



# SAN MATEO COUNTY **PROBATION DEPARTMENT**

ACKNOWLEDGE ALLIANCE  
ANNUAL EVALUATION

**2022-2023**



## ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Applied Survey Research (ASR) is a nonprofit social research firm dedicated to helping people build better communities by collecting meaningful data, facilitating information-based planning, and developing custom strategies. The firm was founded on the principle that community improvement, initiative sustainability, and program success are closely tied to assessment needs, evaluation of community goals, and development of appropriate responses.

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# Contents

<b>PROGRAM DESCRIPTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>EVALUATION METHODS</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>EVALUATION FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Fiscal Year 2022-23 Highlights .....	5
Profile of Youths Served .....	5
Risk Indicators .....	5
Youth Strengths and Service Needs .....	6
Change Over Time.....	8
Justice Outcomes .....	8
Program-Specific Outcomes .....	9
Evidence-Based Practices .....	10
Client Story .....	11

# Program Description

Acknowledge Alliance is a community-based mental health provider located in the city of Mountain View, California. One mission of Acknowledge Alliance is to help children and adolescents develop their capacity to rebound from hardship and adversity and grow into well-functioning adults. Acknowledge Alliance aims to foster resilience and create trusting relationships, thereby empowering youths to realize their fullest potential.

Acknowledge Alliance's Collaborative Counseling Program (CCP) provides counseling services to the most at-risk youth. These are students facing the greatest life adversities - victims of domestic and community violence, coerced gang involvement, poverty, racism, and undiagnosed learning and mental health issues. The CCP Team provides on-site mental health counseling at some of the Sequoia Union High School District's comprehensive and alternative high schools. The teens who receive counseling services gain insight into how their life experiences drive their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; learn to regulate their responses to emotional stimuli; become more empowered to speak up and advocate for themselves appropriately; develop increased trust and the ability to choose healthier relationships; improve their school engagement; find compassion for themselves and each other; and experience renewed hope and a glimpse of a future with new possibilities. Acknowledge Alliance also offers counseling services to out-of-school youth development organizations, such as Peninsula Bridge, where first generation middle-school students are served. Peninsula Bridge also receives parent and staff consultation and trainings several times a year, by clinicians.

Professional staff of pre-licensed and licensed clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists, and psychologists provide supervision and training to clinical interns who in turn provide students individual and group therapy. The organization is committed to building the pipeline of talented mental health professionals by placing master's and PsyD students at school sites to directly support students.

Completion of the CCP program fulfills the counseling requirement for these youths. The CCP's goals for program participants are to:

- Make positive choices and actions;
- Relieve stress;
- Develop a trusting relationship with their counselor;
- Show an increase in self-awareness and self-esteem;
- Increase ability to express emotions constructively; and
- Improve anger management skills.

# Programmatic Challenges

Several programmatic challenges emerged during FY 2022-23 that impacted Acknowledge Alliance's outcomes. During the fiscal year, the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Peninsula (BGCP) discontinued counseling services from Acknowledge Alliance after the second quarter. Six years of partnership with BGCP demonstrated that the youth mental health service model worked well for this population and helped them increase their overall capacity to create and bring the mental health program in-house. Other challenges this year were associated with some persistent post-adjustments. While nearly all individual counseling in high schools took place on-site and in person, remote sessions were provided to college students. Other persistent post-COVID-19 issues this year included attendance problems, loss of motivation, low academic performance, prolonged depression and anxiety problems, identity and confidence challenges, social relationship difficulties, and issues with family relationships. More frequent sessions were provided to clients demonstrating increased needs. As cases requiring immediate interventions increased, more student outreach and crisis interventions were provided. In addition, prevention workshops were provided for parents and students. Several staffing changes at CCP also posed some challenges, as it took more time and effort to onboard new staff and supervise interns, maintain connections with the schools, all while minimizing negative impacts on clients as much as possible due to having fewer staff available. Nevertheless, Acknowledge Alliance CCP was able to provide high-quality services to students, and those who received counseling through CCP reported high satisfaction.

