

# **El Dorado County Probation Department's Environmental Emergency Preparedness Planning**

## **Program Narrative**

### **Proposal Abstract**

The El Dorado County Probation Department's Juvenile Treatment Center (JTC) aims to enhance its emergency evacuation and shelter-in-place processes to provide trauma-informed care for detained youth during environmental emergency situations. These situations include sheltering in place, evacuations, heavy snowfall, road closures, and wildfire smoke. To achieve this goal, the JTC will establish a Youth and Family Advisory Council, which will be consulted to improve emergency procedures. The pilot Youth and Family Advisory Council will serve as a model for expanding such councils to other areas of the department in the future. The anticipated outcomes of the Youth and Family Advisory Council are to ensure that all experiences related to environmental emergencies prioritize trauma-informed care for detained youth and to use this pilot to inform system-wide improvements guided by the voices of youth and families. The impact of these improvements will extend beyond El Dorado County's youth to those from other counties across California placed in the JTC under contractual agreements. By creating an emotionally and psychologically safe space for justice-involved youth and families to provide their input regarding environmental emergency planning, the proposal seeks to remove barriers and foster collaboration and trust to drive meaningful system-level changes.

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#### **a. Description of the Issue**

This grant proposal aims to address the challenges faced by El Dorado County Probation in providing secure and trauma-informed services to justice-involved youth during environmental emergencies. The closure of the Juvenile Detention Facility (JDF) on the West Slope of El Dorado County and subsequent reliance on the Juvenile Treatment Center (JTC) in South Lake Tahoe for

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all bookings have highlighted the need for a comprehensive environmental emergency plan. Environmental hazards such as snowfall, road closures, and wildfires have resulted in significant disruptions to transportation, family connectedness, and access to services. To ensure the highest quality of care and safety during such emergencies, the proposal seeks to implement a robust plan that incorporates trauma-informed practices and reflects the voices of justice-involved youth and families.

**About El Dorado County:** El Dorado County is in the Northeast section of California and is bordered by Sacramento County to the West and the State of Nevada to the East. It stretches across ninety miles with the Sierra Nevada Mountain range separating the Western and Eastern portions of the County. El Dorado is a rural County with a population of approximately 192,600 people<sup>1</sup> and only two incorporated cities: Placerville (approx. 10,700) and South Lake Tahoe (approx. 21,200). Most of the population resides on the West Slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountain range. The drive from the West Slope of the County to the South Lake Tahoe basin on the East side winds several thousand feet up in elevation before dropping back into basin on the two narrow lanes of Highway 50.

El Dorado County Probation operates three facilities in El Dorado County: a Field Office/Adult Day Reporting Center on the West Slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountain range, and a Field Office and Juvenile Treatment Center (JTC) on the mountain in South Lake Tahoe. These two locations are separated by approximately seventy miles and one hour and twenty minutes of drive time on Highway 50. The JTC in South Lake Tahoe operates as a twenty or forty bed facility depending on the needs of the facility, youth demographics, and the average daily population. El

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<sup>1</sup> [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: United States](#)

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Dorado County Probation previously operated an additional Juvenile Detention Facility (JDF) on the West Slope until 2019 when it unexpectedly and permanently closed its doors to the youth of El Dorado County to make way for an adult Homeless Navigation Center, leaving the JTC as the only JDF in the county.

Although most of the population in El Dorado County resides on the West Slope, after the West Slope JDF closed, all youth detained in El Dorado County regardless of their location of residence, must now be booked at the JTC in South Lake Tahoe. The seventy-mile distance to book a youth who lives on the West Slope of the County created challenges around transportation, maintaining family connectedness, intra system communication, and access to services during poor weather conditions in South Lake Tahoe. Although much of these challenges were rapidly overcome by the dedication and flexibility of JTC staff and administration through relationships developed with local justice partners and the Court, it quickly became apparent that the youth, their families, and the JTC staff would be negatively impacted during adverse environmental conditions on a continuing basis for many due to the remote distance from their homes. The environmental awareness that now must always be considered in the context of operations at the only JDF in El Dorado County are poor road conditions and closures caused by rain and snow accumulation, rock falls, and mudslides. The closure of the JDF on the West Slope sharply defined the need for a more robust environmental emergency plan that is trauma informed and incorporates the voice of justice involved youth and families.

