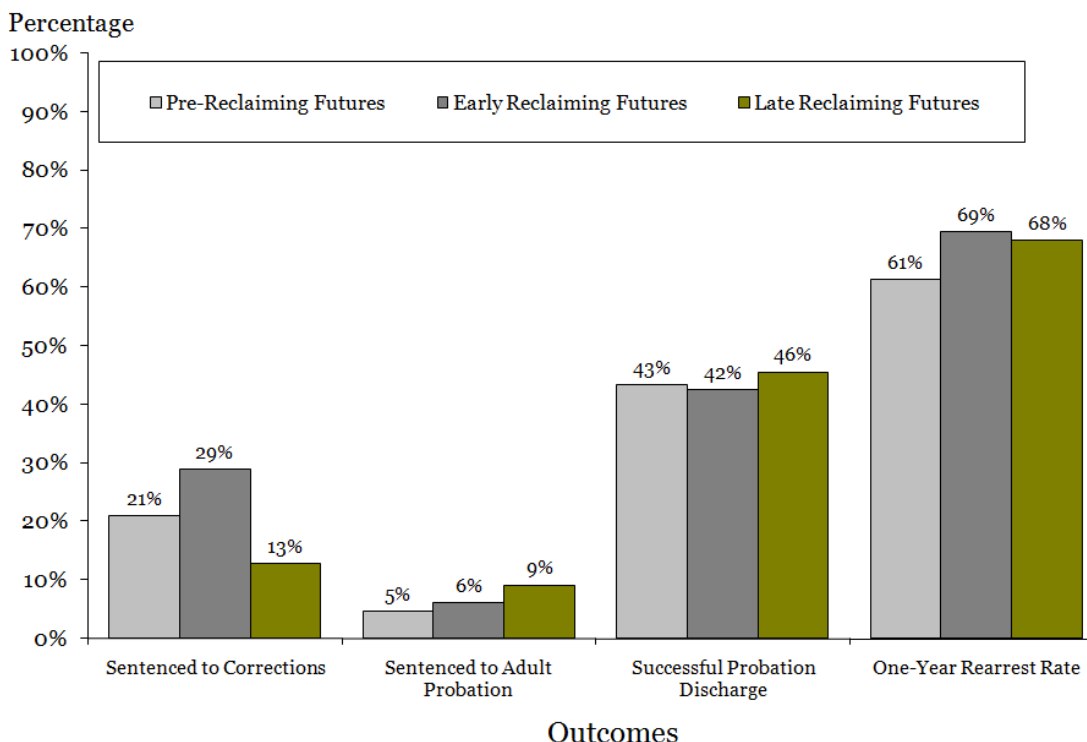
were more likely to be rearrested, and to be rearrested sooner than youth without drug problems.

The researchers hoped to include a measure of drug treatment dose in these analytic models but were unable to obtain drug treatment data from the Illinois Department of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse. Hence, it is possible that controlling for treatment participation may have yielded differences among the comparison groups.

**Reclaiming Futures achieved many of its implementation goals, but it did not appear to affect probation outcomes, rearrest rates, or the number of youth contacts with probation officers.**

These findings reveal a complex picture. On the one hand, it is clear that Reclaiming Futures achieved many of its implementation goals. The analysis shows stronger system performance with respect to the rapid screening of youth for substance abuse problems, the consistent use of structured screening tools, improved coordination between probation and drug treatment providers, and the provision of evidence-based drug treatment services to youth in the targeted community. Moreover, many youth who engaged in treatment received ancillary services such as coordinated care plan conferences, engagement in prosocial activities, and

**Figure 4—Probation and rearrest outcomes by Reclaiming Futures cohort**



Note:

Data on sentencing and probation discharge status were obtained from the Cook County probation family folders. Arrest data were obtained from the Chicago Police Department's electronic arrest history files. One-year rearrest rates were calculated relative to the date on which the youth was sentenced to probation and the date of the following first arrest, whether for a new violation and excluding technical and traffic violations. Pre-Reclaiming Futures cases (N = 67) were sentenced to probation between January 2002 and October 2003; early Reclaiming Futures cases (N=66) between November 2003 and March 2005; and late Reclaiming Futures cases (N = 56) between April 2005 and February 2007. No differences shown in the figure reached statistical significance.

mentoring. Provision of these services was far less standard before Reclaiming Futures.

On the other hand, for reasons that cannot be determined directly from the data, the system improvements associated with the implementation of Reclaiming Futures did not appear to

affect probation outcomes, rearrest rates, or the number of youth contacts with probation officers.

This could be due to the fact that there are many other interceding and mediating factors that affect probation youth in North Lawndale (or any other impoverished and crime-ridden

community). These factors include pervasive and often negative familial and community contexts. For most Reclaiming Futures youth, treatment occurred on an outpatient basis and only intermittently. The majority of each youth's time was spent at home and in the community of North Lawndale, which is especially affected by the absence of male father figures owing to some of the highest incarceration rates in Illinois, insufficient parental supervision, and family instability. Gangs also exert a strong influence on North Lawndale and on youth growing up in the neighborhood.

