

Alternatives to Detention: Reducing Juvenile Detention and Involvement in the Justice System

ATD goal

Reduce future involvement in the juvenile justice system through community-based interventions.

A recent SANDAG evaluation¹ of the San Diego County Probation Department’s Alternatives to Detention (ATD) program highlights the successful outcomes of youth involved in a three-year, California Board of State Community Corrections (BSCC) grant-funded project. With the continued drop in juvenile arrests rates (13.9 per 1,000 in 2017 compared to 56.9 in 2008)² and the corresponding transformation of the San Diego

County Probation’s juvenile supervision model (which prioritizes services in the community over detention when possible), the role of ATD for justice involved youth is increasing. This CJ Flash highlights some of the positive results of ATD that have contributed to its expansion.

The ATD program design is based on the evidence-based Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)³ and provides a continuum of community-based and family-supported detention alternatives for youth who are arrested or referred to Probation, but do not require secure detention and would benefit from community-based options. ATD consists of two core service paths: intensive case management and a non-secure shelter, or “cool beds” plus intensive case management. SANDAG conducted a process and impact evaluation utilizing a weighted historical comparison group to document both the implementation and outcomes of ATD. ATD served **1,242** youth throughout the region between March 2015 and December 2017.

ATD Partners

South Bay Community Services (lead agency), North County Lifeline, San Diego Youth Services, Mental Health Systems, Inc., SAY San Diego, regional law enforcement agencies, San Diego County Public Defender, and San Diego County District Attorney

Cool bed

Provision of a safe, temporary shelter, in a licensed foster care home for youth unable to return home safely.

- **8%** of youth utilized cool bed services.
- **5 days** (range 1-20) was the average (median) stay.

Highlight 1 – Characteristics of ATD participants



74%
male

Hispanic
55%

White
23%

Black
12%

Other
8%

Asian
2%

16

years old
on average

41%

not
enrolled in
traditional
school

67% entered ATD on a misdemeanor offense

26% on a felony offense

7% on a status offense

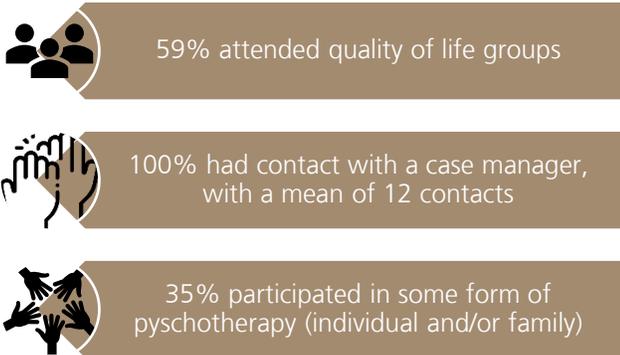
¹ SANDAG (2019). *Alternatives to Detention*. San Diego, CA: Author. Available at sandag.org/uploads/publicationid/publicationid_4588_25769.pdf

² SANDAG (2018). *Arrest 2017: Law Enforcement Response to Crime in San Diego Region*. San Diego CA: SANDAG. Available at sandag.org/uploads/publicationid/publicationid_4568_25452.pdf

³ Annie E. Casey Foundation: Juvenile detention Alternatives Initiative. Available at <https://www.aecf.org/work/juvenile-justice/jdai/>

Highlight 2 – ATD participants received extensive services

Youth were involved with ATD around four months (115.87 days on average, SD= 59.9).



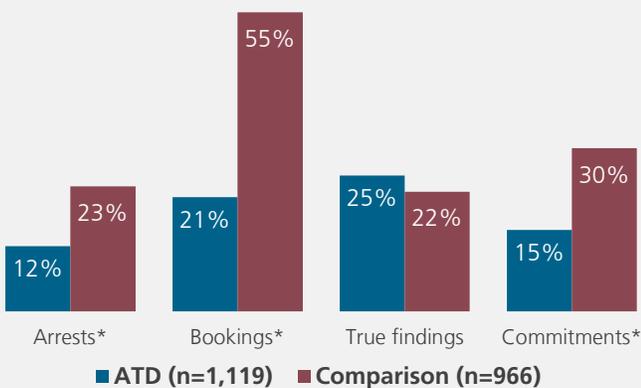
Highlight 3 – ATD program completion status

91%

Successfully completed the program (no new booking into juvenile hall during participation)

Highlight 4 – ATD youth had less contact with the juvenile justice system

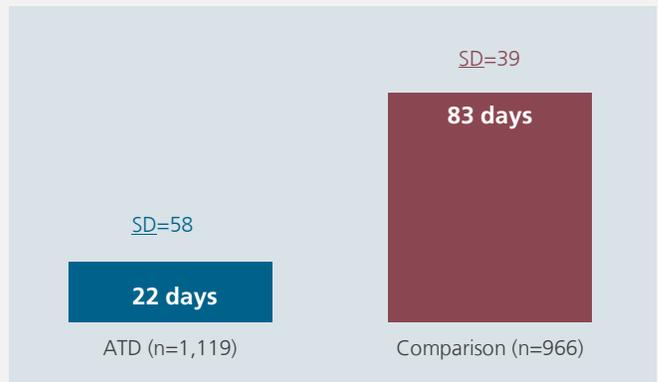
ATD treatment and comparison recidivism during and 12-months post-participation*



*Statistically significant at $p < .05$ level

Highlight 5 – ATD participants spent fewer days detained on average than the comparison group

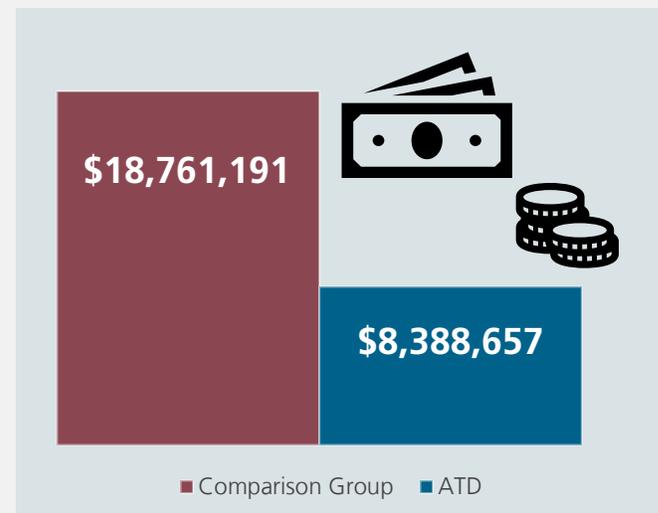
ATD treatment and comparison group differed in average days detained post-participation*



*Statistically significant at $p < .05$ level

Highlight 6 – ATD detention costs were significantly less than the comparison group

\$10.3 million cost difference between ATD and comparison group*



*Statistically significant at $p < .05$ level