After the closure of the JDF on the West Slope, the JTC would face a wildfire and an unprecedented level of snowfall - over 700 inches according to the University of Berkeley, Central

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Sierra Snow Lab<sup>2</sup>. In August of 2021, the Caldor fire burned in El Dorado and neighboring Alpine and Amador Counties for sixty-eight days, consuming a total of 221,835 acres, (345 square miles) and destroying 1,003 structures on both slopes of the Sierra Nevada Mountain range<sup>3</sup>. The JTC was forced to evacuate all youth to the nearest JDF in the County of Placer, ninety miles to the Southeast where they and several El Dorado County Probation staff remained an entire month until the evacuation order was lifted.

While El Dorado County Probation staff were fully prepared for the evacuation it still presented difficulties for the youth, their families, and the staff in the form of poor transportation quality, limited opportunities for the youth to connect with their family (several of whom were also evacuated), and challenges meeting the basic needs of staff working at a remote JDF. A justice involved youth, when asked how their experience was during the evacuation of the JTC replied “During the Caldor fire, I had a grade 2 high ankle sprain, was put on crutches, and was seated sideways in the back of a transport van during our facility evacuation. The road that we took made me carsick because I couldn't face forward. Upon arriving at Placer County Juvenile Hall, I experienced some of the most difficult times in being locked up prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was unable to visit with my family, was only able to visit via zoom, and even that was difficult. Considering the collective experiences through COVID-19, and the Caldor fire, and even our record-breaking winter, our virtual conferencing capabilities leave room for improvement. As virtual conferencing becomes an everyday necessity, it is apparent that these capabilities should become accessible when we are not housed in our facility. These virtual visits are sometimes of major importance to the youth, and providing the mobile technology to make them accessible to

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<sup>2</sup> [UC Berkeley CSSL](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Caldor Fire | CAL FIRE](#)

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us will have a positive impact on the youth. I also think that we need a new larger transport vehicle since we have gotten rid of ours.” The challenges endured by this youth were mirrored by the other youth in custody at that time and again brought to light the need for improvements in the environmental emergency preparedness plan informed by the lived experiences of youth and families in the juvenile justice system in El Dorado County

**Target population:** Brain research shows that adolescents are less able to regulate their own behavior in emotionally charged contexts<sup>4</sup> demonstrating the need for trauma informed environmental emergency practices. Ninety percent of youth involved in the justice system have a history of trauma, therefore evidence shows that secure facilities should be developmentally appropriate and, ensure coordination and collaboration between families, communities, and partner systems, and provide monitoring that is paired with services and programs aimed at positive behavior change (see Footnote 4). These evidence-based practices through a developmental approach to promoting public safety are a primary focus of the JTC but they become increasingly difficult to achieve during environmental emergencies, of which the JTC experiences consistently every year in the form of snow fall, road closures, and wildfires. This funding will be utilized to ensure justice involved youth detained at the JTC will have the highest possible quality of connection, collaboration, and coordination with their families and between systems, in addition to the highest possible quality of services and programs at all times, intentionally reflecting the voice of youth and family in emergency procedures during adverse environmental conditions.

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<sup>4</sup> Helman, Delgado, (2022). *The evolution of juvenile justice and probation practices in California - A history and review of juvenile justice as administered by county probation departments in California (1994–2019)*. California Probation Research Institute.