These contextual factors are important, and the researchers suspect that they may have had a profound and countervailing effect on youth that could offset any detectible positive effects attributable to Reclaiming Futures. Based on this conjecture, the evaluators would recommend that consideration be given to expanding the Reclaiming Futures model beyond treatment coordination and service provision to include ways of moderating the impacts of the community, family, and peer context on youth. More intensive treatments, such as residential care, may even be necessary for those youth who are the most drug involved and most likely to recidivate.

## DISCUSSION

The Reclaiming Futures project had a profound impact on the organization of probation services in Cook County. The Juvenile Probation Department expanded standardized screening, using the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument-2 (MAYSI-2) for substance use and mental health services to all adjudicated Chicago cases, with further expansions planned. Officials also implemented standardized screening for diverted youth (i.e., youth not formally petitioned into court). Probation personnel were required to refer youth for immediate assessments based on the results of their MAYSI-2 screenings. Reclaiming Futures inspired new quarterly meetings between the court and substance abuse and mental health providers to discuss service coordination and to address existing service gaps. It also increased the frequency and strength of interactions among the agencies that provide substance abuse and mental health services throughout Cook County. To foster these relationships and to develop stronger referral networks, probation officers were given lists of local service providers from a "living database" that is actively maintained by the County. Although this database was already in existence, it was not a resource available for direct use by probation officers. In addition to using the information for referrals, probation officers now also share information on new and existing providers to keep the database as current as possible.

Finally, Reclaiming Futures increased the community's recognition of the

importance of providing evidence-based practices on a broader scale. The project supported provider trainings on Motivational Enhancement Therapy/Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Family Systems Therapy. Two large treatment agencies, Youth Outreach Services and Omni Youth Services, implemented the evidenced-based treatment model Seven Challenges. The two agencies also developed a partnership for sharing resources to improve services to probation youth. Working together, the agencies will ensure the sustainability of the model by training staff to become leaders/trainers who can then train staff at either agency.

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CHAPTER FOUR

## Santa Cruz County, California

The Reclaiming Futures Santa Cruz County initiative sought to make significant changes in the service delivery system for justice-involved youth with drug and alcohol problems. The initiative focused on young people at highest risk for problematic outcomes, including imminent out-of-home placement. If successfully implemented, the changes pursued by Reclaiming Futures would fully integrate alcohol and drug treatment services in the juvenile justice system and would result in improved outcomes for youth and families. The goal was to provide more treatment and better treatment, and to move beyond treatment to reconnect and strengthen youth and families within their communities, so that they might overcome alcohol, drugs, and crime.

In Santa Cruz, many young people have problems with drugs and alcohol. Seventy-one percent of high school juniors report using alcohol. In 2002, 1,700 teens abused or were dependent on drugs. A 1998 survey of incarcerated teens in Santa Cruz County found that 44 percent used marijuana daily, and 17 percent used heroin daily. Yet only 30 percent of these young people received treatment.

### STUDY APPROACH

The evaluation of Reclaiming Futures in Santa Cruz County focused on several indicators of systemic change. The design relied on two groups of youth for comparative purposes:

(1) Reclaiming Futures youth—142 delinquent youth who became involved with juvenile probation and related service providers after the 2003 implementation of Reclaiming Futures in Santa Cruz

(2) Pre-Reclaiming Futures youth—141 young offenders whose cases were reviewed by the County's placement screening committee prior to 2003

Youth reviewed by the Santa Cruz County placement screening committee were a suitable population from which to select comparison cases because the process used by the screening committee before 2003 was similar to the process used after 2003 to identify youth who were appropriate for Reclaiming Futures.

The researchers anticipated that these two groups of youth would be similar with regard to socio-demographic characteristics, severity of criminal activity, and need for mental health and substance use services.

Youth who received services after initiation into Reclaiming Futures were compared with youth who received services prior to the County's participation in Reclaiming Futures. Since system changes are likely to evolve over time, the study also examined differences between youth cohorts who entered services before and after 2003.

Detailed case processing data were obtained from the information systems of juvenile court, probation, and drug treatment agencies. The key data elements included the following:

- Justice events, including detailed tracking of intake, initiation of probation, appointments kept, appointments missed, initiation into and release from residential care and detention, and other details regarding each justice event
- Court events, including hearings, adjudications, dispositions, case reviews, referrals, dismissals, placement status, wardship status, and offenses or charges taken from the police report, the original petition, and any petitions sustained in court
- Mental health and substance abuse services utilization, including diagnosis, type of service, service location, date of service, and the total number of minutes of service provided
- Screening and assessment information for youth in the Reclaiming Futures group recorded at intake and follow-ups using the Global Assessment of Individual Needs (GAIN)

The probation data were abstracted by hand from computer screens and printouts. The mental health and substance abuse data were obtained directly from electronic data systems. The GAIN was administered by clinical staff trained and certified in its use. The research team at the University of California, San Francisco, was blind to identifying information, so unique identifiers were maintained by Santa Cruz staff. The unique identifiers permitted case matching at the individual level for all data sets.

The resulting data sets include more than 120,000 unique records of mental health and substance abuse service events for 283 study youth (141 in the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group and 142 in the Reclaiming Futures group). The court processing and justice agency events generated more than 5,000 unique records for the 283 youth. The GAIN was collected on 110 of the 142 post-Reclaiming Futures youth.

