

### **OVERVIEW:**

STEP-UP is a partnership between county and local non-profit organizations aimed at providing alternative custody programs for a growing jail population in Shasta County.

### **CHALLENGE:**

In 2011, the three counties that comprise the Shasta-Tehama-Trinity Joint Community College District were impacted by the passage of Assembly Bill 109 (AB109), known as the Public Safety Realignment Act. This law directed that low level and non-violent offenders convicted of specific offenses be transferred from state prison to local control at the county level. As the largest county in the Shasta College service area Shasta County experienced the greatest impact the realignment mandated by AB109. The direct result of AB109 was that the number of individuals released into Shasta County stretched the extremely limited budgets of the sheriff and probation departments to a point where innovative solution and bold approaches needed to be taken.

According to the Shasta County Probation Department in 2017 there were 2,971 adults in varying degrees of supervision in Shasta County. This combined with a jail capacity of 383 placed a tremendous strain on the law enforcement community in Shasta County. This presented a challenges for our local law enforcement community in terms of finding ways to manage the offenders that would have to be released into the community because of the limited capacity at the Shasta County Jail. Among the primary obstacles our community faced was how to provide programs for released individuals that would increase their future economic opportunities while simultaneously providing supervision and accountability to enhance public safety.

Another barrier that presented itself was the historically low academic levels of formerly incarcerated individuals in our community. Many of these individuals had not completed high school nor did they possess a GED. This proved to be a barrier to them finding employment in our community. Shasta County needed to find a way to assist students in acquiring both basic academic and technical skills in order to secure employment with businesses that were hiring in our community. Simultaneously, Shasta County had to find or develop employers in industries that would be willing to hire individuals with a previous history of incarceration.

### **INNOVATIVE SOLUTION:**

To meet these challenges head on Eva Jimenez from the Shasta College Economic and Economic and Workforce Development Division partnered with Shasta County Sheriff Tom Bosenko to create the Shasta Technical Education Program-United Partnership (STEP-UP) in 2013. Shortly after its inception, the Shasta County Probation Department joined our partnership. The intent behind STEP-UP was to design an innovative solution to providing economic opportunities

through education while at the same time providing structure and supervision for formerly incarcerated individuals in Shasta County. This proved to be just the bold and innovative approach our community needed. STEP-UP worked with local industry and labor market data agencies to identify which vocational and academic programs would result in the greatest chance of post-graduation employment and which employment sectors would be most open to hiring formerly incarcerated students. This research resulted in six programs being offered through STEP-UP. These programs included business and office administration, automotive technology, heavy equipment operation and maintenance, welding, and wildland firefighting. These six programs became the foundation of the STEP-UP academic program.

Finally STEP-UP reached out to the Shasta County Probation Department, the Good News Rescue Mission, and the California Heritage YouthBuild Academy (CHYBA) to round out our partnership team. The Shasta County Sheriff's Department assigned their work-release supervisor as a liaison to our program to help provide referrals to STEP-UP and provide supervision for these students. The Good News Rescue Mission and CHYBA provided us with students from their academic programs and in-kind support. The Shasta County Probation Department provided us with a dedicated Probation Assistant to assist in vetting these students and acting as a liaison between our program and probation officers.

### **ORIGINALITY:**

While there are a number of programs across California that address educating currently and formerly incarcerated individuals, STEP-UP is unique on a number of fronts. STEP-UP is one of the few programs in the country that work with local law enforcement to operate an alternative custody program. This allows individuals who are assigned to work release as part of their sentence or are under close supervision to attend classes as opposed to remaining in custody. The unique nature of the partnership that STEP-UP has formed with probation and the sheriff's department allow for potential students to be vetted and supervised while attending classes.

STEP-UP has also worked on closing the high school equivalency gap with our partners from CHYBA and the Good News Rescue Mission's Academic Center. These two organizations have been able to provide complimentary student options such as adult education and high school completion classes, along with Shasta College's adult education program to provide multiple pathways for students who want to earn a high school diploma or a GED. Having students earn a GED or high school diploma increases a student's earning potential as well as makes them eligible to receive federal financial aid which reduces economic stress on our students as they go attend classes.

