



Since 1980, **SHORTSTOP** has set thousands of youth offenders back on the right path before they have strayed too far. This unique juvenile crime diversion program provides a cost-effective alternative to prosecution and utilizes science-based models for reducing delinquency among youth. By completing SHORTSTOP, youth are able to move forward in a positive direction, without serving jail time or having a criminal record.

SHORTSTOP works to break the cycle that turns youth into repeat offenders. It's a wake-up call that has proven to be extremely successful. In fact, studies show that alternatives to detention are not only cost-effective, but they are much more effective than incarceration at facilitating long-term behavior changes. SHORTSTOP is an integral part of larger system reform, acting as a key stakeholder on Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative efforts in Orange County. Its success has positioned Project Youth OCBF as a leader, not only in Southern California but throughout the nation, in providing successful youth diversion programs that are replicable state and nationwide.



Studies show that unless youth are taught the consequences of crime early, their crimes will escalate. This holds true in Orange County, where 69% of juvenile probationers go on to break the law again. All youth are at risk for delinquency, but our Latino youth are particularly vulnerable. While Latinos represent 49% of Orange County's youth, they account for nearly 80% of all convicted juveniles and 94% of youth gang members.

# the problem

The importance of early intervention programs is indisputable. To meet these needs, SHORTSTOP partners with the Orange County Probation Department, local police departments and school districts to reach out early to at-risk youth early, to prevent youth delinquency from escalating into chronic criminal behavior.

## the solution

The overwhelming success of SHORTSTOP is due, in large part, to mandatory parental participation. Together, first-time juvenile offenders and their parents participate in diversion sessions led by volunteer attorneys and legal professionals. SHORTSTOP is provided in English and Spanish by bilingual, bicultural staff. Services include:



### **Two 4-hour Program Sessions**

Program sessions are held in a courtroom and include a visit to the holding cell, presentations from paroled convicts, a trial simulation, and numerous family strengthening exercises.

Sessions focus on providing legal education, including parents' legal rights and responsibilities; promoting personal responsibility; and increasing protective factors, such as parental monitoring, self control, peer refusal skills, school bonding, and participation in pro-social activities.

### **Mandatory Homework Assignments**

Another critical part of SHORTSTOP is what happens at home. Homework assignments include reading legal education materials, interviewing a working professional in the community to explore future career paths, and completing family communication exercises and goal-setting assignments.

### **Restorative Justice Plan**

An individualized plan is created for each youth that includes financial restitution, victim apology letters, and community service.

### **Case Management and Referral Services**

As needed, youth and families are referred to additional mental health, family therapy, or other wrap-around services.



# our impact



Evaluation studies show that SHORTSTOP makes a measurable difference in the lives of local youth and families and to the well-being of our community. The results of our most recent recidivism study with the Orange County Probation Department indicate that 94% of our program participants are successfully diverted from the legal system for at least one year.

Youth like Mateo\* know just how life-changing SHORTSTOP can be. Recently, Mateo called Project Youth OCBF to apply for an internship. He explained why an internship in SHORTSTOP would mean so much to him. Seven months prior, he'd attended the program after being caught spraying graffiti on street signs with his tagging crew.

"Ever since I went through SHORTSTOP, I've known that I wanted to work with teens that were caught up like I was. I know that if I hadn't got caught, I would be kickin' it with the wrong group. Some of my closest friends then are now in the gang that was recruiting us. Because of SHORTSTOP, my life is going in a different direction," he said.

Since completing the program, Mateo has graduated from high school and enrolled at Golden West College. He plans to transfer to a four-year university to study criminal justice. "I just needed someone to tell me that I could make it. That's what SHORTSTOP did...it gave me confidence."

\* name has been changed

## testimonials

*"SHORTSTOP was a pivotal and humbling experience for my family. I can say with all certainty that it was a game-changer. Our daughter went from flirting with dangerous choices to being an honor student setting off to college this fall. SHORTSTOP showed her where the dead-end path she was on was heading. It was a life-altering intervention, for which we are deeply grateful."*

- SHORTSTOP parent

*"SHORTSTOP taught me that taking the easy way out will never benefit me. It also made me realize who I really am, and it's definitely not a delinquent."*

- SHORTSTOP youth

*"I am so thankful for SHORTSTOP. It helped me in so many ways. At the start of the program when I had to put on an orange jumpsuit and was handcuffed, I saw my mother look at me and I burst into tears. At first, the instructor treated us like we were really in juvenile hall. This was a reality check for me, especially because I'm now 18 years old. The guest speakers helped me understand that with every decision I make there are consequences. My actions have changed. I don't hang out with the same people, and I am more focused on school than ever. I'm so glad I got this second change to turn my life around."*

- SHORTSTOP youth

# investing in the future of Orange County

SHORTSTOP is made possible through financial support from donors who believe in and invest in our mission. We rely on this support to cover program costs, including the cost for youth and family members to participate. No family is ever turned away if they cannot afford to pay the program fees. Financial support is also needed to meet increasing Justice Center fees (most sessions are held in a courtroom), program materials, and other program expenses.

When you give to Project Youth OCBF, your donation helps local youth to achieve their potential, empower people of all ages to lead healthier lives, and strengthen the bonds of family and community in Orange County.

Each year, SHORTSTOP provides hundreds of at-risk youth and their families with crisis intervention and diversion services. Youth are deterred from a life of crime, and families grow stronger. Our community benefits by having healthier youth who are redirected to safer and brighter futures.

#### *Youth Outcomes*

- Reduced alcohol and drug use
- Increased legal education
- Reduced delinquency and recidivism
- Improved family relationships

#### *Families Outcomes*

- Increased parenting skills and parental monitoring
- Increased family communication and conflict resolution skills
- Increased substance abuse education and legal education

#### *Community Outcomes*

- Increased access to agencies that provide additional substance abuse, mental health, and other “wrap around” services
- Strengthened outpatient system of care in Orange County for youth substance abuse



## mission statement

Project Youth OCBF's mission is to keep at-risk youth in school, healthy, and drug-free through education, counseling, mentoring, and family strengthening.

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