#### **FINDINGS**

The hypothesis behind the selection of indicators and analyses in this report was that changing and evolving services at the systemic level would have a direct impact on subsequent case events and youth outcomes. Altering referral practices for youth on probation and providing community-based mental health and substance abuse services in lieu of incarceration or placement might result in less involvement with the probation system but might not have a direct impact on mental health-related symptoms.

Though system change may ideally create a wide range of positive youth outcomes, the perspective taken in this study was that obtaining positive results on system-focused indicators is sufficiently challenging to merit analysis. The results presented here are seen as the most direct and essential measures of whether Santa Cruz County achieved the goals of Reclaiming Futures.

The following analysis includes results from the probation and mental health/substance abuse data sets. The first set of results provides information on the characteristics of the two study groups to confirm that they were comparable with regard to basic demographics. The second set of results addresses how mental health and substance abuse services evolved during the implementation of Reclaiming Futures. The final set of results addresses the involvement of youth in probation and court services as well as ways in which their involvement changed during Reclaiming Futures.

*Study Samples*

Researchers collected all available probation records and service utilization records for every youth in the study, regardless of the age at which the youth became involved in the services system or how long his or her involvement lasted. In other words, data collection covered each youth’s entire juvenile justice “career.”

**Table 2– Study sample**

	Santa Cruz Study Group	
	Pre-Reclaiming Futures	Reclaiming Futures
Mean Age (first court contact)	15.3	15.5
Percentage Male	79%	78%
Percentage Latino	55%	55%
Percentage Anglo	34%	41%

The Reclaiming Futures group consisted of all youth screened during the Reclaiming Futures initiative. The Pre-Reclaiming Futures group consisted of all youth sent to the County’s placement screening committee prior to 2003. The group was created by enrolling youth from 2002 and earlier, moving back in time approximately three years, until a matched sample of 141 youth was identified.

The two study groups were nearly identical with regard to basic demographic characteristics (Table 2). Both groups included significant numbers of Latino youth, and youth in both groups were relatively young at the time of their first involvement with probation services. Additional similarities between the groups will become evident in the analysis of service utilization patterns.

### *Service Utilization*

To measure the utilization of mental health and substance abuse services by study youth, the researchers assembled data on individual service contacts, service type, service location, and program as well as the date and time of service. There were many ways to organize these data, but the study focused on two forms of analysis: (1) “contact level,” in which the individual event records themselves served as the basic unit of analysis and (2) “individual level,” in which all of the records associated with one youth were aggregated to create service indicators for that youth alone. Each level of analysis provides an important but different perspective on the patterns of service utilization by study youth.

The basic test of system change in this analysis is whether service utilization appeared to increase among Reclaiming Futures youth compared with youth prior to Reclaiming Futures. An increase in community-based substance abuse and mental health services was presumed to be necessary for youth to avoid becoming more deeply involved with the justice system. Though many indicators were possible, the study used two measures to reflect the actual amount of service utilization:

- The sheer number of contacts or data records reflected service intensity or, more precisely, frequency. The more records, the more frequent the contact with youth, although the amount of actual contact might vary by type of service.
- Staff time reflected the total quantity of services provided. This is different from contacts or records, since an individual contact could involve limited quantity (e.g., a 15-minute medication visit) or more extensive quantity (e.g., day treatment). Staff time could include co-staff time, in which someone worked in collaboration with the primary staff person (e.g., two therapists running a group session).

The results of this analysis revealed that youth in the Reclaiming Futures group had more contacts. Reclaiming Futures youth had almost 20,000 more contacts than youth in the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group (69,838 and 48,832 records, respectively). The number of contacts included lifetime service contacts for each group. Thus, contacts prior to initiation in either the Pre-Reclaiming Futures or Reclaiming Futures group are included (Table 3).

The Reclaiming Futures group maintained a high level of service contacts from 2003 through 2006, a total of four years of service use with more than 10,000 contacts per year. This was not true of the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group, which had more than 10,000 contacts annually for only two years (2001 and 2002). Youth in Reclaiming Futures received considerably more total service contacts at the older age levels, especially ages 16 and 17, compared with youth who were not in Reclaiming Futures.

A more detailed analysis by type of service suggests that the services provided changed due to the addition of



**Table 3– Lifetime service records by year**

		Santa Cruz Study Group		
		Pre-Reclaiming Futures	Reclaiming Futures	Total
1995		202	17	219
1996		854	25	879
1997		1,038	132	1,170
1998		1,436	764	2,200
1999		2,378	834	3,212
2000		5,985	1,233	7,218
2001		11,722	2,067	13,789
2002		12,319	5,983	18,302
2003	Reclaiming Futures begins	6,278	13,251	19,529
2004		3,359	15,075	18,434
2005		2,106	16,706	18,812
2006		<u>1,199</u>	<u>13,747</u>	<u>14,946</u>
Total		48,832	69,838	118,720

new programs and service options after the launch of Reclaiming Futures. Researchers examined these results in more detail to determine if the pattern could be due to differences in timing between the two groups—i.e., perhaps more comparison youth “aged out” of services. This did not appear to be the case. Regardless of timing, the youth in the Reclaiming Futures group received more mental health and substance abuse contacts than did youth in the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group (Table 4).

