Drug testing is not used to screen applicants

Most applicants, by their own admission, have been doing drugs since they were 10–12 years old. Students who have been doing drugs apply for the Youthbuild program knowing that it does random drug testing, and most of them honestly believe that they can quit. The program does not want to screen for substance abuse. If drugs and alcohol are barriers, the program wants to help prospective students overcome this, along with the other barriers that need to be addressed.

Build relationships before testing

Yuba County YouthBuild staff try to allow enough time for relationships to develop and for students to value the program before they do drug testing.

Orientation gauges commitment, establishes the program's approach

Staff use the two weeks of orientation as a time to clarify the goals of the program and gauge each student's commitment.

The drug and alcohol education component begins with a three-hour presentation during orientation. Pathways Incorporated, Yuba County YouthBuild's drug and alcohol counseling partner, leads this session. Here, students learn the specifics of the drug and alcohol program. They are advised that the Yuba County program is a drug-free work environment. They are told that there will be drug education workshops and random drug testing throughout the year. Young people are also required to sign a statement saying that they will be drug free and understand that they will be tested randomly.

For the first ten weeks after orientation, Pathways leads a drug and alcohol education session one day a week for three hours.

Partner provides assessment and treatment services

If a young person tests positive at any time she/he is referred to Pathways for assessment. In the first year, the Youthbuild staff assessed students and determined what kind of help the students would get based on the test results. They quickly realized that this was not their expertise. Now, Pathways conducts clinical tests to determine the level of help the student needs. The staff defers to Pathways as the experts and have learned to trust Pathways’ assessments and recommendations over time.

The clinical tests help Pathways to determine whether a young person should participate in a residential or outpatient treatment regimen. In either case, the student has to agree to the prescribed treatment as a condition for staying in the program.

Young people are still paid stipends if residential treatment is needed

If a young person goes in for residential treatment, the program has managed a way to still pay him/her a stipend. Most students cannot afford to commit to in-house treatment without some means of sustaining their financial obligations. The program could not retain students that need residential treatment without also arranging to pay their stipends.

Random drug testing happens each week throughout the year

Random testing—three students at a time, once a week—creates consciousness and awareness throughout the program. Young people receive special incentives if they test clean. This provides additional motivation for students to stay sober.

Random testing begins four to six weeks after the program has begun and continues throughout.

If a student tests dirty, she/he cannot participate in the vocational part of the program because of the safety issues this presents on the construction site. The student is assigned menial tasks on site, such as sweeping, instead.

continued
Drug education with random testing is essential

Students need drug education to complement the testing, to become aware of what addiction is, and how it is showing up in their lives.

In-kind support is provided in the partnership with Pathways Incorporated

Pathways Incorporated is a nonprofit organization. It gets funding through the local county government and the State of California. If a student needs treatment, Pathways takes the student’s name and gets local government funding within five days. This can pay for out-patient or residential treatment, whatever is needed. Pathways has provided in-kind support ranging from $36,000 to $40,000 annually over the past three years.

Agreement on approach to drug and alcohol issues

When the staff at Pathways, Incorporated found out that the program was addressing the drug and alcohol issue head on and not kicking students out for dirty drug tests, they approached the program to be a partner. They initiated the partnership because they liked Yuba County’s approach to the issue.

All Yuba County YouthBuild graduates are clean and working. Each year the program graduates 21 students out of approximately 32 that enroll. All of these graduates are working at jobs that are paying $12-$13 per hour.

The program has also demonstrated success with young people who have had to go into residential treatment as a result of their addictions. In 2003, four students went into residential treatment. Three completed the program. One failed to finish treatment and ended up dropping out of Youthbuild completely. During our current cycle, two of the students participated in residential treatment and completed it within six weeks.

Another sign of success is that more students are facing their addictions earlier in the program. The Yuba County YouthBuild staff estimates that 75 percent of the students who enroll in the program either have used or are still using drugs. Some students are able to stop using when they find out that the program is serious about random testing. Others cannot. While Yuba County YouthBuild cannot claim 100 percent success with every student, they can claim that they are succeeding with most of them. They are also confident that all their graduates are drug-free.