

oppaga report

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Project HOPE Helped Break the Cycle of Prostitution and Solicitation, But Had Implementation Problems

at a glance

Project HOPE pilot projects were funded in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties for two years. The program aimed to break the cycle of prostitution by treating both prostitutes and their clients, referred to as “johns.” The Governor vetoed program funding for Fiscal Year 2004-05.

The johns’ programs at the two pilot sites used the same model, though the Hillsborough pilot served four times as many clients as the Pinellas pilot. As of January 2004, no john who completed Project HOPE had been re-arrested for solicitation.

The programs for prostitutes used different models at the two sites: Hillsborough focused on service delivery while Pinellas focused on service referrals. In Hillsborough, most prostitutes had not completed the program at the time of our review; of the few who had, none had been re-arrested. The Pinellas pilot did not track whether prostitutes completed the program, so its success could not be determined or compared to the Hillsborough pilot. As contract administrator, the Department of Corrections should have ensured that the pilots collected and reported comparable data.

Several lessons can be learned from Project HOPE. Contract administrators should clearly define and enforce contract requirements; avoid duplicative layers of administration; use statewide recidivism data to measure program performance; and routinely educate and coordinate with key stakeholders.

Scope

Chapter 2002-297, *Laws of Florida*, created Project HOPE (Healthy Options Promoting Esteem), a pilot program in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties intended to break the cycle of prostitution and solicitation. The law also directed OPPAGA to review the program. This report describes how the program worked in each county, assesses performance data, and identifies lessons learned from the pilots.

Background

Project HOPE was a community-based pilot program intended to break the cycle of prostitution. HOPE had two components: it served both prostitutes and persons who solicit prostitutes, who are generally known as “johns.” Participants were referred to the program by judges, state attorneys, public defenders, probation officers, and jail staff.

According to Ch. 2002-297, *Laws of Florida*, any person convicted of prostitution was eligible to participate in Project HOPE. The law directed the program to provide intake and screening, drug screening and urinalysis tests, psychosocial assessments, case management, short-term counseling, community referrals, and referrals to residential and non-residential drug treatment.

The Legislature recognized that to successfully curb the prostitution cycle, intervention efforts must also target the solicitors of prostitution. Any person convicted a first or second time of prostitution solicitation had the option of attending Project HOPE. Participants were required to complete six education sessions and pay \$350 within a six-month period. Upon successful program completion, adjudication was withheld.

For Fiscal Years 2002-03, 2003-04, and 2004-05, the Legislature appropriated \$100,000 in general revenue in the Department of Corrections budget for each of the two pilot sites—one in Pinellas County and one in Hillsborough County.

The Department of Corrections, as required by law, contracted with the two counties for Project HOPE, and each county subcontracted with a private, non-profit provider to operate its pilot program. Pinellas County awarded the program to Operation PAR, which had initiated legislative action to fund the pilot and had previously run a similar program using federal grant monies. Hillsborough County asked potential vendors to submit program concept papers and selected Tampa Crossroads, Inc., which was already operating treatment programs for the target populations.¹

Both pilot sites experienced substantial start-up delays. The Department of Corrections had not requested the program, so it had not determined ahead of time who would oversee the project or how it would be managed. Although the department has experience in contracting for drug treatment and health services, staff reported that they were not accustomed to contracting with counties for the subcontracting of program services. As a result of difficulties developing the county contracts, implementation of both pilot programs was delayed. Hillsborough Project HOPE started three months late for both prostitutes and johns, while Pinellas started

four months late for prostitutes and eight months late for johns. Regardless of these delays, the \$100,000 allocated each program was apportioned and distributed over the remaining contract months.

The Governor vetoed the funding for Project HOPE for Fiscal Year 2004-05, effectively ending the program in June 2004.

Services for Johns ———

Johns programs at the two pilots used the same model, although Hillsborough served four times as many clients

At both sites, the programs for johns used the same treatment model, as the law specified that participants pay \$350 and complete six education sessions within a six-month period. The classes were designed to address the social problem of prostitution from the perspective of the individual, the family, and the community. The program aimed to help clients identify and correct the thinking errors that preceded their offenses.

According to program administrators at both sites, most johns came to Project HOPE angry: angry at the criminal justice system, angry that they got caught, angry that their spouses found out from court documents mailed to their home, and angry that they had to pay for both court costs and the johns' school. Many of the johns did not see paying for prostitution services as a crime but as a "moral issue." Both pilots reported that although most johns came to their first meeting very defensive, almost all eventually responded positively and engaged in the process. Both program and probation personnel reported positive feedback from johns who completed the program.

