

# **SANTA CLARA COUNTY ADOPTS THE SEVEN CHALLENGES MODEL FOR YOUTH**

A recently awarded Title II competitive grant through the Corrections Standards Authority will benefit the County of Santa Clara efforts to provide detention alternatives to at-risk youth. Thanks to a collaboration lead by Santa Clara County Probation Department, the Juvenile Court, the Department of Alcohol and Drug Services and local providers, the \$150,000 grant will serve probation violators through the highly recognized **Seven Challenges Program**: [www.sevenchallenges.com](http://www.sevenchallenges.com)

Instead of dictating behavior, **the Seven Challenges Program** presents youth with a decision making model that helps them make steady changes in their behavior. Keeping in mind that in addition to drug problems, most youth in the juvenile justice system have co-occurring situational and psychological problems, this program empowers at-risk youth, with the support of counselors who act as problem solving partners. They help youngsters deal with underlying issues and teach them life skills to prepare for a life free of drugs.

The model incorporates many evidence-based practices that have been the standard in the Department of Alcohol & Drug Services' Youth System of Care for a number of years, but it will also be used by other providers, effectively expanding the County's capacity to provide substance use services to youth. One significant advantage to adopting the model so widely is that there will be greater consistency in how services are provided with easier transitions, if a youth should move from one provider to another. For example: a youth might first participate in a seven challenges program while in custody and be referred to a provider in the community who will continue to use the model with the youth.

"We look forward to the implementation of this very successful program," said Dave Cortese, President of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors and Chair of the Children, Seniors and Families Committee. "We welcome non-traditional approaches that involve responding to the needs of at-risk youth and that lead to positive outcomes for children in need of direction."

Since established goals are incremental and attainable, participants are not discouraged through transitions, and are motivated to make a commitment to change and to support success by implementing desired changes.

"This program gives hope to many of us involved in reforming the juvenile justice system," said County of Santa Clara Supervisor George Shirakawa, Chair of the Public Safety and Justice Committee. "Kids who mistakenly believe their drug and alcohol use is not a problem will learn to make well informed decisions and to maintain safe relationships in their community."

The Seven Challenges Program has been endorsed specifically for adolescents by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), as anecdotal and official data on probation violators indicate that most of the youth who come in contact with the juvenile justice system have drug and alcohol issues. It is being used in approximately 35 states by more than 300 agencies and organizations, including Santa Cruz and Monterey counties.

"We know of the significant external pressure youth admitted into drug counseling and referred by probation, parole and drug court judges face to use drugs, or to abstain from drugs," said Santa Clara County Chief Probation Officer Sheila Mitchell. "What is so remarkable about the Seven Challenges Program is that instead of the traditionally aggressive approaches that often breed defiance, kids thrive from a model that encourages self-evaluation and self-awareness. It is empowering when we realize we can make the right decisions on our own."

"Honesty is crucial in the rehabilitation process," added Bob Garner, Director of the Department of Drug and Alcohol Services. "Through the Seven Challenges Program we will be placing a big emphasis on responsibility, without incurring excessive and unnecessary blame or shame. Participants will be able to put their lives in context and understand how their environment can impact their lives."

Initially six agencies will be using this model: The Department of Alcohol & Drug Services, the Probation Department, Asian-American Recovery Services, Advent Group Ministries, Pathway Society and Bill Wilson Center. Several others have expressed an interest in becoming licensed to use the model and may be trained at a later point. In September about one hundred and twenty individuals participated in a three-day workshop on the implementation of the Seven Challenges model.

[www.sccdads.org](http://www.sccdads.org)