Next, the researchers aggregated all of the mental health utilization data to create analyses at the individual level. Service contacts were combined to create a total record count for each youth. As expected, youth in the

Reclaiming Futures group had more lifetime contacts on average (491), compared with youth in the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group (351). The number of annual contacts was also higher for youth in the Reclaiming Futures group (200) than for youth not in Reclaiming Futures (140).

The number of service contacts was roughly the same between groups until age 14, when the Reclaiming Futures group had close to 100 more contacts than the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group (Table 5). Youth in Reclaiming Futures had considerably more contacts with mental health and substance abuse services than did youth who were not in Reclaiming Futures during the critical age range of 14 to 17 (Figure 5).

**Table 4– Total contact counts by age**

Age	Santa Cruz Study Group		Total
	Pre-Reclaiming Futures	Reclaiming Futures	
7	2	4	6
8	14	111	125
9	56	406	462
10	121	391	512
11	238	453	691
12	1,344	1,158	2,502
13	2,507	2,496	5,003
14	2,857	4,803	7,660
15	7,598	10,759	18,357
16	12,051	19,461	31,512
17	13,761	19,585	33,346
18	4,901	9,600	14,501
19	1,280	464	1,744
20	1,216	130	1,346
21	743	17	760
22	183	0	183
23	<u>10</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>10</u>
Total	48,882	69,838	118,720

In addition to the number of service contacts, the study calculated the total hours of services received by youth over the course of their time in the system. The average number of hours was higher for youth in the Reclaiming Futures group when compared with youth in the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group (1,303 versus 1,114 hours). The Reclaiming Futures group had nearly 200 more hours of mental health and substance abuse services on average than did the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group.

The Reclaiming Futures initiative sought to increase youth contacts with mental health and substance abuse treatment providers, but it was designed also to reduce youth involvement with the justice system. The next step in the analysis, therefore, was to compare justice system contacts for Pre-Reclaiming Futures youth and Reclaiming Futures youth.

This analysis relied on the total number of event records in the court data set for an overall indicator of a youth's involvement with probation and justice

**Table 5— Average lifetime service contacts by age**

Age	Santa Cruz Study Group		
	Pre-Reclaiming Futures	Reclaiming Futures	Percent Change
13	531	570	+7%
14	366	537	+47%
15	406	510	+26%
16	262	355	+35%
17	163	241	+48%

authorities. The indicator reflected all police charges, filed petitions, and sustained petitions.

At the level of event records (i.e., not aggregated by individual youth), there were 5,421 petitions and police charges in all for Pre-Reclaiming Futures and Reclaiming Futures youth. There were fewer overall petitions and charges for the Reclaiming Futures youth (2,371 compared with 3,047).

Youth in Reclaiming Futures had 16 percent fewer police charges, 18 percent fewer petitions filed, and 11 percent fewer petitions sustained than did youth in the Pre-Reclaiming Futures comparison group.

An examination of these records separated into age groups reveals an important finding (Table 6). The analysis shows that youth had similar numbers of charges and petitions through age 15, whether they were in the Reclaiming Futures group or the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group. After age 15, however, there was a decline in number of justice events for the Reclaiming Futures group relative to the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group (Figure 6).

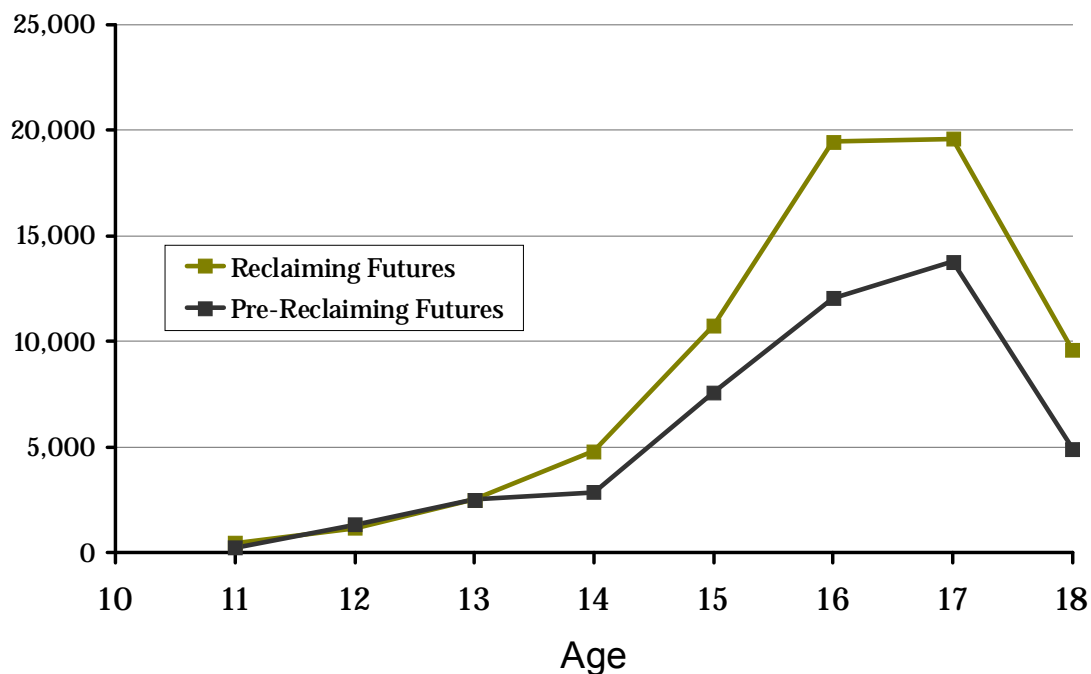
Even when researchers examined the various types of events included in the justice category, the patterns were identical for police charges, filed petitions, and sustained petitions. Furthermore, the number of youth at each age was virtually identical across the Pre-Reclaiming Futures and Reclaiming Futures groups, so the effect is not due to there being larger numbers of older youth in the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group.