# Evaluation Methods

Programs provided by Acknowledge Alliance are funded by San Mateo County Probation’s (Probation) Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA). Acknowledge Alliance monitors their programs and reports client, service, and outcome data to Probation and its evaluator, Applied Survey Research (ASR). The methods and tools used to collect this data from funded programs include:

- **Participants and Services:** Funded programs collected demographic data (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, etc.) and service data (e.g., type of services, hours of services, etc.) for individual participants. Program staff entered these data elements into their own data systems prior to transferring the data to ASR for analysis.
- **Risk Factors:** Funded programs used two assessments, the Juvenile Assessment and Intervention System (JAIS) and the Child Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment, to provide a standard measure of risk, life functioning, and areas of strength and need for youths:
  - **JAIS:** Funded programs used the Juvenile Assessment and Intervention System (JAIS) to provide a standard measure of risk for youths. This individualized assessment is a widely used criminogenic risk, strengths, and needs assessment tool that assists in the effective and efficient supervision of youths, both in institutional settings and in the community. It has been validated across ethnic and gender groups. The JAIS consists of a brief initial assessment followed by full assessment and reassessment components (JAIS Full Assessment and JAIS Reassessment). The JAIS assessment has two unique form options based on the youth’s gender. Probation has elected to administer the JAIS to all youths receiving services in community programs for at-risk and juvenile justice involved youth. The JAIS Girls Risk consists of eight items, and the JAIS Boys Risk consists of ten items. Each assessment yields an overall risk level of “low”, “moderate”, or “high”.
  - **CANS:** This is a multi-purpose tool developed for children’s services to support decision-making in determining the level of care and service planning, to facilitate quality improvement initiatives, and to allow outcome monitoring. The CANS consists of items scored on a four-point scale of 0-3, with a score of two or three indicating an actionable need. The assessment groups items into several core modules, including Youth Strengths, Risk Behaviors, Behavioral/Emotional Needs, Life Functioning, Caregiver Strengths and Needs, and Acculturation. Secondary modules that can be triggered by answers to specific core module items include School, Trauma, Substance Use, and Juvenile Justice.
- **Risk Indicators:** Funded programs evaluated certain risk indicators upon entry for JJCPA youths, including if the youths had an alcohol or other drug problem, a school attendance problem, and whether they had been suspended or expelled from school in the past year.
- **Outcomes:** Like all JJCPA-funded programs, Acknowledge Alliance reports on five justice-related outcomes for program participants occurring within 180 days post entry. They are:
  - Arrests;
  - Probation violations;

- Detentions;
- Court-ordered restitution completion; and
- Court-ordered community service completion.

The outcome measures reported for Acknowledge Alliance include Arrests and Probation Violations. The prior year's cohort of program participants serves as the reference or comparison group to interpret FY 2022-23 outcomes.

In addition to the required justice-related outcomes, Acknowledge Alliance collected two program-specific outcome measures to track progress toward helping participants express their emotions constructively and making positive choices for themselves. Acknowledge Alliance also administers the Children's Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) pre- and post-tests to measure its clients' psychological, social, and school functioning.

- ***Evidence-Based Practices:*** JJCPA-funded programs are encouraged to follow evidence-based practices. To augment Probation's knowledge of which programs are being implemented by funded partners, each funded program has provided a catalog of its practices since the FY 2017-18 evaluation period. After receiving this information, ASR runs the cataloged practices reported through several clearinghouses to determine whether each practice is an:<sup>1</sup>
  - Evidence-based theory or premise;
  - Evidence-based model, shown by multiple experimental or quasi-experimental studies to be effective;
  - Evidence-based practice or modality shown to promote positive outcomes; and
  - Evidence-based tool or instrument that has been validated (concurrent and predictive).

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<sup>1</sup> For the full list of evidence-based practice clearinghouses used to evaluate programs, please see the JJCPA and JPCF Comprehensive Report for fiscal year 2022-23.

