

## **La Bodega de la Familia/Family Justice** **New York City\***

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### **Genesis of Program:**

In 1996, the Vera Institute of Justice opened La Bodega de la Familia to test the proposition that strengthening the families of substance abusers under the supervision of the criminal justice system can improve the success of treatment, reduce the use of jail to punish relapse, and reduce the abuse within families that often accompanies addiction. This program is being described due to its approach to criminal justice-involved, substance using adults, some of whom are women, and their families, which often include children. The approach to children is primarily focused on strengthening the capacity of the adults in their lives to serve as better parents and caregivers.

The founding and current project director, Carol Shapiro, published several papers on the criminal justice system and its history of excluding families in its response to drug offenders. In conjunction with the Vera Institute of Justice, Shapiro then approached the Coordinator of Criminal Justice in New York for funding for a project that would meet this need

The program as conceptualized would maintain the family unit in the community while the offender received treatment services. The family would also receive case management services to meet their needs in hopes of better stabilizing the entire family.

The following criteria were used while searching for a program location. The community had to:

- be a major consumer of criminal justice resources;
- exhibit a high incidence of drug use by neighborhood residents;
- boast access to a wide array of community-based health and substance abuse treatment services;
- show evidence of local community and political support; and
- have characteristics that may inspire replicability elsewhere.

A national advisory board and a community advisory board were established. The

\* This case study was compiled from a variety of sources, interviews and publications. It is not intended to be an endorsement by the authors of a particular program, method or approach. The case study is intended to provide an illustration and example of one type of approach to mother-child programs.

national board includes professors, medical representatives, judges, prosecutors, the state's attorney, substance abuse professionals, and a representative of The Police Foundation. The community board includes former program participants, non-profit professionals, and representatives from police, probation, parole, public housing, child welfare, and the faith-based community.

The planning process involving the Vera Institute, the project director, and the advisory boards entailed a full year. The major obstacle the founders had to overcome was that most funders were not accustomed to seeing a program that combined public health and criminal justice. Initially only one funding source was involved and it was from a criminal justice city source.

### **La Bodega's Mission and Goals:**

The mission of La Bodega de la Familia is to create a neighborhood support center that proposes a unique solution to the problems of substance abuse in families, involving not just the individual drug user but the entire family in substance abuse counseling and support.

The goals of the program are:

- to reduce interfamilial harms caused by drugs including: family strain, break-up, child placement, legal problems, voluntary family break-up, and theft;
- to bolster success of non-residential drug treatment placement;
- to reduce the harms associated with drug addiction in a given neighborhood;
- to reduce the use of custody (jail or prison) to punish relapse.

These goals have not changed during the almost six years of the program's operation.

The program did not have any zoning difficulties due to the planning process that included meeting with community groups that met the criteria mentioned. Part of the process was to ensure buy-in by the community and politicians prior to selecting a site. The site that was chosen had been the location of a family grocery store where a shoot out between a drug dealer and the police left a police officer paralyzed and killed an alleged drug dealer.

### **Program Components:**

Almost five years ago, the Vera Institute of Justice opened La Bodega de la Familia in a diverse, low-income community on New York City's Lower East Side to help substance abusers under the supervision of the criminal justice system succeed in outpatient treatment and comply with criminal justice mandates. Bodega supplements treatment and supervision by building resilient family systems that encourage the addict in recovery.

Working directly with substance-abusing offenders and their families, Bodega provides an array of services, including Family Case Management, counseling and relapse prevention services, and 24-hour crisis intervention in the event of a drug-related emergency.

La Bodega's signature service is "Family Case Management," an inclusive process that engages the substance abuser, family members, criminal justice personnel, and treatment providers together to identify and mobilize a family's inherent strengths and resources and to build a network of healthy relationships to support the offender. Working in partnership with law enforcement, Bodega's family case managers collaborate with family members to develop strategies to help the offender stay in treatment and comply with supervision. They also find ways to deal with legal, financial, and emotional problems that are plaguing family members and keeping them from serving as a resource to the substance abuser. In addition, the program counsels and refers other family members dealing with mental illness or substance abuse, not just the substance abuser, offering prevention as well as treatment.<sup>1</sup> Services are also available to community members. Neighborhood residents can attend a variety of support groups, including ones for young mothers, victims of family violence, or concerned friends and family of substance-abusing individuals. Additionally, special programming is offered for young people in participating families and neighborhood children to teach prevention and engage them in healthy activities.

La Bodega's institutional partners are the myriad of criminal justice agencies concerned with the success of the thousands of individuals mandated to outpatient drug treatment each year. Historically, these agencies respond to relapse with jail. To the extent that a punitive approach to relapse interrupts treatment, it is viewed as counterproductive. When fighting an addiction to alcohol, drugs or tobacco, relapse is natural. Removal from the community, family, and treatment does nothing to resolve the problem that is likely the cause of criminal behavior.<sup>2</sup> Bodega offers an alternative. The problem causing addiction is addressed in the context of the challenges to preventing relapse in the community. By connecting family support networks, treatment providers, and supervision officers during the recovery process, criminal justice personnel begin to see addiction as a chronic illness and are armed with the resources to develop non-punitive responses to relapse.

