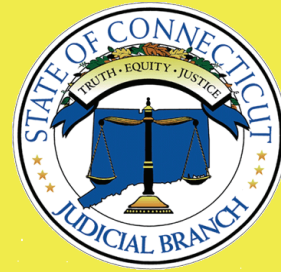


# CSSD Chronicle

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## NEW ALTERNATIVE IN THE COMMUNITY (AIC) CENTER OPENS IN EASTERN CONNECTICUT

On April first, Community Solutions, Inc. (CSI) held an open house and dedication ceremony for a new Alternative in the Community (AIC) center in Eastern Connecticut. The AIC, located in a spacious renovated bank building in downtown Norwich, was dedicated to Lawrence “Larry” Albert, who recently retired from the Connecticut Department of Corrections (DOC) after a long career in the field of community corrections and human services.

According to CSSD Director Jack Brooks, Albert is considered by many to be the “father of modern community corrections in Connecticut.” In the mid-1970’s, Albert was involved in the creation of the Private-Providers Resource Expansion Project (PPREP)—contracts servicing offenders and defendants—in Connecticut’s larger metropolitan areas. The goal of the PPREP was to provide information to offenders and ex-offenders on available mental health, substance abuse, and employment services within the community; educate the public about community corrections as an alternative to



From left, Norwich AIC Director Ed Keeley, Larry Albert, and CSI Area Director Howard Gibson.

incarceration and help gain its acceptance; and, work with state legislators for program funding by helping them understand the value and cost effectiveness of the community corrections approach to criminal justice.

PPREP services grew into multi-service centers and eventually evolved into the current AIC model which now provides clients with the individualized services they need in one central location instead of being scattered among different agencies. Five AICs grew to 17 in the mid-80’s, and the new AIC in Norwich is especially welcomed in a large geographical area of Connecticut that has struggled for years to provide adequate community services for its diverse, and often rural, offender population.

Over 100 guests were in attendance at the AIC dedication ceremony, including Norwich Mayor Peter Nystrom, Connecticut State Comptroller Kevin Lembo, CSI CEO Bob Pidgeon, CSSD Executive Director William Carbone, members of the local Chamber of Commerce, AIC staff and clients, as well as members of other community and criminal justice organizations. Albert proudly accepted the honor and thanked those in attendance for continuing to support the value of offender community supervision as an alternative to incarceration.

Although the official opening of the Norwich AIC took place in April, the center has been in operation since December 2010, opening its doors to 20 offenders who transferred from the overcrowded New London AIC. Ed Keeley, Program Director for the Norwich site, noted that since December “we now have 96 clients utilizing our services and that number keeps going up every month.” Keeley, who also retired from DOC several years ago, but found he sorely missed working in community corrections, oversees an AIC staff with very diverse resumés. “Other than me, only two members of the team have criminal justice backgrounds,” said Keeley. “Some people might think



*Larry Albert and CSSD Executive Director Bill Carbone at the Norwich AIC Open House and dedication ceremony honoring Albert.*

that's a problem, but I don't. My staff is smart, eager to help offenders, and they bring a lot of creative solutions from their private sector experiences when addressing our clients' needs. Our philosophy is to do whatever it takes to make our clients successful, and my staff works to do that every day. I'm lucky to have them."

One member of the Norwich AIC team who exemplifies this unique team effort is Darren Ball, who holds the recently created AIC position of Job Developer. Ball worked for several years as a corporate human resources recruiter in Stamford until a recent move to the Norwich area found him looking at human services as a viable career opportunity. "This position is a perfect fit for me," said Ball. As a Job Developer, Ball spends time making personal connections with local business owners, and creating a master list of employers who are friendly to hiring court-involved clients. Part of that work also includes educating potential employers on the advantages of hiring an AIC client beyond the financial incentives of a federal bonding program or business tax credit. "Many of them don't realize that our clients have been through an extensive job readiness program at the AIC before we recommend them for employment," said Ball. Clients attend a multi-session education program that begins with a chapter on how to keep a job. "A lot of people are surprised that

we start our program at the end, so to speak," said Ball. "But it's important for clients to understand the negative behaviors that have stood in their way to successful employment in the past. Once those issues are addressed, and they master the skills needed to be a good employee, we can work with them on how to fill out a job application."

Clients are encouraged to keep a "master job app" with them when they are canvassing businesses so that routine and vital information can be easily and quickly filled in on any application form. They learn how to conduct themselves in a job interview with role-playing exercises at the AIC, and they also learn how to respond in a proactive and appropriate way to a prospective employer's inquiry about their past criminal justice involvement. "It's having pride about where they are now, not where they've been," noted Ball. "They can't change their past, but they can offer the employer something positive in the future."

The AIC also helps provide clients with appropriate clothing for interviews, basic hygiene products, or special uniform requirements once a job has been secured. "The community has been very generous with all types of donations," said Keeley. "For example, one of our clients needed to have a uniform of khaki pants, a polo shirt, and appropriate footwear. We were able to outfit him for his first days of work until he could purchase additional items himself."

On a cold and rainy day in early May, the lobby of the Norwich AIC was empty except for one middle-aged gentleman, waiting to meet with an AIC counselor. When asked about the services provided by the AIC, the man eagerly gave his opinion. "They've taught me a lot in only three meetings," he said. "They're there for you, and are helping me with my anger problems. I look forward to coming here. I never miss a class." Ed Keeley looked up from across the room and smiled. "Glad to hear it," Keeley said quietly. "Very glad to hear it."

For more information on Community Solutions, Inc. and their programs, visit their website at [www.csi-online.org](http://www.csi-online.org) or, contact CSSD Program Manager Barbara Lanza at [Barbara.Lanza@jud.ct.gov](mailto:Barbara.Lanza@jud.ct.gov).

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*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)*