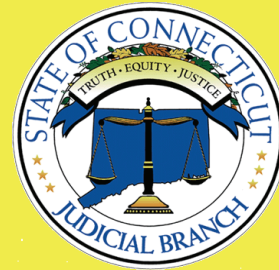


# CSSD Chronicle

State of Connecticut Judicial Branch

Court Support Services Division

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## CSSD Tackles Cultural Competency and Diversity: The Way We Interact With Each Other

*Editor's Note: A heartfelt thank you to Rena Goldwasser, CSSD Program Manager, for writing this special edition of the CSSD Chronicle.~ LG*



*The concepts of cultural competency and diversity are well known. They affect the way the Branch and CSSD do business, the way we interact with each other and external/internal stakeholders, and they can impact the effectiveness of the services that we provide. This Chronicle will be the first in an occasional series of Special Editions designed to increase*

*awareness of the work that is being done around the issue of multiculturalism by the CSSD Cultural Competency Advisory Committee (CCAC).*

**What is Cultural Competency:** Cultural competency is important because it affects everyone. It is more than racial classification, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. It encompasses the whole range of human experiences, including age, language, religion, socioeconomic class, physical disabilities, national origin, geographical location, political affiliation, physical size, and appearance. These factors influence the cultural experiences and background of individuals. The process of being culturally competent involves gaining an understanding of one's assumptions regarding differences and an acceptance, understanding, and appreciation of those differences.

**Why become culturally competent?:** Recognizing that the backgrounds and experiences of people we serve and work with are different is the best way that we can identify and become sensitive to those diverse values and needs, and achieve our goals of improved client outcomes and enhanced efficiencies through improved working environments. The FY 2009/2012 CSSD Strategic Plan acknowledges this and includes a specific core strategic goal: "The CSSD will engage in activities that provide a diverse, gender responsive, and culturally competent environment for employees, contracted network staff, and clients."

**CSSD's Response:** With increasing diversity in our communities and evidence of disparities in criminal justice, it is important that professionals understand how their own and their client's demo-

graphic factors influence behavior, service delivery, and recidivism. The CSSD Cultural Competency Advisory Committee (CCAC) was established to address these issues, with the encouragement and support of CSSD's Executive Director and management team, (See *WHC Executive Memo, October 2009.*)

The founding members of the CCAC came from CSSD staff who attended a 21-session intensive training in cultural competency and multiculturalism sponsored by the Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services (DMHAS). The commitment made by these individuals to bring this training back to CSSD, and work to transfer the knowledge, has been a key element in the activities of the CCAC. The staff who attended were: Troy Brown, Program Manager II, Programs and Services; Laura DiFelice, Manager, CSSD Training Academy; Joseph DiTunno, Program Manager II, Family Services; Erika Nowakowski, Court Planner II, Programs and Services; Patricia Nunez, Program Manager II, Juvenile Residential Services; and Julia O'Leary, Deputy Director, Juvenile Probation. Former Adult Probation Regional Manager Hilda Nieves also participated and was a key member of the CCAC until her retirement in 2010.

The CCAC has since added other members to the original group. To date, these include Court Planner II Sonia Contreras, Court Planner II Melanie Rossacci, Compliance Monitor II Daisy Ortiz, New London Chief Probation Officer II Robert Coyne, Compliance Monitor II Lillian Gonzalez, Juvenile Services Regional Manager Tasha Hunt, Juvenile Services Regional Manager Mark White, Middletown Adult Probation Officer II Janet Tarallo, and Middletown Chief Probation

Officer II Noel Ramos. Current membership reflects a wide variety of staff and business units within the Division. Membership is voluntary and open to staff who have completed either the 21-day or 5-day trainings, or other multicultural training, after qualifying through an application process.

**The First Step:** Training was identified as a first step to increase awareness, and it was the initial area tackled by



**Graduates of DMHAS Cultural Competency Institute Training with Lead Trainer DMHAS Trainer Ellen Boynton**  
(Left to right) Troy Brown, Erika Nowakowski, Patricia Nunez, Hilda Nieves, Ellen Boynton, Laura DiFelice, Joseph DiTunno,

the CCAC. The training process began with Central Office staff, from CSSD Executive Director Bill Carbone on down, who attended an intensive, 5-day, 40-hour Cultural Competency “Mini” Institute training. The CCAC, working together with the CSSD Training Academy, and with the support of DMHAS’ Office of Multicultural Affairs, organized this training. Over 100 Central Office employees were trained from October 2009 to September 2010. The curriculum included three days that focused on specific groups in CSSD’s client population – African American, Latino/a, and Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer and Inquiring (LGBTQI). Two days were provided on a world view of multiculturalism as well as other basic concepts.

