



CSSD Chronicle

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Court Support Services Division

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CSSD Residential Youth C.A.R.E. Programs for 16- and 17-year-olds

In December 2009, St. Francis Home for Children, Inc. opened two statewide referral programs in New Haven for eligible 16- and 17-year-old youth involved in the adult court system. The programs, contracted by the Judicial Branch/CSSD, provide 30-day respite care to stabilize youth in crisis and prepare them for a return to the community with appropriate supports and after-care services. The programming is trauma-sensitive, gender-responsive, and uses a strengths-based approach—all key components for personal success among this client population—and also supports CSSD’s risk reduction efforts for lowering recidivism.

Girls’ Youth C.A.R.E. – C.A.R.E. (Center for Assessment, Respite and Enrichment) is a six-bed, gender-specific program for young women located in a residential neighborhood of large, single-family homes near Yale University. The three-storied house at 651 Prospect Street in New Haven is open and inviting; the interior is painted and decorated in warm, jewel-tone colors. The first floor houses a large conference room, several spacious areas for its in-house school, and a few staff offices.



The large, sweeping staircase leads to the second floor of double-occupied bedrooms, each with their own full, modern bathroom. Each room is bright and clean and outfitted with suicide-resistant furniture and accessories. According to Kelly Stutzman, CSSD Deputy Superintendent, St.

Francis worked in collaboration with CSSD to create this safe and “home-like” environment. A nicely-equipped common area is across the hall, attached to a large, open kitchen where girls and staff can have relaxed conversations over family-style meals as well as cultivate culinary skills.

The third floor is dedicated to another common area named the “Butterfly Lounge”—staff and clients have movie nights in front of the big-screen TV, and girls can use the space for family visits that they have earned based on the “stage of growth” a girl has attained. The program’s “store” is also located in the lounge, where girls may purchase items or gifts that they have earned through the program’s positive motivation system.

Abby McLaughlin, St. Francis Program Director for the Girls’ Center, notes that the girls who come to Prospect Street “may be court-involved but they’re not court ordered; they want to be here” and the incidences of unauthorized leaving are rare. “As a matter of fact,” said McLaughlin,

“many of the girls express their desire to stay beyond the thirty days.” They want to stay in order to strengthen their life skills even more.

Programs and Activities – Treatment plans and goals are specific for each girl based on assessments completed within the first few days of a girl’s arrival. The school’s lesson plan is based on each girl’s level of ability and strengths; both group and individual instruction is given and educational credit is recognized by the girls’ district school upon their return home. Guest speakers from the community also provide instruction beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic. For example, Planned Parenthood presentations and materials help to bolster the school’s health curriculum, while the owner of a local hair salon works with girls on issues of body image as well as culturally-based personal grooming needs. After-school and weekend activities include housekeeping chores, visits to area museums and libraries (including those on the Yale University campus), and local college tours. All programming is structured to give girls the tools to maintain healthy relationships, learn positive coping skills, and discover personal, attainable goals.

“The words she wrote became her voice...writing was something she felt she could use after she left [the program].”—Abby McLaughlin, Program Director

McLaughlin has a shelf in her office that is filled with blank journals of different sizes and colors. The girls pick out one at the start of their 30-day stay and McLaughlin

encourages them to use the journals to chronicle their time at the center and express their feelings—good and bad. The journal entries are private, and girls do not have to share them with counselors and staff. McLaughlin noted that one girl, who had a lot of trouble participating in group discussions found journaling to be helpful. “One day, she brought her journal to class and asked to read some of her entries. The words she wrote became her voice. It proved to be a very positive tool for her—writing was something she felt she could use after she left [the program].”

Boys’ Youth C.A.R.E. – Over on Congress Avenue in New Haven, in a newly revitalized neighborhood of tenements and businesses, is a four-story brick building that houses the Boys’ Youth C.A.R.E. program, also run by St. Francis Home for Children, Inc. The six-bed residential program is located on the upper two floors, its entrance securely separated from the Life Skills Day Program and staff offices that take up the building’s lower level.

The boys’ program features several two-to-a-room dorm-like suites with a centrally-located full bath. The décor is also fresh, clean, and modern—

“Once they leave, they [the boys] can grab things out of their ‘thinking bank’ to deal with aggressive situations.” – D.J. Nadeau, Program Director

creative use of paint and color brightens the suicide-resistant bedrooms, the common areas, and the narrow hallways and stairwells. The program’s

school component, behavior reward system, community activities, and open, family-style meals are male-oriented, but the mission statement and goals mirror that of the Girls’ program—to provide services that help boys identify strengths, talents, and needs while encouraging their development to achieve success in their community.

D.J. Nadeau (known as “Mr. D”) is Program Director for the Boys’ C.A.R.E. and sees value in having staff dine with the boys on a regular basis. “When we talk over a plate of food and have conversation around the dinner table, we all get to learn things about each other.” Nadeau



believes that food is a powerful indicator of a boy’s progress. “When they start to relax, eat well, and interact at the table, they’re moving in the right direction.”

Nadeau has fostered several contacts with outside community resources which allow the boys to

experience an array of recreational activities such as go-cart racing, gym memberships at a local Boys and Girls Club, and tickets to sports venues at Yale University. The boys are even willing to try salsa dancing at a local dance studio—and they enjoy it! Nadeau believes that despite the short amount of time the boys spend at the center, they are exposed to a lot of positive and worthwhile activities that exercise their minds and bodies. “Once they leave, they [the boys] can grab things out of their ‘thinking bank’ to deal with aggressive situations. We introduce them to

resources that are free, like the library, or working out on their own, to show them they have control over their actions and can make positive choices.”

More Room to Learn - Currently, the classroom space is tight at the Congress Avenue site, but Jillian Carroll, Director of Program Operations for St. Francis, announced that the program has recently acquired a larger space near Eli Whitney Technical High School. The boys’ classes will commence there starting in March 2010.

Nadeau spoke excitedly about the new off-site school because he sees it as another positive opportunity for the boys. “Many of these boys have problems with truancy. An off-site school will help them develop time management and teamwork skills while they’re here—to get dressed, eat breakfast, and be ready to leave on time”—important skills to take back with them when they return to their communities. ♥

For more information on the Girls’ and Boys’ C.A.R.E. program, please contact Kelly.Stutzman@jud.ct.gov.



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