# Evaluation Findings

## FISCAL YEAR 2022-23 HIGHLIGHTS

- Acknowledge Alliance served 238 youths this year, 28% less than the last fiscal year. Average hours spent with youths increased 15% from FY 2021-22.
- JAIS data on criminogenic risk was suppressed for FY 2022-23 due to an extremely small sample size (n=2).
- Acknowledge Alliance assessed 43% (103 of 238) of youths served using the CANS. Results for the 75 youths with baseline assessments in the fiscal year indicated 75% had three or more actionable needs when they entered the program. Out of 68 youths with both baseline (any fiscal year) and follow-ups this fiscal year, the number of needs at follow-up decreased when compared to baseline in six areas: behavior and emotion, life functioning (Overall and Transitional Age Youth specific), trauma symptoms, acculturation, and caregiver strengths and needs.
- Risk indicators evaluated at entry for Acknowledge Alliance youths including alcohol or other drug problems, attendance problems, or suspension/expulsion in the past year were suppressed due to an extremely small sample size (n=3).
- Participants showed improvements in scores on the GAF scale.

## PROFILE OF YOUTHS SERVED

In FY 2022-23, Acknowledge Alliance served 238 youths, with race/ethnicity and age data available for 93% of youths. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of youths were female, 29% male, and 3% were transgender/other, with an average age of 17.1 years. Three-quarters (76%) identified as Hispanic/Latino, 8% identified as White/Caucasian, 7% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, 5% as multi-racial/multi-ethnic, 2% as Black/African American, and 2% identified as another race.

The 238 youths served in FY 2022-23 spent an average of 3.5 months in the program and received 21.2 hours of services (Exhibit 1). Fifty-five percent (55%) of services rendered were for individual counseling, 39% for case management, 3% for consultations, 2% for student outreach, and 1% crisis intervention.

**Exhibit 1. Youth Services**

YOUTH SERVICES	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23
Number of Youths Served	249	312	265	330	<b>238</b>
Average Number of Hours Served	8.8	13.8	20.6	18.4	<b>21.2</b>
Average Time in the Program (Months)	3.7	4.1	4.7	4.4	<b>3.5</b>

## RISK INDICATORS

Acknowledge Alliance evaluated specific risk indicators upon entry, including if the youths had an alcohol or other drug problem, a school attendance problem, and whether they had been suspended or expelled from school in the past year. All data for FY 2022-23 have been suppressed due to an extremely small sample size (n=3) this fiscal year.



**Exhibit 2. Youth Risk Indicators at Entry**

RISK INDICATORS	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23
Alcohol or Other Drug Problem	28%	8%	7%	*	*
Attendance Problem	49%	42%	40%	*	*
Suspension/Expulsion in Past Year	62%	58%	1%	*	*

Note: FY 2022-23 n=3. \*Indicates that data were suppressed due to a sample size below five.

Similar to that of the previous fiscal year, all JAIS risk data for FY 2022-23 have been suppressed due to an extremely small sample size (n=2).

**Exhibit 3. JAIS Risk Levels**

JAIS RISK LEVELS	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23
Low	63%	61%	80%	*	*
Moderate	27%	39%	20%	*	*
High	10%	0%	0%	*	*

Note: FY 2021-22 n=3. \*Indicates that data were suppressed due to a sample size below five.

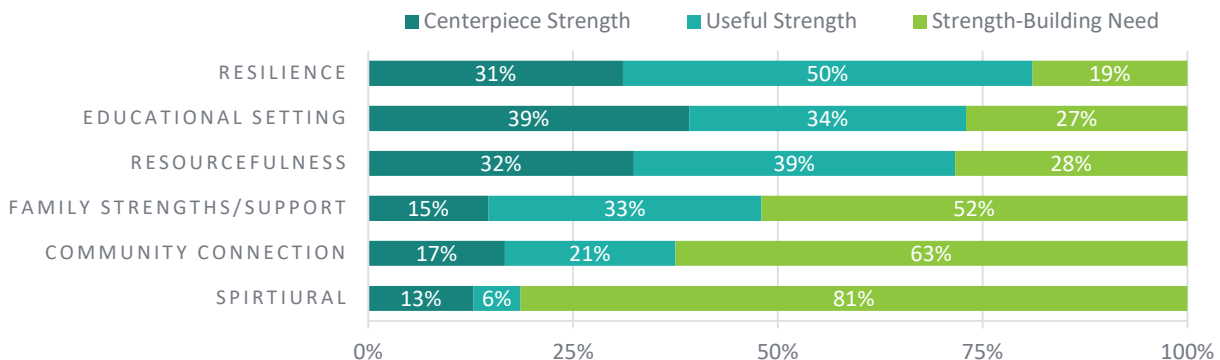
**YOUTH STRENGTHS AND SERVICE NEEDS**

In FY 2022-23, Acknowledge Alliance gathered CANS assessment data at baseline and/or follow-up from 103 youths, 43% of the 238 youths served.<sup>2</sup> A total of 75 youths had a baseline assessment within the fiscal year and 68 youths had both a follow-up assessment within the fiscal year and a baseline assessment from any fiscal year.