The goal of the Institute trainings was to get people thinking and learning about other cultures and value systems, examine their biases, and begin to understand how these concepts can impact personal and professional interactions.

In collaboration with the CCAC, the CSSD Training Academy has continued to enhance its selection of cultural competency trainings in selected topics such as *The Hispanic Culture Series*; *The Southeast Asian Experience*; *European-American Cultures*; *Disproportionate Minority Contact*; *Sexual/Gender Diversity*; *Women’s Issues in Treatment*, *Technology in the Teen World*, and *Caring for the Caregiver*. These trainings are open to CSSD staff and contractors.

**Additional Initiatives:** Currently, the CCAC Training Subcommittee and the CSSD Training Academy are working to develop a version of the mini institute training for the Division’s 1,500 field staff that will reflect their needs and concerns while presenting the basic principles of cultural competency. This training will be for all levels of field staff, from every CSSD business unit. The Subcommittee is currently identifying trainers and resources for this effort.

This past January, four half-day training sessions were held for Program Directors and Assistant Program Directors from the CSSD network.. The sessions focused on Limited English Proficiency (LEP) requirements to ensure an equal standard of service to everyone, regardless of language barriers. The CCAC Training Subcommittee worked with Al Hyla, Program Manager I with the CSSD Training Academy and Court Planner II Karen Chorney of Judge Support Services, who is the Branch LEP trainer, to develop the curriculum.



**A sample of the different kinds of foods from all over the world that were served at the Brown Bag lunch.**



**CSSD Executive Director Bill Carbone joins others in enjoying the Brown Bag pot luck at Central Office**

On March 31st, the CCAC kicked off a “Brown Bag” Awareness Project at Central Office with a successful Pot Luck Lunch for staff who had previously attended the 21-day or 5-day mini institutes. Food was provided by everyone, representing various countries and cultural backgrounds. The goal of the Brown Bag events is to provide an avenue for discussion of cultural competency topics and issues. Similar gatherings may be held in field offices and contractor sites. The Brown Bag meetings will be moderated by members of the CCAC and other CSSD staff, and participants will help to determine the topics for discussion.

For long term change, people’s attitudes need to be addressed through education and, in the case of an organization like CSSD, policies have to be put in place that provide guidelines within which to operate. Ongoing policy development and review is another CCAC activity. The first of these policies regarding the organization of the CCAC is currently being reviewed by Executive Management and should be issued shortly.

**Other Activities:** CCAC members also participate in Branch efforts to raise awareness about cultural competency and language barriers. CSSD is represented on the Judicial Branch Advisory Committee on Cultural Competency and also on the Branch Limited English Proficiency Committee. The latter group developed a system for producing and tracking the translation of judicial forms used by all divisions so that clients who are involved in the court system understand the documents they are signing and the conditions imposed on them by the court. These forms are available on the Judicial Branch’s official forms website.

CCAC members are also active on the CSSD Forms Translation Committee which is charged with identifying and overseeing translation of CSSD specific internal policy attachments. The Forms Committee developed an intranet site which was announced earlier last month (*see WHC Executive Memo E Mail 3/4/2011*). Policy attachments are available for download from this site.

Central Office staff from the Grants and Contracts Unit elected to improve cultural competency awareness through an “art beautification” project after completing their CCAC training. They located posters that carried messages about cultural competency and diversity. Pooling resources, they had the posters framed and placed in various public spaces (meeting rooms, halls) throughout Central Office. The messages carried by this poster art are of tolerance and respect for different customs and different cultural backgrounds.

**Going Forward:** CSSD Executive Director Bill Carbone noted that “Through its work, the CCAC hopes to enhance the organizational climate in CSSD and our contracted network where honest, civil, and respectful communication can flourish.” In addition to the activities mentioned previously, members plan to work with individual CSSD business units in the future to add other cultural competency activities.

The CSSD Training Academy, together with the CCAC, will also address specific training needs of field staff as these are identified. Planning and policy issues will be reviewed to help create a more culturally competent environment within CSSD. The CCAC is also soliciting information from the field. We would like to become aware of activities that our field staff have encouraged or participated in with the goal of improving cultural competency awareness and creating an environment of appreciation for diversity in the workplace and in our interactions with clients. We would welcome hearing about such activities and invite you to contact Troy Brown ([troy.brown@jud.ct.gov](mailto:troy.brown@jud.ct.gov)) or Rena Goldwasser ([rena.goldwasser@jud.ct.gov](mailto:rena.goldwasser@jud.ct.gov)) with information or any questions you might have. A future *Chronicle Special Edition* issue will focus on these stories.

*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](mailto:Linda.Grzeika@jud.ct.gov)*