

# County chosen to pioneer juvenile rehab program

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The Santa Cruz County Probation Department is in taking part in a social experiment that could change the focus of the juvenile justice system in the United States.

Santa Cruz County has been chosen as one of 13 communities across the country to try ideas to provide drug and alcohol treatment programs to juveniles who find themselves in custody. The five-year experiment is being funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a New Jersey-based group that

gives grants for social programs, said foundation spokesman Mac Prichard.

Santa Cruz County was chosen because it has already shown a commitment to its juvenile justice system by reducing the proportion of Latinos incarcerated in juvenile hall from 67 percent to 49 percent, Prichard said. It was also chosen because the county already has a residential treatment program with 12 beds at the juvenile hall site in Felton.

"Nationwide, Santa Cruz is historically recognized for its good work in this area," Prichard said.

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Some of the other pilot communities include Seattle; Marquette, Mich.; Rosebud, S.D.; Jackson, Ky.; Dayton, Ohio; Chicago; Anchorage, Alaska; and the state of New Hampshire.

Barbara Collins is working full time to create a plan for how the program will offer effective drug and alcohol treatment to juveniles. She and professors from University of California, San Francisco have started this month talking to justice officials, social groups like anti-gang violence groups Barrios Unidos, and even juveniles who have been in jail and their families to see what those on the inside of the system say they need.

Collins said she hopes to come up with a plan in a couple of months, and then she will go back to the social groups and teens and families with her plan and see if her policies accurately translate their wishes. Then the county will submit their program to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and if they like the idea, Prichard said, the foundation will give the county up to \$250,000 to run their program. The

county can re-apply for another \$250,000 every year for the next five years if their program is showing results by keeping kids from going back to drugs and alcohol.

Collins said she is looking at the adult drug treatment system set up under Proposition 36 as a possible model, because it allows drug users chances to pick themselves back up and resume treatment, even if they have a few relapses.

"We need to make adolescent substance abuse less criminal and more about treatment," Collins said. "Kids also need some chances."

She said the program would also focus on outpatient solutions that help kids stay off drugs and out of trouble, even after they get out of juvenile hall and back into the community.

Youth soccer leagues, church groups, physicians who treat people with drug problems and even local businesses that could offer youths jobs such as Graniterock have also expressed interest in participating in the program to get juveniles off drugs and keep them off drugs so they don't wind up in juvenile hall again.

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