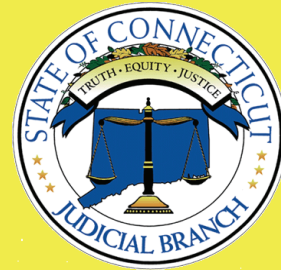


CSSD Chronicle

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The Connecticut Junior Republic Opens New Residential Program for CSSD-Referred Youth



Cow and her calf, part of the CJR agricultural program

An hour's drive from the city of Hartford is the town of Litchfield, home to the sprawling, rural campus of the Connecticut Junior Republic (CJR). Founded in 1904, the CJR has provided residential and community-based care, treatment, and education for at-risk and special needs young people for more than 100 years.

On November 2, 2010, the Connecticut Junior Republic opened an eight bed residential program, the Litchfield Boys Community Residential Program (LBCRP), for

CSSD referred 17- and 18-year-old males involved in the adult criminal court system with substance abuse and behavioral issues, and with some co-occurring mental health needs. Fifteen and 16-year-old males in the adult court can also be accepted with approval from CSSD.

The four month program is designed to decrease recidivism, decrease substance use dependence, and increase stability and overall family functioning by providing evidence and research-based interventions and services. Multi-Dimensional Family Therapy (MDFT), a science based treatment model out of the University of Miami Medical School, is integrated into the residential program at all levels in order to achieve these goals. MDFT therapists work with clients and their families to enhance client and family strengths; re-engagement and connection to the family, community, and other support networks; and also utilize evidence and research based programming and pro-social activities. The program staff consult weekly with Dr. Gayle Dakoff, one of the developers of the MDFT, who helps ensure fidelity to the model, consults on cases and sessions, and provides ongoing training. Clients at the LBCRP are provided with post residential care beyond their four month stay via a referral to a community-based, in-home family therapy provider (MDFT, MST, or IICAPS) to rein-



A part of the main living area in the LBCRP cottage

force positive changes, and help the client's transition back to their home and community.

Visiting the CJR campus — The main living area in the LBCRP cottage is warm, open, and inviting, even on a cold and wintry February morning. The open floor plan contains a large seating area of comfortable couches, chairs, and tables for group therapy and social activities, and there is a small kitchen to make a light breakfast, snack, or sandwich when the campus cafeteria is closed. Large windows along one wall allow natural light to spill into the space and give a panoramic view of the wooded Litchfield Hills, a barn, the campus school, the cafeteria, and other CJR out buildings. At the sound of visitors, several young men amble out of their clean, bright, and personally decorated bedrooms, introduce themselves, and talk about their life at the CJR.

When asked the question, "What have you learned while you've been here?" 18-year-old "Jay" responds with a sheepish grin, "A lot." His fellow roommates laugh easily with Jay before getting serious. They talk about how much the LBCRP has helped them "get along with different people," especially when they find themselves back home on an earned weekend pass. "We've learned new ways to think and not react to certain situations," Jay went on. "You need a strong foundation in life so the building don't collapse, and we're getting that here."

Learning for Life — Vocational and alternative education programs for boys is provided on CJR's Litchfield campus through the Cable Academic and Vocational Education Center. Approximately 60 special education students from various school districts across the state, ranging in age from 10 to 16, attend day classes during the school year. The young men from the LBCRP have their own separate classroom as a "home base," where they receive some academic instruction based on individual needs. However, all the boys are integrated into the CJR's vocational and agricultural curriculum with other day students, as well as most of the academic classes. According to Monty Sabolcik, CJR Program Director, a lot of thought went into the best way to



The Litchfield Boys Community Residential Program “home base” classroom at CJR

integrate both sets of students given the range of ages and backgrounds. Sabolcik credits CJR’s principal, Jim Obst, along with the teachers and the students themselves, for contributing ideas to make it a smooth transition. “Everyone has benefitted from the inclusion of the older students. The boys have modeled a lot of positive leadership and maturity that has benefitted the younger day students.”

Sabolcik notes that the LBCRP students have input into the vocational classes they attend. “We use the boys’ strengths to find the best vocational match for them,” says Sabolcik. “Because of their age, many of them won’t be returning to traditional school settings after their time with us. They may enroll in GED classes, or be involved in other alternative education programs in their community, but all of them will be looking for part- or full-time jobs when they go home. We realize that, and offer them opportunities to learn good, marketable job skills and how to be a good employee.” The school offers classes that include printing, woodworking, car repair, and even construction. “The kids frame and sheetrock an entire room, which includes electrical wiring and other features. Once they’re done, they learn how to demo it responsibly,” says Sabolcik. “They love the process.” Sabolcik also talked about CJR’s agricultural program. “The instructor lives on the campus. He raises the cattle, pigs, and other livestock, and maintains our greenhouses and gardens. Some of the boys feed and take care of the animals, work with the instructor in the fields, and sell any extra harvested produce at our farm stand, like summer vegetables and pumpkins. Whatever the boys are interested in, wherever their strength is, we probably have a class for it.”

Lunch with students — Dan Rezende, the CJR Director of Programs, enters the dining hall at lunch and is immediately met with smiles and personal greetings from the students sitting at the table. Three of them are talking enthusiastically about school, the vocational classes, the different jobs they do at CJR, and the plans they have when they go home for the weekend. They take obvious pride in getting paid for the work they do at CJR. Some of them take culinary classes and spend time in the program’s dining hall kitchen, confidently planning menus and preparing meals alongside the CJR’s chef. The boys talk about cooking—and eating—foods they had never seen before coming to CJR, like shellfish (some liked the bay scallops that were served one evening while another scrunched his nose at their mention), and one young man remarked on the salad greens used beyond the normal iceberg lettuce. “I never knew you could eat raw spinach in a salad,” said one young man. “It tastes a lot better than when it’s cooked.”

Once the boys leave to go back to the cottage, Rezende sits back and remarks on how well the program model is working for this first group of boys. “The four month program is long enough to make developmental changes and give them time during home visits to put into practice what they’re learning here.” Rezende stressed that the success of the program depends on CJR’s partnership with parents. “Parents are a key component to help the young men succeed in this program, and we link the parents with support and therapy after their sons come home.”

After lunch, Sabolcik gives a final tour of the cottage’s lower level where individual and family therapy sessions are conducted. There is also an area that was recently converted into a weight and exercise room, with both donated and purchased equipment, which is another positive activity for the boys to learn about and incorporate into their lives. “The community-at-large has always supported CJR and they help contribute to its success. There’s something about this place that speaks to people. We stress the importance of community service to the boys. You know, giving back to the place where they live.”

Back upstairs in the cottage’s great room, a program counselor is heard leading the EQUIP Group, announcing that all eight boys have passed the CPR/First Aid course as part of their health class. “The nurse was very proud of your scores,” the counselor tells the young men. “You know, you can list this certification on your resumes.” Several boys react positively to the news. “Really?” says one of them. “We can list it for jobs and stuff? That’s cool.”



Weight and exercise room at the LBCRP cottage

Referrals to the Litchfield Boys Community Residential Program are made through the CSSD Central Office Gatekeeper, Maureen Luddy-Curtis, Program Manager, or Saraea Palmer, Court Planner at 860-721-2115 or 860-721-2126.

Questions about the program can be directed to Kelly Stutzman at Kelly.Stutzman@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