The programs for johns got off to a late start the first year, Fiscal Year 2002-03, due to contract development problems and difficulty in obtaining referrals. The law allows johns six months to complete their program. Exhibit 1 describes the participation and completion rates at the two pilot sites.

¹ Operation PAR applied to run the Hillsborough pilot but was not selected. Both Operation PAR and Tampa Crossroads operate in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties.

Exhibit 1
The Hillsborough Pilot Served More Johns ¹

	Pinellas	Hillsborough
FY 2002-03 Intakes	9 in four months	55 in nine months
FY 2003-04 Intakes	19 in nine months	66 in nine months
Total Intakes	28	121
Completers	24	112
Participating	9	21
Failed to complete	2	9
Program costs collected to date	\$13,794	\$38,382
Recidivists	0	0 ²

¹ Information for Fiscal Year 2003-04 reflects only the first nine months, through March 2004.

² Three johns were rearrested for non-related offenses: battery, traffic offense, and drug possession.

Source: Project HOPE program providers.

The Hillsborough pilot served over four times as many johns as the Pinellas pilot, and collected more fees. The sizable difference in participation may be the result of Hillsborough’s pre-existing johns’ treatment program, the five-month gap between program start dates, or rotation and turnover of judges, state attorneys and public defenders that were responsible for referring prostitutes to the programs. The number of persons arrested by law enforcement is also a critical factor.

According to statewide recidivism data, no johns who completed Project HOPE at either pilot site had been re-arrested for solicitation as of January 2004. This data, coupled with reports from the program providers that johns typically changed their opinion of prostitution following the educational sessions, indicates that Project HOPE was successfully curbing the cycle of prostitution solicitation.

Services for Prostitutes—

The pilot providers used different models to provide services to prostitutes

According to the program administrators, who have had years of interaction with the program population, most prostitutes have multiple treatment needs, are unemployed with little or

no prior legitimate job experience, lack stable housing situations, and have minimal education. Prostitutes usually have children, though few have custody at the time of program assessment. Most have some degree of substance abuse problem and lack a social or family support system. Further, most prostitutes have a history of sexual abuse and trauma.

To address these issues, both pilots developed individualized treatment plans for each participant. Staff of both pilots reported that budget constraints and the shortage of local services, such as residential beds for substance abuse treatment, limited their ability to fully address client needs.

Whereas Ch. 2002-297, *Laws of Florida*, is quite specific about the johns component of Project HOPE, it does not specify program completion timeframes or requirements for prostitutes. Prostitutes participated in Project HOPE from a few weeks to over a year, based on their individual treatment plans. The two counties selected providers with different philosophies and program designs to provide services to prostitutes, as discussed below.

Hillsborough. In Hillsborough County, Project HOPE was operated by Tampa Crossroads, Inc. This pilot focused on delivering treatment services. Project staff conducted a needs assessment with each prostitute and then worked with the client to design a treatment plan. Each prostitute participated in Tampa Crossroads services as specified in the plan; services could include counseling, substance abuse counseling, marriage and family counseling, employment counseling, and court advocacy. (Tampa Crossroads sessions included other social service clients in addition to Project HOPE participants.) As needed, pilot staff also referred the prostitutes to other agencies for help with education, employment, housing, clothing, and food, and helped clients navigate the health care system. Project HOPE staff tracked each prostitute’s progress toward completing the treatment plan.

Tampa Crossroads had already been operating programs to assist prostitutes and johns in Hillsborough County prior to being selected to operate Project HOPE.² According to program administrators, these services will likely continue without Project HOPE funding but will serve fewer clients.

Pinellas. Project HOPE in Pinellas, operated by Operation PAR, focused on referring prostitutes to needed services. Project staff conducted a needs assessment for each prostitute, worked with the client to develop a treatment plan, and then identified programs and agencies that could provide the needed services and treatments. When appropriate, and if space was available, staff referred prostitutes to substance abuse programs, mental health services, and HIV/AIDS treatment programs operated by Operation PAR. The two project HOPE staff—the program administrator and a case manager—spent most of their time conducting intake assessments, performing case management duties, and making referrals. They reported that they did not have the resources to follow up later to determine whether prostitutes completed their treatment plans; consequently there is no data on program completions from this site.

Although not required by the Project HOPE contract, the Pinellas pilot also ran a prostitute support group that allowed prostitutes to share their experiences in a less judgmental environment. The group was available to all prostitutes regardless of whether they were Project HOPE participants. The program administrator reported that the group was popular and met a previously unmet need, as it is difficult for prostitutes to discuss their experiences in mental health groups composed of the general population.