**Baseline Assessment**

The average number of centerpiece or therapeutically useful strengths identified at baseline per youth was not available due to half of the 12 items missing data. Of the six items completed, Resilience (81%) and Educational Setting (73%) were the most frequently identified strengths among Acknowledge Alliance youths (see Exhibit 4).

**Exhibit 4. Percentage of Youths with Each Strength at Baseline**

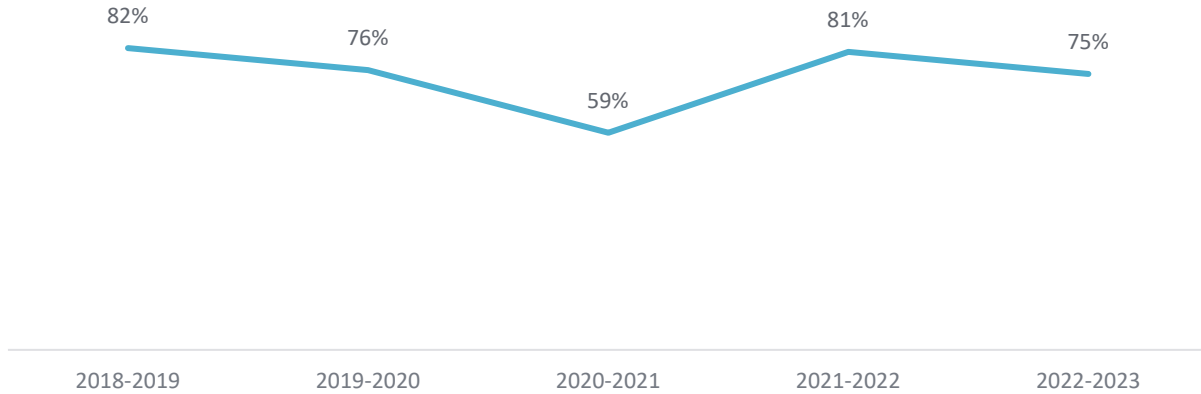


Note: n=70-75 per item. Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

<sup>2</sup> Acknowledge Alliance reported that only youths under 18 years of age and who met with staff at least 3 times were assessed (n=123). The completion rate for this subsample of youths was 84%.

Approximately 75% of youths (n=75) had actionable needs at baseline on three or more items, a decrease of six percentage points from the previous fiscal year.

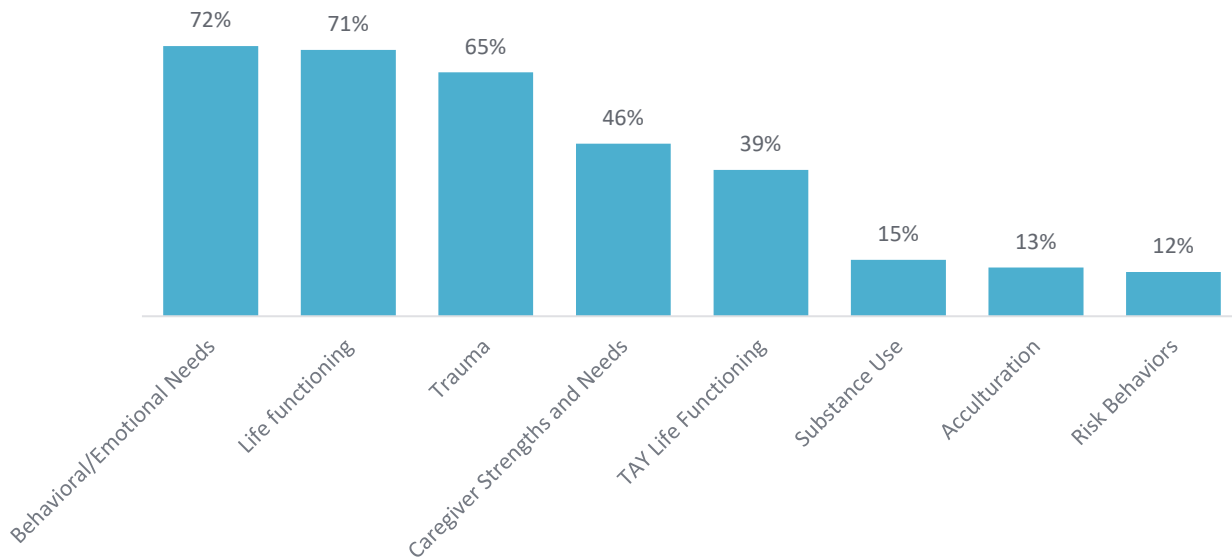
**Exhibit 5. Percentage of Youths with Three or More Actionable Needs at Baseline**



