

CSSD Chronicle

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Bridgeport Juvenile Detention Center Pilots *Girls Services Unit*



CSSD Juvenile Residential Services, in collaboration with the CSSD Training Academy, is piloting a *Girls Services Unit* at the Bridgeport Juvenile Detention Center. The pilot was developed in response to recent incidental increases in the number of female juveniles being admitted to the facility since the close of the New Haven Juvenile Detention Center, and the longer length of the girls' stay before gender-specific placement can be secured. Typically, juveniles are placed in appropriate programs within a week. However, there have been times when girls have remained at the facility for up to 21 days before placement can be found.

The goal of the *Girls Services Unit* is to increase the quality and quantity of gender-specific prevention and intervention services while the girls are at the facility. The following guiding principles for a female responsive approach informed the structure of the pilot:

- **Gender:** Acknowledge that gender makes a difference
- **Environment:** Create an environment based on safety, respect and dignity
- **Relationships:** Develop practices that are relational and promote healthy connections
- **Services/Supervision:** Address girls' issues through comprehensive services that are strengths-based, trauma-informed, culturally relevant, and take into consideration mental health issues
- **Basic Needs and Community Connection:** Establish a system of community supervision and re-entry

Planning meetings took place with key administrative stakeholders to develop a solid framework for the project. The CSSD Training Academy worked with Community Solutions, Inc. (CSI) to conduct trainings. Jessica Fraser, a CSI trainer and quality assurance coach, was selected to provide the on-site trainings as well as conduct subsequent observation of staff/juvenile interactions, assure quality assurance, and provide support and feedback to staff and supervisors.

Next, the Bridgeport Juvenile Detention Center identified the first cohort of staff to be trained. Personnel from all levels of the facility (Juvenile Detention Officers, Lead Juvenile Detention Officers, Classification and Program Officers, Program and Services Supervisor, and Deputy Superintendent), as well as from all three shifts, were identified to participate in the training.

The *Girls Services Unit* Cohort 1 staff members include:

Robinette Walker, Lead Juv. Det. Officer
Jennifer Puffen, Juvenile Detention Officer
Eric Hudson, Juvenile Detention Officer
Woodrow Vereen, Juvenile Detention Officer
Deja Gauthier, Juvenile Detention Officer
Elizabeth Cappella, Juv. Det. Officer Trainee
Melissa Burch, Juvenile Detention Officer
Lisa Williams, Juv. Det. Program & Classification Officer
Francis French, Juvenile Detention Officer
Susan Allen, Program Svcs. Supervisor
Dino Guerra, Shift Supervisor
Tim Peiffer, Juv. Det. Deputy Superintendent

Phase I of the pilot involved training staff in the following four modules:

1. Promoting Female Responsive Strategies within Juvenile Detention
2. Female Psychosocial Development
3. Integrating Female Responsive Strategies
4. Vicarious Trauma and Self-Care

All training modules were conducted during October/November 2012, at the Bridgeport

Juvenile Detention Center, in 2-hour time blocks. Cohort staff were given “homework assignments” to help process the concepts learned in the training and identify successes and challenges which were reviewed before the next module of training.

Phase II of the pilot began in January, and Fraser has been visiting the Bridgeport site to observe members of the cohort as they work with youth at the facility. “The staff is extremely dedicated to helping girls, and they have been enthusiastic about this pilot,” said Fraser. According to Fraser, providing equal services to female detainees does not diminish the quality of treatment for male clients. “There is a great quote that really speaks to what we are trying to do,” said Fraser. “*Equality is NOT about providing the same opportunities to men and women, but about providing opportunities that MEAN the same to men and women and get the same RESULTS.*”

Research has shown gender differences in communication style, reaction to trauma, and family and personal bonds. Fraser notes, “Many girls have strained and complicated relationships with their mothers, and most girls were runaways, living on the street, before coming to detention.” Fraser goes on to explain that the lack of a father in the home, or exposure to poor male role models, often affects girls in ways that leave them more vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and poor treatment by a significant other when they get older. “It’s been interesting to see that girls who come to the facility are rarely contacted or supported by their ‘boyfriends’ during their stay, but the boys who are here frequently get mail and messages from girls on the outside.” The CSI training for cohort staff provides an opportunity for the girls—and boys—to talk about relationship issues as well as witness healthy and appropriate interactions between male and female detention staff.

Timothy Peiffer, a *Girls Services Unit* cohort member and Deputy Superintendent of Bridgeport Juvenile Detention, has worked with youth for over 28 years. He is proud of the way staff continually meet the challenge of working with at-risk youth, including their work in the *Girls Services Unit* pilot. “CSSD is being very responsive to the gender-specific needs of females,” said Peiffer about the project. “In the end, our goal is to help them get whole again, despite all the challenges, in whatever way we can.”

For more information about the *Girls Services Unit* in Bridgeport, please contact Patricia Nunez, Program Manager, CSSD Juvenile Residential Services at Patricia.Nunez@jud.ct.gov



Several members of the *Girls Services Unit* cohort at Bridgeport Detention: (L to R) CPO Lisa Hamlett-Williams, JDO Woodrow Vereen, CSI Consultant Jessica Fraser, CPO Frances French, PSS Susan Allen, and JDO Eric Hudson

The **CSSD Chronicle** is a regular publication of information and news about the Court Support Services Division. Questions or comments on this edition, or suggestions for future articles, can be directed to Linda.Grzeika@jud.ct.gov