Pinellas did not collect contract-required completion data needed to compare the success of the two pilot models

The three main measures of Project HOPE performance are the number of prostitutes who participated in the program, the number who completed it, and the percentage of completers who were not subsequently rearrested on similar charges. While both pilots provided data on participation, Pinellas did not provide completion data. As a result, the success of the Pinellas pilot could not be determined and completion and recidivism rates could not be compared between pilots.

Exhibit 2 on the following page describes prostitute intake and participation at the two pilot sites. Though scheduled to begin in July 2002, both pilots started late due to problems finalizing the contracts. While the Pinellas pilot completed significantly more prostitute intakes the first year, Hillsborough caught up the second year. Because most prostitutes had multiple treatment needs, the number of participants generally increased from month to month.

Hillsborough HOPE reported that, due to the wide range of issues that prostitutes face, only three of the prostitutes it served had completed their treatment plans to date. Six more prostitutes, who were nearing graduation, had been in treatment for several months, had maintained gainful, law-abiding employment, and were able to live independently for the first time in their lives. As of January 2004, none of the three prostitute graduates had been re-arrested for prostitution or drug-related charges.³

² Prostitution Redirection Initiative Diversion and Education Program (PRIDE) and the Johns Awareness, Diversion, and Education Program (JADE).

³ January 2004 was the most recent recidivism data available.

Exhibit 2 Prostitute Participation Grew Over Time

FY 2002-03	Pinellas		Hillsborough	
	Intakes ¹	Participants	Intakes	Participants
July 2002				
August 2002				
September 2002				
October 2002			0	0
November 2002	2	2	1	1
December 2002	2	4	0	1
January 2003	5	8	5	6
February 2003	10	10	5	11
March 2003	14	17	0	11
April 2003	10	19	9	19
May 2003	8	20	6	23
June 2003	22	29	6	27
Total	73		32	
FY 2003-04				
July 2003	9	35	4	31
August 2003	3	37	6	21
September 2003	8	40	7	23
October 2003	8	40	18	33
November 2003	3	41	13	45
December 2003	3	41	7	43
January 2004	5	42	0	43
February 2004	12	46	3	32
March 2004	9	24 ²	6	36
April 2004				
May 2004				
June 2004				
Total	60		64	
Grand Total	133		96	

¹ The contract requires a total of 10 total intakes monthly, including both prostitutes and johns. Exhibit 1 reports only prostitutes.

² Open cases with clients who no longer needed case management, service referral, linkage and follow-up intervention services were closed out from the previous month.

Source: Project HOPE administrators.

As discussed above, Pinellas HOPE did not track completion of its clients in the activities to which they were referred. However, Operation PAR, the Pinellas HOPE administrator, did track whether prostitutes completed the substance abuse program or other ancillary services provided in-house. Of the 19 prostitutes that completed Operation PAR services, as of January 2004, nine had been rearrested; five for drug related charges and

four for probation violations, which may or may not have been related to prostitution and/or drugs. HOPE staff asserted that it often takes substance abusers multiple attempts to successfully alter their behavior.

As a result of Pinellas HOPE's failure to collect required completion data and the Department of Correction's failure to adequately monitor and enforce this contract requirement, the state lost the opportunity to determine whether the direct delivery model or the service referral model was more effective at providing rehabilitative services for this population. The Pinellas pilot was intent upon assisting prostitutes but lost sight of the need for accountability, both in determining whether its referrals led to any changes in prostitute behavior and in reporting its performance to taxpayers. Government contracting with the private sector requires strong agency oversight.

Program Population Coverage. Participation in Project HOPE by both prostitutes and johns depended in part on the number of arrests by local law enforcement for these offenses. Based on arrest data provided by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Hillsborough program served 27% of prostitutes arrested during program operations, while the Pinellas program served 21% of the target population. The Hillsborough program served 9% of johns arrested during program operations, whereas, the Pinellas program appears to have served virtually all of the arrested johns. It is important to note, however, that by law Project HOPE is optional for johns while prostitutes are more likely to be required by the court to participate.

Lessons Learned

Though the data indicates that Project HOPE was having a positive affect on the cycle of prostitution and solicitation, we noted several areas in which program performance could have been improved. Should the program be resumed, the contract administrator should

clearly define and enforce program requirements and contract administration should be streamlined to eliminate middlemen at the county level. The Department of Corrections should assist in obtaining meaningful recidivism data. Finally, program staff must establish on-going relationships with key stakeholders to avoid drops in referral rates.

Program requirements should be clearly defined and enforced

Pilot programs must develop clear definitions and measures of success, identify data requirements, and establish uniform reporting formats and timeframes to demonstrate whether they have been successful.