Note: FY 2022-23 n=75.

Exhibit 6 presents the percentage of youths administered a baseline CANS assessment having at least one actionable need in that module. A high percentage of youths had actionable needs across many of the CANS core domains, including behavioral/emotional needs and life functioning. The Behavioral and Emotional Needs module, which indicates the need for follow-up action to address depression, anxiety and symptoms of trauma and strengthen healthy behaviors and emotional health in youths, was indicated as a need for 72% of youths assessed at program start. This need area was followed closely by the Life Functioning module (71%), which assesses how youths’ function across individual, family, peer, school, and community realms. Two of every three youths had a need to address symptoms of trauma (65%).

**Exhibit 6. Percentage of Youths with at Least One Moderate or Significant Need Per CANS Module at Baseline**



Note: n=70-75.

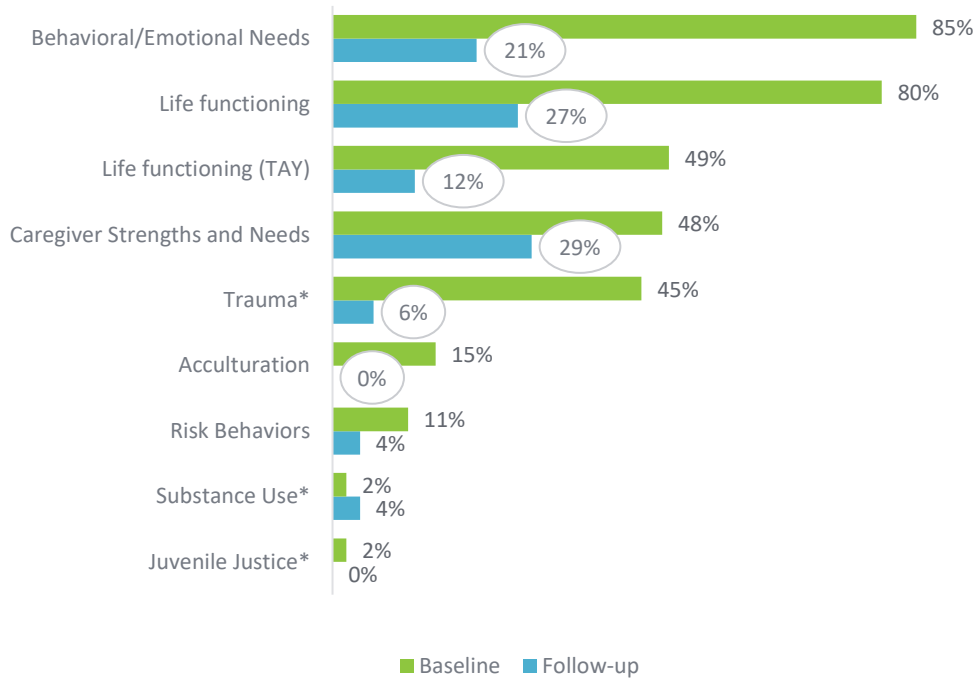
## CHANGE OVER TIME

The baseline and follow-up assessments of 68 youths were analyzed to reflect most accurately the change in the number of youths with actionable needs over time.