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### b. Project Design and Implementation

1. **Youth and Family Advisory Council:** The grant will establish the Youth and Family Advisory Council, led by justice-involved youth and families, to partner with JTC staff in effecting system change. The Council will create a safe forum for experience sharing, reducing stress, and mitigating trauma among detained youth and staff. Additionally, it will serve as a pilot program to extend advisory councils into other areas of the Juvenile Division, improving internal processes. The planning phase will determine the Council's parameters, evaluate the suitability of participants, and develop a process to engage former justice-involved youth and their families.
2. **Immediate Equipment and Resource Needs:** The grant will provide essential equipment and resources to enhance the experience and outcomes of justice-involved youth during environmental emergencies. This includes:
  - Printers, hotspots, laptops with camera capabilities, and internet access for enhanced communication and connectivity.
  - Satellite phones to ensure communication continuity during disruptions in regular networks.
  - Air scrubbers for indoor smoke abatement to maintain a safe and healthy environment.
  - Flashlights and batteries for emergency lighting during power outages.
  - Recreational equipment to support youth well-being during emergency situations.
  - An appropriately equipped emergency transportation vehicle to ensure safe evacuation.
  - Back-up generators to maintain facility operations during power outages.

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3. **Humanitarian Support:** The funding will also cater to the human needs of justice-involved youth, their families, and staff before, during, and after environmental emergencies. This support includes:

- A communications application to inform parents and loved ones of the youth's status and facility updates.
- Trauma interventions for youth and staff provided by external clinicians on an as-needed basis.
- Evacuation expenses, including long-term housing and charges at host facilities.

### c. Capabilities and Competencies

El Dorado County Probation Department's envisions safe communities through changed lives by providing public safety with an emphasis on collaborative partnerships and innovative practices in Corrections, with accountability and compassion. The department's well-trained, dedicated, and compassionate employees are its most valuable asset.

Specific strengths of the Juvenile Treatment Center's current emergency plan and capabilities include:

- Experience and adaptability demonstrated during past environmental emergencies, such as wildfires and heavy snowfall.
- Commitment to trauma-informed care and evidence-based practices to meet the needs of justice-involved youth.

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- The Youth and Family Advisory Council's establishment will further enhance collaboration and communication with justice-involved youth and families, leading to improved services and outcomes.
- The JTC currently has a **Mutual Aid Agreement** in place with the Placer County Juvenile Detention Facility (JDF). This agreement enables the two facilities to support each other during emergencies, such as wildfires or facility evacuations. The collaboration between the JTC and Placer County JDF fosters seamless coordination and resources sharing, ensuring the safety and well-being of detained youth across county lines.
- There is ongoing work to establish a **Sacramento Region Mutual Aid agreement** to expand the network of support to include other neighboring counties within the Sacramento region. By engaging in mutual aid agreements, the JTC demonstrates its dedication to proactive emergency planning and preparedness, allowing for swift and effective responses to potential crises.

By implementing the proposed project, El Dorado County Probation aims to ensure justice-involved youth detained at the JTC experience the highest possible quality of connection, collaboration, and coordination with their families and between systems. The plan will intentionally incorporate the voices of youth and families in emergency procedures, emphasizing safety, trauma-informed care, and positive behavior change. With established mutual aid agreements, adaptive response strategies, trauma-informed practices, and a focus on collaboration, the Juvenile Treatment Center demonstrates a high level of capability and competency in emergency planning and preparedness. The JTC is well-positioned to ensure the safety and welfare of detained youth during environmental emergencies while continually striving for improvements

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informed by the voices of youth and families. This commitment to excellence and ongoing improvement reflects the JTC's dedication to providing the best possible care to justice-involved youth in challenging circumstances.