The researchers next compared the total volume of justice events by calculating the average number of events attributable to each youth during his or her entire career in the juvenile justice system (Table 7). The results revealed that youth in Reclaiming Futures had 16 percent fewer police charges, 18 percent fewer petitions filed, and 11 percent fewer petitions sustained than did youth in the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group.

In addition to the number of separate events, a key indicator of involvement in the juvenile justice system is the total length of time a youth spends in contact with the legal system. The study

**Figure 5 – Mental health and substance abuse services by age**

**Lifetime Service Contacts**



measured elapsed time by subtracting the date of a youth’s first offense from the date of his or her final offense while under the jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system. The results show that youth in the Reclaiming Futures group spent far less time in trouble with the law than youth in the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group. Youth in Reclaiming Futures had an average of 1.7 years between their first and last offenses in Santa Cruz County, while youth in the

Pre-Reclaiming Futures group had an average of 3.1 years between their first and last offenses.

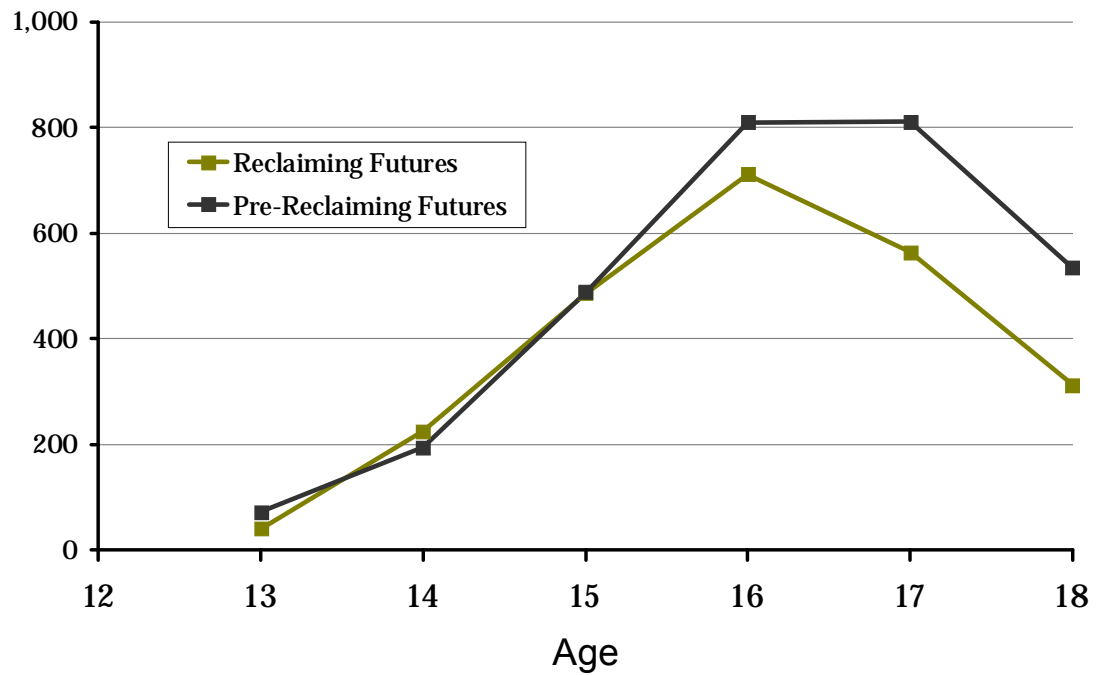
Even controlling for a youth’s age at the time of the first offense, the study confirmed that youth in the Reclaiming Futures group spent substantially less time involved in criminal activities than did youth in the Pre-Reclaiming Futures group (Table 8).

**Table 6– Total number of charges, petitions filed, and petitions sustained by age**

Age	Santa Cruz Study Group	
	Pre-Reclaiming Futures	Reclaiming Futures
13	72	40
14	194	225
15	488	486
16	810	712
17	811	564
18	534	312

**Figure 6– Juvenile court events by age**

Total Petitions and Charges



**Table 7– Lifetime mean number of police charges, petitions filed, and petitions sustained**

	Santa Cruz Study Group		
	Pre-Reclaiming Futures	Reclaiming Futures	Percent Change
Police charges	6.3	5.3	–16%
Petitions filed	6.7	5.5	–18%
Petitions sustained	3.8	3.4	–11%
Total justice events	16.7	14.1	–16%

Note: Detail may not add to total due to rounding.