Exhibit 7 shows the percentage of youths with at least one actionable need at baseline and follow-up. The results show a statistically significant 64-percentage point decrease in the number of youths with behavioral/emotional needs, including reducing the number of youths with actionable needs around trauma by 39 percentage points. There was also a 53-point decrease in the number of youths with life functioning needs, a 19-percentage point decrease in youths with caregiver needs, and complete resolution of all actionable Acculturation needs. There were no significant changes in the remaining need categories.

Although the results of the follow-up CANS indicate that youths still needed support for many needs, the significant decreases in the number of youths with these needs indicates that many youths experienced a resolution of many or all of their needs during their participation with Acknowledge Alliance. This was particularly true regarding improved behavioral or emotional symptoms, establishment of life skills and functioning, and decreased trauma symptoms.

**Exhibit 7. Change in Percentage of Youths with CANS Actionable Needs Over Time**



Note: n=42-47. Circles indicate statistically significant decreases from baseline to follow-up assessment using paired T-tests,  $p < .05$ . \*Results include needs identified on core items or secondary modules.

## JUSTICE OUTCOMES

As shown in Exhibit 8, no youth (n=0) served by Acknowledge Alliance met the criteria for reporting justice outcomes (180 days post entry into probation) in FY 2022-23.

**Exhibit 8. Justice Outcomes (Six Months After Entry)**

JUSTICE OUTCOMES	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23
Youths Arrested for a New Law Violation	16%	*	*	*	NA
Youths with a Probation Violation	14%	*	*	*	NA

Note: FY 2022-23 n=0. \*Indicates that data were suppressed due to a sample size below five.

**PROGRAM-SPECIFIC OUTCOMES**

The Acknowledge Alliance performance target for CANS completion rate for the youth participants was 95%. They fell short of that goal, at 44% (Exhibit 9). The second CANS-related data collection measure was to have all Acknowledge Alliance CANS assessors maintain current certification, but they fell short of meeting that goal at 57% certified (4 of 7 staff). One additional staff member had an expired certification, and the remaining two staff were not on the current list of certified staff.

**Exhibit 9. Program-Specific Outcomes**

CANS DATA COLLECTION	FY 21-22	FY 22-23 TARGET	FY 22-23 RESULTS
CANS Completion Rate	37%	95%	44% <sup>3</sup>
CANS Users/Trainers Current with (Re)Certification	57%	100%	57%

In addition to the CANS assessment, Acknowledge Alliance staff and interns measured progress made by each youth using the Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) scale. The GAF is a 100-point scale used by mental health clinicians to measure psychological, social, and school functioning for children ages six to 17. The child version of the GAF was adapted from the Adult Global Assessment of Functioning Scale and is a valid and reliable tool for rating a child’s general level of functioning on a health-to-illness continuum. GAF scores at pre- and post-test were collected for youths who had been seen more than three times in the Transition and Youth Development Programs. As seen in Exhibit 10, the youths in the Transition Program had a 20.9% increase in GAF scores from pre- to post-test. The youths in the Youth Development Program had a 15.0% increase.

**Exhibit 10. Transition Program GAF Pre- and Post-Test Scores by Program**

GAF SCORE	PRE-TEST MEAN GAF SCORES	POST-TEST MEAN GAF SCORES	PERCENT CHANGE FROM PRE- TO POST-TEST
Transition Program	53.0	64.1	20.9%
Youth Development Program	57.9	66.6	15.0%

<sup>3</sup> Using a revised sample of only youths with three or more sessions, the completion rate was 84%. However, this rate did not meet the goal of 95%.

Performance measures for Acknowledge Alliance included the percentage of youths in each program who reported that counseling helped them express their emotions constructively and make positive choices for themselves. For the Youth Development Program, 79% of youths reported that counseling helped them to express their emotions constructively and 74% reported that counseling helped them make positive choices for themselves. These both fell short of their goals of 90% and 75% respectively. For the youths in the Transition Program, 70% reported that counseling helped them to express their emotions constructively, which is lower than the goal of 90%. The goal of youths reporting that counseling helped them make positive choices for themselves was 75% which was exceeded with 85% of Transition Program youths reporting this outcome.

