



CSSD Chronicle



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

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CSSD Best Practice Interventions Address Problem Behavior in Detention

In keeping with CSSD's goal of implementing evidence based practices to improve the effectiveness of our services, the Division has been engaging in research studies designed to assess new and promising interventions. Just as important are the efforts to track outcomes of these new interventions which have proven to be successful and garnered recognition even outside of Connecticut. For the past year, our Detention Centers have been collaborating with researchers from Yale University Child Study Center and UCONN School of Medicine on studying new ways to reduce problem behaviors. Data has been collected and analyzed for two programs that have been implemented. The results of these preliminary studies were presented at the 115th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association in August by presenters that included CSSD Program Manager for Clinical Services John Chapman, Ph.D. Requests for information on CSSD's experiences have come from as far away as juvenile detention systems in Florida, California, Guam, and some international inquiries as well.

BACKGROUND: CSSD Detention staff has been identifying major issues common to detained youth. As a result of this analysis, an overall goal that was set was to find interventions that would teach detainees ways to maintain better self control and reduce aggressive and impulsive behavior both in the detention center and after a return to the community. Aggressive and impulsive behavior is thought to be related to two primary problems: the lack of ability for many children to control their own internal anger, and the lack of knowledge of how to solve social problems without resorting to aggression.

TEACHING SKILLS TO CONTROL BEHAVIOR: The first approach was to teach better control through management of internal emotions. Dr. Julian Ford and his staff from The University of Connecticut School of Medicine came on board to teach detention staff and children simple techniques useful in controlling anger through a 10 session curriculum called TARGET. (*See 4/5/06 CSSD Chronicle for more information on TARGET*) TARGET is based in the knowledge that many children involved in the juvenile justice system have experienced significant traumatic events in their lives such as abuse, loss, and exposure to violence.

Difficult or dangerous behaviors, impulsivity, depression and thoughts of suicide may result in children who experience these kinds of events. Early results have shown that in a study completed by UCONN of 241 children from the Bridgeport and New Haven Centers, approximately 43% have symptoms consistent with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. When statistical tests were applied to those who participated in TARGET groups it was discovered that their behavior ratings made by Detention staff improved with the number of groups attended. Additionally, the amount of room time received decreased as the number of groups increased.

DEVELOPING COPING SKILLS: While work was underway on the TARGET intervention, a team of researchers from Yale University Child Study Center began to offer another new group intervention designed to help children control aggressive behavior. Under the direction of Dr. Elena L. Grigorenko from the Department of Psychology, a *Social Problem Solving Training* (SPST) group was started in the Bridgeport Detention Center and has now expanded statewide to New Haven and Hartford. SPST is based on the social information processing model of delinquent and aggressive behavior. SPST is designed to enhance coping skills and create awareness of alternate choices to violence. Children are asked to think about the alternatives as well as to consider how a victim or offended person might feel. In studies that are still underway, SPST has shown important changes in how children think. A questionnaire designed by Detention staff and administered to 170 children from Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven indicates that children who participate in the 10 session group showed more socially acceptable responses than those who did not participate. Also, while all children showed decreases in levels of depression, those who participated in SPST showed this decrease more quickly than those who did not.

Future plans include reviewing the expansion of these programs, and increasing each center's capacity to implement and monitor them for quality assurance and outcomes. **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION** contact CSSD Deputy Director III Karl Alston, Juvenile Detention at Karl.Alston@jud.ct.gov

SPECIAL NOTICE:

The yearly State Employees' Charitable Giving Campaign officially began on October 1st and will run through December 4th. This is a way for State Employees to support a charity of their choice and give back to their communities by supporting services that help many people throughout the year. Following is a link to the Campaign Site that will provide more information on how you can participate.

http://zeus/co/Attachments/WMUattachments/Campaign_2007_Memo_to_Employees.pdf

Suggestions? Questions? Comments? Concerns? Contact us!

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