Another unique feature of the STEP-UP program is the fact that we have dedicated staff members that serve as case managers for our students. Shasta College employs a program director and a student success facilitator who work with STEP-UP students to help them navigate all the steps to matriculation as well as supporting success in their academic programs. We are also assisted by the probation department dedicating a probation assistant to assist our staff with oversight and vetting of students. Staff assist students' class selection, providing students with

financial and technical assistance, referrals to community resources, and co-creating individualized pathways or roadmaps to follow in completing their certificate or degree program. Having dedicated staff also provides another layer of accountability and oversight of students in STEP-UP. Students are required to check-in weekly with program staff as well as attend monthly student meetings.

In response to our innovative work and initial results, STEP-UP was able to secure grants from the non-profit initiative Renewing Communities in 2016. In 2017, STEP-UP secured financial support from the Community Corrections Partnership Executive Committee of Shasta County (CCPEC) to expand the number of students enrolled in STEP-UP. Securing these grants provided STEP-UP with the ability to implement important innovative program strategies. Our program began to cover a significant portion of student expenses during the academic year. Examples of these expenses include the costs of textbooks, school, supplies, safety equipment, tools, drug testing, and ensuring that coursed fees were are covered. STEP-UP provides a weekly food voucher for a hot meal on campus during class sessions. Students are allowed to keep their safety equipment and tools so that they are ready to begin work immediately upon completion of their program.

#### **COST-EFFECTIVENESS:**

Upon securing the Renewing Communities grant in 2016 STEP-UP operated with a budget of approximately \$250,000. This funding provided for a cohort of 50 students, a program manager and a full-time probation assistant to serve as a liaison to the program and provide student support. Funding a probation assistant saved Shasta County over \$58,000 per year for the three years our grant was in place.

Securing the financial assistance form the Shasta County CCPEC allowed for us to double the size of our cohort from 50 to 100 students. According to the Shasta County Sheriff's Department is costs an average of \$110 per day to incarcerate an individual in the Shasta County Jail. This figure factors in the costs for staff, food, medical, and operational expenses. Based on these figures the average cost of incarcerating an individual for a year in the Shasta County Jail is \$40,150. In comparison it costs approximately \$5,000 per student per academic year to have a student participate in STEP-UP. When operating a full cohort of students STEP-UP has saved the taxpayers of Shasta County approximately \$3,515,000 by having individuals go to community college as opposed to being incarcerated.

Moreover, funding a probation assistant through private grant dollars has saved Shasta County Probation and Sheriff's Departments were able to save countless man-hours over the past two years. Having the probation liaison meet with students on campus and provide feedback to deputies in work release and probation officers on student progress allows the entire process to be more efficient and effective in ensuring public safety.

STEP-UP has maximized our internal resources by collaboration with programs such as EOPS, foster youth, and disabled students programs. STEP-UP has worked with the California Department of Rehabilitation to provide resources for qualified students.

### **RESULTS:**

STEP-UP has experienced tremendous academic achievement over the past several years. This is a testament to our student's sincere desire to change their lives as well as the effectiveness of our partnership. During the 2017-18 academic year alone we had 15 students inducted in the Phi Theta Kappa Honoris Society in recognition of their academic excellence. Over the course of the past three semesters 68 of our students made the Dean's List with a 3.5 GPA or above. This year, STEP-UP had its largest graduating class to date with 29 students being awarded Certificates in Technical Education (CTE)/or Associates Degrees. STEP-UP has maintained a 3.01 GPA for the spring semester. Over the past five years 15 percent of students who left the program before completing it did so because they had secured full-time employment. This is a direct benefit to our community.

Mindful of the partnership's goal of ensuring public safety and alleviating impacts on our county jail, we are proud of the fact that according to data from the Shasta County Probation Department, over the past five years STEP-UP has only had seven current or former students receive new criminal charges, a recidivism rate of just 4.52 percent. This has saved tens of thousands of dollars in jail resources, probation staff resources, and court time.

Our success has been noted at the state level. STEP-UP was named the 2017 California Community College Chancellors Office Student Success Program of the Year. This designation is given to the most effective program in any area of student assistance out of all 114 California Community Colleges, a tremendous accomplishment especially considering our relatively modest student population.

In addition, based on the success of our program the California Legislature awarded Shasta College's STEP-UP program a \$1.5 million innovation award to expand the program to the surrounding counties in our district and provide mini-grants to community colleges and counties across the state the ability to replicate the STEP-UP model in their own community.

### **PROGRAM POINT OF CONTACT:**

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