**Exhibit 11. Performance Measures**

PERFORMANCE MEASURE	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23 TARGET	FY 22-23 RESULTS
<b>Court and Community Schools/Youth Development Program*</b>						
Percent of youth who report that counseling helped them to express their emotions constructively	89%	67%	N/A	97%	90%	79%
Percent of youth who report that counseling helped them to make positive choices for themselves	73%	44%	N/A	91%	75%	74%
<b>Transition Program</b>						
Percent of youth who report that counseling helped them to express their emotions constructively	89%	80%	71%	85%	90%	70%
Percent of youth who report that counseling helped them to make positive choices for themselves	78%	80%	67%	85%	75%	85%

\*Note: In FY 2022-23 the program outcomes shifted from Court and Community Schools to the Youth Development Program.

**EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES**

In FY 2022-23, JJCPA-funded programs were asked to provide the models, practices, or curricula employed in their programs. ASR then evaluated the given information to determine whether they were evidence-based or promising practices through a search of evidence-based practice clearinghouses including SAMHSA Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Model Programs Guide. Exhibit 12 details the practices that Acknowledge Alliance reported and the evidence base for each.

**Exhibit 12. Evidence-Based Practices**

PRACTICE	PRACTICE IMPLEMENTATION	RATING
Psychodynamic Psychotherapy	Weekly hour-long individual and group therapy sessions (no time limit – clients may attend as long as needed).	Evidence-based practice according to empirical evidence. <sup>4</sup>
Trauma-Informed Practice	Therapists are trained in understanding the impact of complex trauma on the youths and effective ways to address this as an integral part of the therapy.	The Trauma-Informed approach is evidence-based practice according to SAMHSA. <sup>5</sup>
Cultural Sensitivity	Therapists are trained to explore and factor in cultural influences and norms in their work with clients.	Although cultural sensitivity is not recognized as an evidence-based or promising practice on its own, it is recognized as an important factor for the client and therapist relationship. <sup>6</sup>

**CLIENT STORY**

Each year, staff at funded programs provide a client story to help illustrate the effect of services on their clients. The following is the client story provided by Acknowledge Alliance for FY 2022-23.

**Exhibit 13. Client Story**

Name of client	Maddie (pseudonym)
Age and gender	20, female
Reason for referral	Maddie self-referred due to increasing symptoms of depression and anxiety that was significantly affecting academic performance and attendance.
Client’s behavior, affect, and appearance when they first started in the program	Maddie’s affect appeared very sad and anxious at the start of treatment. Maddie reported decreased attendance in her classes. Maddie was initially reserved about therapy and opening up about presenting problems.
Activity engagement and consistency	Engagement was consistent throughout the course of treatment with deep exploration of symptoms related to childhood trauma, relationship dynamics with parents, and interpersonal relationships.
Client’s behavior, affect, and appearance toward the end of the program	Toward the end of the session, she presented with a happier affect and feeling more confident and empowered in her ability to navigate difficult emotions related to childhood wounds that impact academic performance.

<sup>4</sup> Shedler, J. (2010). American Psychological Association 0003-066X/10/. Vol. 65, No. 2, 98 –109 DOI: 10.1037/a0018378. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/amp-65-2-98.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> SAMHSA. (2014). SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, p10. Pub ID#: SMA14-4884. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/SAMHSA-s-Concept-of-Trauma-and-Guidance-for-a-Trauma-Informed-Approach/SMA14-4884>

<sup>6</sup> Hook, J. N., Davis, D. E., Owen, J., Worthington, E. L., & Utsey, S. O. (2013). Cultural humility: measuring openness to culturally diverse clients. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 60(3), 353–366. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032595>

<p>What the client learned as a result of the program</p>	<p>“I learned to understand myself more and how to empathize with others.”</p>
<p>What the client is doing differently in their life now as a result of the program</p>	<p>Maddie is identifying when she is feeling sad or anxious and doing things that support her such as talking to a friend or bringing it up in therapy.</p>
<p>The value of the program in the client’s words</p>	<p>“Having a space to talk where I can learn more about myself. I never thought I could learn so much about myself in therapy.”</p>