



CSSD Chronicle



A regular publication of information and news about Court Support Services Division

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THE ARTS CAN MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE TO CHILDREN

The arts enrich our culture and our lives but what impact do arts based programs have in preventing juvenile delinquency? Recently, more local arts agencies have pursued social change projects for youth with the common goal of reducing problem behaviors such as school failure, drug use, delinquency and teen pregnancy. Evaluations of these efforts to date have provided some evidence to substantiate that arts based program participation does foster desirable client outcomes including cognitive development, motivation to learn, organizational skills, self perception and resiliency.

BACKGROUND: CSSD Detention administrators have followed the emerging research on arts based programming in support of their strategic plan initiatives to help improve outcomes for children. In FY07/08 a Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued that awarded a statewide, three year contract to the Connecticut Ballet to provide these services in Bridgeport, New Haven and Hartford Detention and the contracted girls' community detention centers in Hamden and Hartford. "The goal of our efforts" said Bill Carbone, CSSD Executive Director, "is to provide children with exposure to pro social activities and create connections to organizations that can provide opportunities for mentoring and after care services. These kinds of activities can improve long term outcomes and encourage behavior change to prevent children from re entering the system." Research indicates that at risk children are more successful when they come home if they are connected and engaged in community based, pro social activities.

RECREATIONAL ENRICHMENT PROGRAMMING: The Connecticut Ballet was founded in 1981 and is the only year round professional ballet company in the state. It has performed at venues throughout the United States and in Canada. Services are provided through the Ballet's *Dance Exposure Project* which is part of its Juvenile Justice Outreach Program (JOP). The JOP is focused on developing skills, physical and emotional health and connection to community and family and has provided training to more than 2,000 youngsters since its inception in 1991. Dance and drumming classes (Latin dance, jazz and hip hop, West African dance, Brazilian dance and African percussion) are now available at all CSSD detention locations.

Twice weekly, gender specific recreational dance and drumming classes are available as well. A monthly "parent night" participatory class and demonstration is also held.

DANCE AND DRUMMING HAVING A POWERFUL EFFECT: Connecticut Ballet staff work closely with clients, their families and detention officers to ensure that the youngsters remain connected and stay on track. The program has been running since July 2007 and between July-December 2007 approximately 480 youngsters have been served. Some of the most compelling outcomes are documented in the Ballet's first six month report which was just released. Youngsters were asked to respond to the question "have you learned new skills". Their answers were most sincere and from the heart – "It makes me feel like a new person because I know new things" or "Yes, because I never knew how to salsa and now I'm trying to learn more about it". When asked "how does it make you feel" responses ranged from "It makes me feel relaxed" to "it's a stress reliever".

NEW ARTS MENTORING PROGRAM: In addition to the recreational enrichment, Connecticut Ballet is also starting a Mentoring Program initiative at detention sites. With start up funds from the Tow Foundation and support from CSSD Detention and Juvenile Probation officers, Connecticut Ballet staff will identify youth who would benefit from a community based mentorship with one of Connecticut Ballet's Teaching Artists upon release. The goal is to provide an experience that will broaden the cultural horizons of youth and develop awareness of future career track options in the arts. Both mentors and mentees receive a stipend while participating in the program. Participating children will also be trained to assist in the instruction of other youth in a community based setting. Mentors see the youth outside of the arts lessons at least weekly. It is anticipated that four mentor positions will be awarded this spring by the Connecticut Ballet Juvenile Justice Mentoring Program. Youth who are not selected but who are interested in continuing with dance/drumming classes, are interviewed by Connecticut Ballet and referred to an appropriate community based training program. **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION** please contact Patricia Nunez, Juvenile Detention Services, Program & Service Supervisor @ 860-721-2129.

SUGGESTIONS? QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? CONCERNS? CONTACT US!

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