The department's contracts with the counties did require the pilots to report important data on workload and performance, including

- a monthly roster of participants;
- a list of specific services provided;
- a description of individual participants' monthly attendance and progress;
- a report identifying the number of participants successfully completing the program during the contract period; and
- a report on the number of participants subsequently charged with soliciting or buying prostitution services or of drug-related crimes within six months of completing Project HOPE.

While the expectations for the johns programs were clear due to the specificity of the law, the department did not adequately define these contract expectations for the prostitutes programs. As discussed above, the Pinellas pilot failed to track whether prostitutes finished their treatment plans. For contract reporting purposes, it reported only prostitutes who finished Operation PAR substance abuse treatment as completions.⁴

⁴Hillsborough County collected and reported all contract-required data and maintained additional data, as required by the county contract monitor.

The Department of Corrections consulted OPPAGA during Project HOPE contract development and we advised that several specific program questions needed to be answered prior to finalizing the contract, including how completion and success would be defined. Although the Department's final contract included many of our suggestions, it did not resolve these important issues.

The department's failure to define these key terms and expectations in the contract hinders the Legislature's ability to determine the effect of the Pinellas pilot on participating prostitutes or compare the two pilots. Should the pilot be re-funded, we recommend that the contract define key terms and contract requirements.

Department monitoring of the contract should have identified and resolved the problem that the Pinellas pilot was not tracking whether prostitutes completed their treatment plans. However, the department underwent an internal reorganization in 2003 and Project HOPE oversight was shifted from the now defunct Office of Program, Transition, and Post-Release Services to the Bureau of Substance Abuse Program Services. This shift required different department staff to become familiar with program contract requirements. Following this shift in program oversight, department staff began site monitoring and started revising reporting and format changes; however, at this point the pilot was almost over.

Appropriate, standardized data reporting and program monitoring methods for any pilot program should be established in the early stages of contract development, not months before contract expiration.

Streamline contract administration

Contract administration should be as streamlined as possible to reduce costs, eliminate duplicative work, and avoid confusion in communication. Administering the Project HOPE contracts through the counties created a second, unnecessary level of oversight. According to Department of

Corrections staff, Hillsborough and Pinellas county staff, and Project HOPE administrators, this second level was duplicative and did not add value to the oversight and implementation processes. In fact, the extra administrative layer impeded communication between the program providers and the contract monitors by inserting a middleman at the county level. This middle layer administrator had to interpret and pass on Department of Corrections' information requests, which added time and potential confusion to every interaction. Further, although Pinellas County did not charge for contract administration and all allocated monies went to Project HOPE services, Hillsborough County retained a 10% (\$10,000) contract administration fee, thereby reducing overall funding for its Project HOPE services.

If the program is resumed, we recommend that the Legislature eliminate the counties from the program implementation and oversight process and direct the Department of Corrections to contract directly with the program providers.

Use statewide recidivism data

Performance data should be as complete and accurate as possible. The Project HOPE contract required the pilots to report the number of participants subsequently charged with soliciting or buying prostitution services or drug-related crimes within six months of completing Project HOPE. However, the contracts did not specify how this information was to be obtained. As a result, each pilot collected recidivism information from a local source and only obtained arrest data for its county. Since participants could easily move to another location to prostitute or solicit, limiting recidivism data to the county of the original arrest does not provide an accurate picture of program success.

A statewide analysis of arrests better reveals whether program graduates have changed their behavior. To conduct our analyses, we used data from the Department of Law Enforcement. Should the program resume, we recommend that the Department of Corrections consult with the Department of Law Enforcement to set up a criminal history check process for Project HOPE graduates to determine whether they have been re-arrested for like offenses anywhere in the state. This will allow the Legislature to better assess program success.

Work with key participants from the outset

Identification and education of key participants is essential throughout pilot projects. Both pilots made efforts to educate judges, state attorneys, public defenders, and local law enforcement about the program. However, both locations suffered from low referral rates in the program's early months. This was largely attributed to confusion on the part of the court system and the state attorney and public defenders' offices. Communication among the program administrators and court personnel resolved the initial low referral rate. Ongoing interaction and education is needed to address judicial bench rotation, high caseloads, and the high turnover of assistant state attorneys and public defenders. If the program is re-funded, we recommend that the pilots establish a routine process for interacting with judges, state attorneys, and public defenders to avoid a drop in program referral rates.

The Florida Legislature

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Project supervised by Kathy McGuire (850/487-9224)

Project conducted by Sabrina Hartley (850/487-9232)

Gary R. VanLandingham, OPPAGA Interim Director