

Monterey County
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Children benefit from mental health care

Kids perform better in school, create less mischief, study finds

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A recently released study by the county Health Department suggests that mischief goes down and school performance goes up when children with mental health needs receive help.

The study, conducted by the Health Department's behavioral health division, shows there has been increased service to the county's children, including those in underserved communities. At the same time, school performance in the county has gone up and youths who have gone through the juvenile justice system are less likely to commit more crimes.

"It shows that youths and their families are functioning better," said Dana Edgull, a Behavioral Health Services manager. "There are high levels (of youths) that are not re-offending, that are functioning better at handling their daily life, doing better in school."

More than 2,200 youths received help in 2007 from county organizations, an 11 percent increase over the previous year. And it was twice the number who received help eight years earlier.

The Health Department estimates that about 14,000 children in the county suffer from a serious mental disorder.

The study also shows a correlation between

neglected mental illness and behavioral problems, such as criminal activity and dropping out of school.

According to the Health Department, one in five youths in the nation has a mental health need. About 50 percent of students with emotional or behavioral health problems drop out of school.

In Monterey County, 16 percent of children and youths receiving mental health services have gone through the juvenile justice system. About half in the system have mental health issues.

Monterey County is one of 52 System of Care communities in the nation that receives federal funding to provide and evaluate mental health services for youths, Edgull said. The county is in the final year of a six-year, \$6 million grant.

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