### **d. Plan for Collecting the Data Required for This Solicitation's Performance Measures**

#### **Performance Measure 1: Establishment and Functioning of the Youth and Family**

##### **Advisory Council**

#### **Data Collection Methods:**

- **Documentation Review:** Review meeting minutes, agendas, and records related to the planning phase and establishment of the Youth and Family Advisory Council.
- **Surveys and Interviews:** Conduct surveys and interviews with justice-involved youth, their families, JTC staff, and Council members to assess the Council's functioning and effectiveness.
- **Observations:** Observe Council meetings to understand the dynamics and contributions of members.

#### **Data Collection Timeline:**

- Conduct initial surveys and interviews during the planning phase to assess the parameters and participation criteria of the Council.
- Regularly review meeting minutes and agendas to track Council activities and progress.
- Conduct follow-up surveys and interviews after the Council's establishment to assess its impact on reducing stress and mitigating trauma among detained youth and staff.

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### Performance Measure 2: Acquisition and Use of Emergency Equipment and Resources

#### Data Collection Methods:

- **Inventory Tracking:** Maintain a comprehensive inventory of the emergency equipment and resources acquired through the grant funding.
- **Documentation Review:** Collect receipts, purchase orders, and invoices related to the procurement of equipment and resources.
- **Usage Reports:** Require regular usage reports from staff members to track the utilization of equipment and resources during environmental emergencies.

#### Data Collection Timeline:

- Continuously update the inventory as equipment and resources are acquired and utilized.
- Collect and review documentation related to purchases and expenditures periodically throughout the grant period.
- Regularly receive usage reports from staff members after each environmental emergency event.

### Performance Measure 3: Provision of Humanitarian Support during Environmental Emergencies

#### Data Collection Methods:

- **Case Records:** Maintain detailed case records for justice-involved youth, families, and staff impacted by environmental emergencies.

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- **Post-Emergency Assessments:** Conduct post-emergency assessments with youth and staff to identify their needs and experiences during the environmental emergency.
- **Expenditure Tracking:** Keep records of expenses incurred for humanitarian support, including communication applications, trauma interventions, food, and evacuation expenses.

### **Data Collection Timeline:**

- Maintain case records for all justice-involved youth, families, and staff impacted by environmental emergencies throughout the grant period.
- Conduct post-emergency assessments shortly after each environmental emergency event to capture real-time experiences and needs.
- Track expenditures for humanitarian support continuously and document them for reporting purposes.

### **Performance Measure 4: Evaluation of Program Outcomes and Improvements**

### **Data Collection Methods:**

- **Surveys and Feedback Forms:** Distribute surveys and feedback forms to justice-involved youth, families, and staff to gather feedback on program outcomes and improvements.
- **Data Analysis:** Analyze quantitative data, such as survey responses and usage reports, to assess the impact of the Youth and Family Advisory Council and emergency equipment/resources.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Analyze qualitative data from interviews, assessments, and feedback forms to identify areas for improvement and success stories.

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### **Data Collection Timeline:**

- Distribute surveys and feedback forms at appropriate intervals to capture continuous feedback on program outcomes.
- Conduct data analysis periodically to track progress and assess the effectiveness of the program.
- Regularly review qualitative data to identify areas of success and areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments to the program.

By implementing this data collection plan, El Dorado County Probation will have a comprehensive understanding of the program's effectiveness and impact on justice-involved youth and staff during environmental emergencies. The data collected will facilitate reporting on performance measures and guide ongoing improvements to ensure the program's success.

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**ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> “El Dorado County, California, Quick Facts.” U.S. Census Bureau, Accessed July 2023.  
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/eldoradocountycalifornia/PST045222>

<sup>2</sup> “University of California, Berkeley.” Central Sierra Snow Lab, Accessed July 2023.  
<https://cssl.berkeley.edu/>

<sup>3</sup> “California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection.” Caldor Fire, Accessed July 2023.  
<https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2021/8/14/caldor-fire>

<sup>4</sup> “The evolution of juvenile justice and probation practices in California - A history and review of juvenile justice as administered by county probation departments in California (1994–2019).” Helman, Delgado, 2022. California Probation Research Institute.