

CSSD Chronicle

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Court Support Services Division
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Connecticut Junior Republic CARE Program for Girls



The first thing you notice, at the entrance to 80 Prospect Street in Waterbury, are the large white letters welcoming you to Connecticut Junior Republic (CJR). The wide stone steps are decorated with pots of colorful summer flowers, and the large open vestibule is filled with light and comfortable seating. Inspirational artwork decorates the interior brick walls. The two-story building, located minutes from the downtown area, provides community-based services

for youth on its first floor, and houses the Center for Assessment, Respite, and Enrichment (CARE) program on the second floor.

What is CARE? The CARE program is a short-term residential program for girls, 11 to 17 years old, who are court-involved for a status offense, or family related misdemeanors such as domestic violence. It is designed as a place of safety for a girl in crisis while staff work to assess her needs—and those of her family—and assist them in taking the necessary steps to achieve their future goals.

CARE referrals are made by a CSSD Juvenile Probation Officer or Family Support Center staff. The program is able to serve up to six girls for 14 days, and return referrals can be made by aftercare providers if a girl has a subsequent crisis event. Referrals are accepted from anywhere in the state, although many girls in the program reside in the Waterbury, Stamford, Greenwich, and Norwalk area.

Program Model—The program is based on a tri-level behavior model called “Teach, Reach, and Inspire.” Each level has progressive privileges and responsibilities that a girl can attain, during the course of each day’s three check-in periods, based on her behavior, group participation, and other established criteria. There is an educational component to the program as well in a large, well-equipped first floor classroom. CARE contacts a girl’s home school and coordinates credit assignments and projects to be completed, with the assistance of the CARE teacher, during the daily 9:00 am to 2:00 pm mandatory classroom time.



CARE’s Support Team—Cassandra Reyes, MSW is the Program Director for the CARE program. She is assisted by a four-member clinical team to provide assessment, referrals for aftercare, and goal planning for each girl. Seven full-time, and several per diem staff members help provide the one-to-one direct care and supervision of the girls.

Reyes is a Waterbury native and has worked for CARE since she was a college intern. After graduation, she be-

came a case manager, then a clinician for CARE before becoming Program Manager a year and a half ago. Her passion and commitment to CARE is evident when she talks about the girls in the program and the ways she and her staff work to meet their varying needs.

Color, Light, and Marilyn Monroe—The first floor is beautifully designed to welcome CJR youth, parents, and others in the community, but the second floor is all about the CARE girls. Walls are painted in bright or pastel colors and no space is empty of girl-inspired decoration. Even the second floor's two large bathrooms have girl-centered themes—one gives tribute to a powerful quote by Marilyn Monroe about the power of self-reliance; the other focuses on a collage about secrets that was created by girls in the program who were inspired by the popular young adult website postsecret.com. Decorative examples of “Teach, Reach, and Inspire” are strategically placed throughout the large common areas, and the 1– and 2–person dormitory-style bedrooms are also light and bright.

Girls are monitored by staff 24/7 but do have the opportunity to earn short periods of “alone” time in their rooms. No electronic devices are allowed at the program, but girls can work within their behavior level for the privilege of making and receiving phone calls. Immediate family members are encouraged to visit, and those with level privileges can take advantage of staff-supervised trips outside of the CJR building.

More than just going to the mall—The social outings to the movies, shopping, and other venues are important, but Reyes believes community service opportunities have value for the girls, too. They visit



the local library and help read to younger children during scheduled story hours, and they support downtown Waterbury's beautification projects. CJR is one of many local sponsors that work to improve the Waterbury community in different ways. Over the Memorial Day weekend, several of the CARE girls decorated t-shirts for their trip downtown to work on city flower containers, pick up litter, and empty corner trash barrels.

Reyes also talked about another side benefit of the girls' program—exposure to diversity. “Girls get to hear from other girls in group about their experiences in a poor single-parent family, a wealthy family with two parents, and everything in between.” A range of ethnicities—Ukrainian, Guatemalan, Mexican, and more—have helped the girls learn about the different struggles others have gone through with assimilation, cultural differences, and family expectations.

CSSD Compliance Specialist Felix Rodriguez gave high praise for the CARE program, and credited Reyes and her team for helping to make it the success it is. “They've done a wonderful job making CARE accessible to the girls,” Rodriguez said. “It's a great program.”

For more information on CJR's Waterbury CARE program, visit their website at ctjuniorrepublic.org or contact CSSD's Felix Rodriguez at Felix.Rodriguez@jud.ct.gov

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