**Table 8– Mean length of time spent in trouble with the law (in years)**

Age	Santa Cruz Study Group		
	Pre-Reclaiming Futures	Reclaiming Futures	Percent Change
13	3.5	2.7	–23%
14	3.6	2.4	–33%
15	3.0	1.7	–43%
16	2.6	1.6	–38%
17	1.6	1.1	–31%

**Table 9– Summary of key indicators**

Santa Cruz Study Group				
Service Domain	Indicator	Pre-Reclaiming Futures	Reclaiming Futures	Percent Change
<u>BEHAVIORAL HEALTH:</u> Substance Abuse / Mental Health Services	Average hours of service	1,114	1,303	+17%
	Average service contacts per year	140	200	+43%
<u>JUSTICE:</u> Probation Involvement and Juvenile Offenses	Average number of charges and petitions	16.7	14.1	–16%
	Average length of justice involvement, or years between first and last offense in record	3.1	1.7	–45%

Finally, when the study considers several indicators at once, the results suggest that Reclaiming Futures was associated with substantial increases in the intensity and duration of substance abuse treatment and mental health services for youth, while it was associated with sizeable decreases in their involvement in the justice system (Table 9). The youth in the Reclaiming Futures group received 17 percent more hours of mental health and substance abuse services and had 43 percent more contacts per year with these providers. At the same time, they had 16 percent fewer criminal charges and court petitions, and they spent 45 percent less time overall in trouble with the law than did youth in the Pre-Reclaiming Futures comparison group.

**DISCUSSION**

The goal of Reclaiming Futures in Santa Cruz County was to change the system of care for youthful drug-involved offenders in ways that would increase the effectiveness and efficiency of services so that youth would commit fewer offenses and have less involvement with juvenile justice authorities. The results of this analysis suggest that youth served during the Reclaiming Futures initiative received more mental health and substance abuse services and had less involvement with the juvenile court and the juvenile probation office than did youth handled before Reclaiming Futures was implemented.

## King County (Seattle), Washington

The Seattle-King County Reclaiming Futures evaluation focused on service system navigation and recidivism outcomes for substance abusing, juvenile justice–involved youth. Youth in the study participated in Reclaiming Futures from September 1, 2003, through December 31, 2006. These Reclaiming Futures youth were matched to a comparison group of youth (Pre-Reclaiming Futures) served by the Seattle-King County court system between January 1, 2001, and August 31, 2003.

The evaluation addressed four research questions:

- Did King County create a feasible plan to establish a "system of care" for substance abusing offenders served by the juvenile justice system?
- Did King County do what it said it would do to implement its plan for change and to enact systemic changes?
- Did the juvenile justice and substance abuse treatment systems in King County actually change?
- Were the systemic changes associated with other improved outcomes for youth?

The Seattle-King County Reclaiming Futures initiative was a systemwide

effort to improve alcohol, drug, and mental health treatment outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system. To this end, partners in the youth-serving system developed new approaches, which included the following:

- Providing comprehensive assessments to young people in the justice system
- Providing court and treatment programs through which teens and their families could receive ongoing support, including mental health services
- Creating "advocacy teams" based on the "wraparound" model of service coordination, to nurture and support youth during and after probation
- Holding graduation ceremonies to honor young people who were released from the justice system
- Involving the community as teenagers moved toward a new drug-free, crime-free life

### STUDY APPROACH

This report summarizes service navigation and recidivism outcomes for youth participating in the Reclaiming Futures initiative. Recidivism outcomes were monitored for 18 months after a youth's initial court filing. The total number of youth involved in Reclaiming Futures were separated into two cohorts



based on the date of their initial offense: “early” (September 1, 2003, through December 31, 2004) and “late” (January 1, 2005, through December 31, 2006). This allowed the study to explore how the effects of changes evolved as the initiative matured over time.

The evaluation design focused on contrasting the experiences of the “early” and “late” Reclaiming Futures youth with the comparison group of Pre-Reclaiming Futures youth. In addition, comparisons were made among subgroups of youth in the Reclaiming Futures groups based on their involvement in specific programs such as treatment court, drug court, the chemical dependency disposition alternative, advocacy teams, and a mentoring program.

The data for the study originated with three primary sources:

- 1) The King County Superior Court’s juvenile court division, which maintained a special Reclaiming Futures program database as well as a database of case activity generated from the court’s regular information system, program utilization data from the Juvenile Justice Intervention Services, and “Assessments.com,” a private contractor that maintained a database to track the application and results of the Washington State Juvenile Risk Assessment instrument

- 2) The “Target” database from the Washington State Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse (DASA)
- 3) Mental health services data from the King County Mental Health, Chemical Abuse and Dependency Services Division (MHCADSD).

Using these data sets, the researchers examined the three study groups and concluded that there were no statistically significant differences between Reclaiming Futures youth and the matched comparison group with regard to age, gender, overall criminal history, and overall risk for reoffending. The study groups were also similar in their dynamic risk scores from the mental health domain of the Washington State Juvenile Risk Assessment.

There were small differences in the overall substance abuse risk scores of the three groups, but none of the differences was statistically significant. The researchers created a control variable based on the risk score and used it to explore the effects of group differences in the study’s other analyses. The differences did not affect the outcomes reported here.

