

Press Release

San Luis Obispo County Juvenile Hall adopts innovates with a new rewards system to promote positive behavior and reduce recidivism

San Luis County's Juvenile Hall implements a new application that makes it easier for officers to record and reward positive youth behavior modeled after the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program

San Luis Obispo, California April 7th 2020

[Summary] SLO TRIBUNE | EDUCATION The San Luis Obispo County Juvenile Hall has partnered with Cal Poly's Digital Transformation Hub, powered by Amazon Web Services, to implement a [ePBIS] a system that allows youth in the facility to accrue points for positive behaviors. The system enables officers to recognize hundreds of different identified positive behavioral patterns and reward individuals when they are observed demonstrating rewardable behaviors in accordance with the PBIS programmatic approach. Using an application that runs on a mobile phone, officers scan an individual's barcoded wristband to reward youth for demonstrating a specific behavior, like keeping hands to oneself, listening to others while they are speaking, and not being distracting to others. Youth accumulate points which can be exchanged for items in the commissary like snacks and drinks. The PBIS program, augmented by this solution, will reinforce positive behavior patterns in youth during their stay in juvenile hall while helping to reinforce longer term positive behavior patterns.

[Opportunity/Problem] The San Luis Obispo County Juvenile system works continuously to improve the quality of service they provide to male and female youth. The youth are typically brought in for criminal acts in the community or for violations of probation. During their stay in the Juvenile system and in accordance with PBIS principles, youth behavior is monitored and officers are encouraged to systematically reward youth for exhibiting positive behavior while de-emphasizing a focus on penalizing negative behavior. By employing PBIS methodology, officers hope to reduce the use of force, suicidal ideation, and recidivism by recognizing and reinforcing positive behavior traits. In addition, the officers hope to increase compliance with juvenile hall rules and feel safer in the work environment. Until now, officers were required to manually write down the positive behaviors that they observed on a youth by youth or group wide basis. This made it difficult for officers to accurately and rigorously document and reward behavior leaving operational gaps in the data-driven PBIS approach.

[Approach/Solution]

San Luis Obispo County is changing the way we influence behavior for youth in juvenile hall by leveraging technology to quickly, easily, and accurately tracking youth behavior. Rather than verbally discouraging behaviors that are undesirable, PBIS as a program outlines desired behaviors and expectations. These desirable behaviors are posted around the facility for everyone to see. Everyone in the facility should be able to easily identify, describe, and give examples of these behaviors when asked. Officers intentionally provide verbal and visual recognition when youth exhibit these positive actions. Using a mobile phone application with a barcode scanning feature, behavior is tracked at the individual youth level to detailed metrics of the rewarded behaviors such as when, who, and how they were rewarded. Youth can access My Weekly Profile to see the rewards they received, review reward point accumulation, and compare their rewards with peers anonymously. Officers can use this data to analyze behavioral patterns and help identify trends to provide a better understanding of each youth and how well the PBIS program is working. By using this system, the goal is to increase positive youth behavior, operational consistency, and staff morale while lowering potential uses of force and recidivism.

[Leader quote here]

"This new system has really helped reduce the number of safety related incidents as well as help improve morale for the youth." Said Jim Salio, Chief Probation Officer. "It's much easier now to see how well the PBIS system is performing so we can take a robust, evidenced based approach to how we treat our youth and what is or isn't working programmatically."

[Customer Quote & Experience]

"It was nice to be reminded and appreciated for trying to do the right thing. It can be frustrating when everyone says don't do this, don't do that. I like seeing how I rank against my peers. It's pushed me to go out of my way to get recognized for the positive things so I can buy extra stuff at the commissary. Most of the new guys think it's unfair, but they realize pretty quick that all the rules are posted and that it's pretty easy to figure out. I like hearing the sound of coins when the device captures my wristband, then I know the reward was added to my account. As long as I keep it real and keep my temper, I know I'll keep earning rewards." Said Jeremy, one of the male youths.

“It feels good to be positive in our interactions with the youth and watch the way they respond to it. The system makes it easy to scan multiple wristbands quickly and find the right behavior associated with them, do mass awards or individual awards, etc. The development team showed me a new prototype feature that allows me speak a behavior and not have to navigate menu options to find the right item. Wow. It feels like we are finally catching up with technology.” Said Officer Gonzales.

To learn more about [ePBIS] visit www.xyz.com.

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Customer FAQ (youth)

Q: Can other youth see my reward records?

A: No, you can only see your own data as well as anonymized summary for others in the facility but no individual details.

Q: Can I see which behaviors gave me which points? (Does it matter that youths get to see exactly which good behaviors were rewarded?)

A: Currently all behaviors get you 1 point. You can review all your rewards in in your profile.

Q: How often can I view My Weekly Profile?

A: You can view your weekly profile at any time while you have access to the facility computers. Every point awarded will instantly show up in your profile.

Q: Can I see many points are certain behaviors are worth?

A: Currently all behaviors are worth 1 point.

Q: How do I know that officers record points fairly?

A: Which officer recorded which reward for which youth is all list in the database. A report will show the distribution of all awards.

Q: Why didn't I get points for a behavior when another youth received points for the same behavior?

A: Officer's intentionally reward different youth for different reasons. The idea is to motivate each youth to be the best version of themselves and often different youth have different motives and needs and thus require different rewards to help motivate and change their behaviour.

Customer FAQ (officer)

Q: Will the youth get to see my reward records?

A: No, this data is only collected for internal review.

Q: Will youth be able to see which behaviors they received rewards for?

A: Yes their profile has a listing of all rewards they have every been given.

Q: What if I want to add a positive behavioral pattern that's not on the list?

A: All rewards are contained in a database and easily customizable.

Q: Is it difficult to scroll through and find the right reward for a behavior?

A: The user interface has partitioned each behavior according to the PBIS matrix and then further divided by location. Once you pick a location and category (Safe, Responsible, Considerate) the remaining list of behaviors is relatively small and easy to select from.

Q: What happens if the wristband doesn't scan?

A: You can manually enter the event ID in to the app.

Q: What happens if a youth breaks their wristband?

A: Youth can get another wristband from an officer.

Stakeholder FAQ (who)

Q: Will network connectivity be required to run this application?

A: The application has the ability to operate in offline mode should internet connectivity drop. The system uses cloud technology to run and therefore requires a secure connection to the internet to eventually sync data.

Q: How much do wristbands cost?

A: Wristbands are fairly inexpensive and provided by the juvenile hall.

Q: Is this data being protectively stored?

A: The data is stored in a private subnet inside an AWS Virtual Private Network. The only way to access any data is either through the checkout application that requires authentication or through AWS account which has granular security roles to protect the data.

Q: Can we track disciplinary behaviors as well as rewards for each youth?

A: At this time disciplinary behaviors are tracked in a separate system but it would be possible to join these 2 datasets together in a future version.

Q: How are PBIS communicated to the youth?

A: Charts containing the desirable behaviors are placed around the facility for the youth to see.

Q: How will we know this is working?

A: Behavior data can be analyzed at any time and personal identifiers and other sensitive fields can be redacted as needed. PBIS as a programmatic philosophy is not new and has been shown to produce positive results in academic settings. This program will take a multi-year, data driven approach to assessing how well it impacts youth behavior and outcomes and is a priority for SLO County Juvenile Hall.

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