These relationships are being tested through formal partnerships with the New York State Division of Parole and the New York City Department of Probation. Bodega provides Family Case Management services to substance-abusing offenders under supervision whose families are willing to participate. Family members are encouraged to work with supervision agencies to monitor their loved one's progress and provide strategic support and advice. In turn, supervision officers have greater insight into the offender's circumstances and, when faced with relapse, can now pull together a network of supporters (family, treatment providers, Bodega) and fashion a response that moves the offender towards recovery. Changes in supervision practice are already evident. Parole officers now bring Bodega staff along when they visit the families of soon-to-be-released offenders to start its relationship with the family from the first possible moment.

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<sup>1</sup> Sixty-five percent of families engaged at La Bodega have reported intergenerational histories of substance abuse, while over 35 percent reported histories of involvement in the criminal justice system.

<sup>2</sup> Caulkins, Jonathan P., et al., *Mandatory Minimum Drug Sentences: Throwing Away the Key or the Taxpayer's Money* (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 1977), pp. xvii-xviii.

### **Financial Resources and Support Needed for the Program:**

The annual budget of La Bodega is \$1.1 million. Since opening, the program has served over 500 families. An average of ten families are served each day in Family Case Management with an average of four individuals per family.

The primary funding sources are the New York City Department of Mental Health, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Service and the New York State Division of Parole, New York City Office of Probation, and the New York City Council.

La Bodega was able to gain the support of local government and the state because the government realized that La Bodega's services would better enable parole and probation officers to do their jobs and that the family is important in the treatment process of offenders.

The program continues to be monitored by the National Advisory Board and the Community Advisory Board.

### **Community Involvement:**

La Bodega works in a primarily Latino community with a strong emphasis on family with clear roles generally delineated for the members of each family. The main objective of the program is to assist families to identify resources within themselves and within the community in order to identify and strengthen connections. The program has linkage agreements with several community-based agencies in the area.

La Bodega has had volunteers from the PAPAS Program (Parenting Awareness Prevents Abandonment), local high schools, law schools, and universities. Senator Connors' Office awarded the program a grant that was utilized to honor the rich and diverse Latino culture of the community through a series of three workshops focusing on music, dance and literature.

Regular outreach occurs with all churches and church-based organizations in the community. A recent survey indicates that La Bodega currently works with over a dozen faith-based community agencies, including organizations of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Hare Krishna, and Evangelical faiths.

La Bodega has a formal research affiliation with John Jay College of Criminal Justice. La Bodega is collaborating with researchers from John Jay on a research project and has an agreement with them to use John Jay students as interns. In addition, students seeking masters in social work from New York University, Hunter College, and Columbia University have interned at La Bodega. Volunteers from local high schools have also come after school.

### **How Does La Bodega Measure Success:**

Researchers from the Vera Institute are conducting a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of La Bodega's services and outcomes. The results have not yet been published, but preliminary data indicates that Bodega can, in fact, engage families and

increase their cohesion and support for drug users, and reduce the justice system's reliance on jail to punish relapse.

In addition to formal evaluations, Bodega is able to gauge the impact of its work by the feedback it receives from government partners and the requests for national training and technical assistance. The NYPD, Parole and Probation have encouraged the program to expand its services. Those expansions include: increasing its "catchment area" to include the entire 7<sup>th</sup> Precinct; the creation of a La Bodega outpost in public housing—either through housing police or NYC Housing Authority—so that Bodega has an outpost that is physically situated where more client families live; and, the expansion of the target population to include families struggling with mental illness.

Nationally, there has been no shortage of interest in Bodega's work. Through Family Justice, the program's new 501(c)(3), it is currently exploring projects with drug courts, two HOPE VI public housing sites, and a project to work with juveniles on probation through NYC's Neighborhood Shield Program.

Elements which are critical to the success or failure of La Bodega include: training of police, parole, and probation officers; staff meetings; ability to do home-based work; group work; and cultural activities, including La Bodega's cookbook, community murals, photography journal, and dance and poetry workshops.

#### **What Issues Remain a Challenge for La Bodega:**

La Bodega is located in the Lower East Side, an area rich in resources and services for members of the community. However, affordable housing and legal advocacy in the area would benefit the community. Currently, any infraction or involvement with the criminal justice system by an individual could mean eviction for the entire family or exclusion from an individual integral to the family support structure.

#### **Recommendations to New and Emerging Programs:**

- It is important to diversify your funding sources as soon as possible.
- It is important to research the neighborhood before setting up direct service programs and assessing the needs of your population.
- Think critically about political and economic sustainability.

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