The three study groups also varied somewhat by race and ethnicity. The Reclaiming Futures initiative in King County was designed to focus on youth of color. By the late Reclaiming Futures period (January 1, 2005, through December 31, 2006), more than 50 percent of youth served by the initiative

were youth of color, principally African American and Latino youth. The proportion of youth of color increased from 40 percent in the early Reclaiming Futures period to 59 percent in the late Reclaiming Futures period. Researchers examined the effects of these differences and determined that they did not change the study’s conclusions.

**FINDINGS**

The timing of system navigation shows a consistent pattern of decreasing time lapses from the Pre-Reclaiming Futures period to early Reclaiming Futures and late Reclaiming Futures (Table 10). Data relating to substance abuse and mental health treatment as well as court data tracking treatment and supervision demonstrated shorter lag times between court filing and assessment, and between court filing and engagement in services.

These results are not from an analysis of individual case handling times, but they suggest that youth in the justice system

moved more quickly to treatment as the Reclaiming Futures initiative began to take hold, particularly in the time that elapsed between court filing and the first substance abuse assessment. The findings were also consistent with those reported from King County’s Mental Health, Chemical Abuse and Dependency Services Division (MHCADSD) and those reported by the juvenile court.

The data from MHCADSD and DASA show that, as the Reclaiming Futures initiative progressed, youth also moved more quickly from court filing to engagement in services (Table 11). The differences were statistically significant ( $p < .000$ ). These findings can be interpreted fairly as indicating faster access to services. The actual number of days between filing and assessment is less easily interpretable for three reasons: (1) the data do not necessarily track youth experiences across a single filing episode; (2) some youth may have started treatment before they received

**Table 10– Time elapsed between filing date and DASA assessment**

	Seattle Study Group			Total
	Pre-Reclaiming Futures	Early Reclaiming Futures	Late Reclaiming Futures	
Number of youth	397	203	377	977
Average days elapsed*	556	171	168	326
Standard deviation	532	199	157	411

\* Differences were statistically significant  $F=133.1, p < .000$ .

**Table 11– Average time elapsed between filing date and engagement in treatment**

	Seattle Study Group			Total
	Pre-Reclaiming Futures	Early Reclaiming Futures	Late Reclaiming Futures	
<b>MHCADSD – Service Engagement</b>				
Number of youth	238	94	152	484
Average days elapsed*	262	225	146	219
Standard deviation	280	226	145	240
<b>DASA – Service Engagement</b>				
Number of youth	283	165	273	721
Average days elapsed**	342	203	177	248
Standard deviation	292	224	139	241

\* Differences were statistically significant  $F=11.8, p < .000$ .

\*\* Differences were statistically significant  $F=40.2, p < .000$ .

an assessment; (3) some youth entering treatment court, drug court, or other special services (e.g., Multisystemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, Aggression Replacement Treatment) may not have been assessed or engaged in the public mental health system until their interventions were complete.

Reclaiming Futures youth were more likely to receive a drug/alcohol or mental health assessment than youth in the comparison group. Combined assessment data from MHCADSD and DASA revealed that more than 62 percent of Reclaiming Futures youth received a full substance abuse and/or mental health assessment from at least

one of the two agencies (some youth had assessments from both), compared with just 43 percent of youth served before Reclaiming Futures. The difference was large and statistically significant ( $\chi^2= 72.2; p < .000$ ).

Youth in Reclaiming Futures were more likely to receive a drug/alcohol or mental health assessment and more likely to be assigned to service coordination than were youth in the comparison group.

**Table 12 – Service coordination assignments**

	Seattle Study Group			Total
	Pre-Reclaiming Futures	Early Reclaiming Futures	Late Reclaiming Futures	
No service coordination	795 (72%)	144 (42%)	374 (55%)	1,313 (62%)
Some service coordination	306 (28%)	201 (58%)	302 (45%)	809 (38%)
Total	1,101	345	676	2,122

\* Differences were statistically significant  $\chi^2 = 121.4$ ;  $p < .000$ .

Reclaiming Futures youth were more likely to be assigned to service coordination (i.e., to receive more active case management) than were youth in the comparison group. Coordination data from all three data sources showed more interagency staffing teams assigned through MHCADSD, more case management services assigned through DASA, and more advocacy teams assigned through the King County Superior Court. Only youth in the Pre-Reclaiming Futures period received the interagency staffing teams from MHCADSD.

Nearly half of Reclaiming Futures youth (49 percent) received some type of treatment service coordination beyond that provided by the juvenile probation counselor (Table 12). This was significantly higher than the proportion of youth that received any form of service coordination prior to Reclaiming Futures (28 percent).

Youth in the early Reclaiming Futures period, however, were more likely to receive treatment service coordination

than youth in the late Reclaiming Futures period. This potentially negative indicator may be explained by MHCADSD’s efforts to lower caseload sizes and to improve fidelity to the standards of the National Wraparound Initiative by recalibrating its advocacy team services in 2005. Local stakeholders suggested to researchers that efforts to improve the quality of services and retention of youth and families in services also may have led to reductions in the number of youth that could be served effectively in the later years of the Reclaiming Futures initiative.

While the available data provide strong indications that these systemic changes improved the processes by which youth accessed and navigated the judicial and treatment systems in Seattle and King County, the same data do not show improved outcomes in terms of recidivism (28 percent among the Pre-Reclaiming Futures youth versus 53 percent for Reclaiming Futures youth). Researchers tried to isolate felony recidivism rates as well, but just 8

percent of youth in the comparison group committed new felony offenses, compared with 19 percent of youth in Reclaiming Futures.

Analyses of new court filings produced similar results. The study examined the number of new court filings within 18 months of each youth's original filing date and found that Reclaiming Futures youth had an average of 1.7 new offenses each, while youth in the comparison group had just .69 new offenses each. This difference was statistically significant.

There are a number of possible explanations for these recidivism results. The assignment of cases during the Reclaiming Futures initiative was not under the control of the researchers. Subjective factors likely contributed to practitioner decisions as to which youth received the more intensive treatments available as part of Reclaiming Futures. Court staff may have preferred to use Reclaiming Futures for youth in need of more services, especially those served by the treatment court and drug court.

Court staff may also have monitored Reclaiming Futures youth more closely, which would explain at least some of the higher recidivism figures. Youth in the comparison group, on the other hand, included some youth committed to long-term confinement with the State's Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration, which would obviously limit their opportunities for recidivism. Without more detailed and controlled data collection, it is not possible to draw any

firm conclusions about the meaning of these recidivism comparisons.

## DISCUSSION

Stakeholders in Seattle and King County generally agreed that, partly due to the efforts of Reclaiming Futures, their local services system was moving in the right direction to provide an improved continuum of care for substance abusing juvenile offenders. By the end of the initiative, local policymakers and practitioners shared a strong commitment to the reforms implemented during Reclaiming Futures, and they agreed that more attention was finally being paid to the needs of substance abusing youth in the justice system. They also expressed widespread satisfaction with the improved communication between the juvenile justice and treatment systems.

At the same time, stakeholders agreed that the current array of mental health services has significant gaps, meaning that, even with improved assessment and coordination, specific services to respond to the needs of youth and families are not always available. While improvements have been made, expanding the service array is a critical area for attention.

Youth involved with Reclaiming Futures received screenings and assessments more quickly and were engaged in treatment more quickly than the comparison group youth, reflecting clear success in implementing the Reclaiming Futures model. The Reclaiming Futures youth also received more assessments

overall, compared with the Pre-Reclaiming Futures youth, which supported stakeholder views that the initiative brought greater attention to the mental health and substance abuse needs of youth in King County.

Recidivism outcomes, however, did not show improvement. Local officials hoped that their demonstrated progress in delivering timely assessments and ensuring service coordination was a necessary first step, and that improvements in recidivism and other outcomes might appear later. In this regard, local leaders and stakeholders reported that a major lesson learned through their participation in Reclaiming Futures was the need for strict adherence to standards and quality assurance practices that could eventually result in improved recidivism outcomes.

## Conclusion

Based upon four independent evaluations, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Reclaiming Futures initiative appears to have been successful in inspiring important changes in the juvenile justice and substance abuse treatment systems of New Hampshire, Chicago, Santa Cruz, and Seattle. In these communities, more youth received effective screening and assessment after the implementation of Reclaiming Futures. Youth tended to move more quickly through the screening and assessment process, and they participated in more treatment programs and received more support services, including mentoring and various forms of prosocial activities.

Despite varying methods and data collection strategies, the site-specific evaluations of Reclaiming Futures share one conclusion. Namely, the efforts of the communities that participated in the initiative had a real impact on the systems of care that respond to justice-involved youth with substance abuse problems. The initiative changed the day-to-day business of service delivery in ways that could lead to better outcomes for youth. Whether those changes actually led to better outcomes, however, is a question that remains for future studies to answer.

Researchers tested the hypothesis that service enhancements would lead to better youth outcomes, specifically, reduced recidivism. The four evaluations, however, were unable to measure recidivism in the same way, and their findings could not be compared directly.

One study (Seattle) compared recidivism among Reclaiming Futures youth and non-Reclaiming Futures youth and found that recidivism was actually greater in Reclaiming Futures. Due to data limitations, however, the researchers were unable to rule out a wide range of factors that could have caused the apparent difference.

Two of the studies (Chicago and New Hampshire) were inconclusive, with some comparisons favoring Reclaiming Futures and others not, or with results that did not differ substantially between Reclaiming Futures youth and non-Reclaiming Futures youth.

The fourth study (Santa Cruz) found strong and consistent recidivism results that favored Reclaiming Futures. The Santa Cruz study was also the best local evaluation in terms of data collection. Due to the existence of highly developed and well-managed data systems in both its juvenile justice and treatment

agencies, researchers in Santa Cruz were able to measure case processing and youth outcomes with far more detail and precision than was possible in the other Reclaiming Futures sites.

The fact that the Santa Cruz study had the best data and showed the strongest effects raises a key question. Is this association entirely coincidental, or could it be evidence for the effectiveness of the Reclaiming Futures initiative? The answer to this question, unfortunately, cannot be known without additional research and analysis using more detailed and consistent data.







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