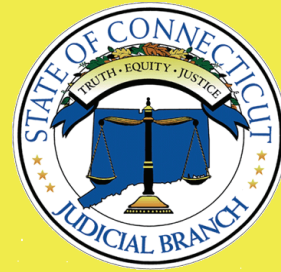


# CSSD Chronicle

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## Bringing the Light of Day to the New Haven Juvenile Detention Center



*Jack Fitzgerald, New Haven Detention Superintendent (right) is joined by Dave Crowley, CJCA PbS Coach (left) after receiving the Barbara Allen-Hagen award from CJCA on October 1st.*

On October 1st, Jack Fitzgerald, Superintendent of the New Haven Juvenile Detention Center, represented CSSD to receive the Barbara Allen-Hagen Award from the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators (CJCA). The yearly award is given to a few select correctional facilities who use CJCA's

Performance-based Standards (PbS) system to identify, monitor, and improve conditions and treatment services provided to incarcerated youths, using national standards and outcome measures. In 2010, the New Haven Juvenile Detention Center led the nation in providing the best effective practices and environment for youth among similar facilities. "Things have come full circle," said Fitzgerald. "Fifteen years ago, our detention center was in terrible shape. Receiving this award, named for the woman whose research on conditions of juvenile confinement helped chart a course of change in the juvenile justice system, is a testament to CSSD's long-term commitment to improve conditions at all three detention centers." Bill Carbone, CSSD Executive Director agrees. "The recognition given to New Haven Detention is well-deserved. Managers and staff have worked hard to bring about positive change in the way we work with Connecticut's juvenile population, based on the standards set forth by Barbara Allen-Hagen and CJCA," said Carbone.

It was the 1993 class action lawsuit, *Emily J v Weicker*, that began Connecticut's long journey to improve the quality of

care and supervision for its court-involved youth. Martha Stone, then-director of the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union, brought the suit on behalf of eight children, charging the state Judicial Branch, the Department of Children and Families (DCF), and the Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven education departments with 114 counts of mistreatment and neglect of detained youth. Fitzgerald remembers that "kids encountered problems as soon as they stepped through detention's front door." In 1999, when Fitzgerald first arrived at the facility, it was an open, crowded, and often dangerous place. Many times, client intakes were done in areas where peers were present. This practice made it difficult for staff to conduct interviews, or for kids to share sensitive information, without being overheard by others. Fitzgerald notes how detrimental that was for juveniles since, "The intake process is a very important aspect of what we do. It's the best time for us to assess and evaluate a child's needs." Renovations to the New Haven site have now made the admission process less stressful by providing larger, private, and more secure places for interviews.

This message of safety and respect has been replicated in other areas of the facility. Privacy partitions were installed in the large shower area; cells were refurbished with more age-appropriate furnishings; the entire facility was stripped of its institutional colors and painted in more vibrant

hues. In 2008, a large gymnasium—with tall windows to allow natural light to stream in—two new classrooms, an administrative wing, and other individualized areas were added to the building. This expansion gave detention residents and staff more room to operate and relieved the stressors associated with overcrowding.



~Congratulations to the New Haven Juvenile Detention staff~

According to Karl Alston, Deputy Director of Juvenile Detention Services, changing the physical appearance of the facility was the easy part. Building a different culture among staff and incarcerated youth—one of cooperation and partnership—was the greater challenge. “We had to train staff on how to engage in a 'hands-off' model that gave kids an opportunity to self-manage their behavior, rather than the 'hands-on' method which required staff to control behavior with physical restraint or

excessive cell confinement,” said Alston. Staff attended classes on how to interact and recreate with youth and to use those opportunities to counsel and help them. Now, Juvenile Detention Officers (JDOs) supervise small groups of eight to ten kids, moving them throughout the facility during the day instead of trying to manage large groups of 25 or more youth, in one static location, for long periods of time.

The poor quality of medical care, mental health services, and educational resources during a juvenile’s stay were major complaints of the *Emily J* lawsuit. The detention centers lacked trained medical and mental health personnel to assess a juvenile’s needs upon admission, or to respond to emergencies during a juvenile’s stay.

Today, Fitzgerald speaks proudly of the services currently available at each of the accredited detention sites, which meet the standards set by the American Correctional Association (ACA) and the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC). Detainees have access to available medical personnel around the clock. Each child is afforded a physical exam and, if a child needs dental care, they are brought to a dentist. Medication is dispensed by a licensed nurse, and children on psychotropic medication are evaluated by a psychiatrist on a regular basis. A juvenile’s mental health needs are assessed at intake. At the New Haven facility, suicide prevention is achieved by an efficient watch system. Fitzgerald notes, “We’re responsible for the well-being of someone’s child. I take that very seriously.” Staff conduct 15-minute checks on juveniles when they are in their rooms—every four minutes if the child has been identified as a high suicide risk—and all the checks are recorded electronically. Counseling sessions and education programs are conducted each day. The programs—Social Problem Solving Training (SPST) and Trauma Adaptive Recovery Group Education and Therapy (TARGET)—shift the focus of behavior management and change from detention staff to the child by encouraging juveniles to talk about their problems and utilize better coping strategies. “We choose to be supportive instead of puni-

tive,” says Fitzgerald. “The goal is to teach kids to manage their own behavior while they’re in detention, so they can better manage it when they’re released.”

The local Board of Education still oversees the education curriculum at the Bridgeport Juvenile Detention Center. However, CREC (The Capitol Region Education Council) is in charge of classes in Hartford; ACES (Area Cooperative Education Services) in New Haven. Classes are scheduled from 8:30 am to 2:40 pm in New Haven and additional activities are available for students in the late afternoon. One-to-one instruction is also available for those who need it. “We have staff on board who enjoy teaching this population,” said Fitzgerald. “As a matter of fact, the lead teacher in New Haven has been with us for nine years. The teachers know what they’re doing, and the kids respond to their methods.”

Over the last several years, the public attention being given to the New Haven Detention Center has been more positive. Most recently, Ali Weiner, a Yale University student, published an article in the September 2010 issue of the university’s magazine *The New Journal*, titled “Welcome to Detention: Turning around New Haven’s juvenile detention center.” Weiner writes honestly about the system’s poor conditions in the mid-1990s and balances its troubled past with solid examples of its improvement. She weaves personal statements from administrators, staff, and detainees throughout her piece including Fitzgerald’s zealous, yet evidence-based, belief that natural light within a facility can be a panacea for a host of problems. (To read Ali Weiner’s article in its entirety, click [here](#) .)

When asked about future goals for the facility, Fitzgerald said with a smile, “Well, this isn’t the World Series. It’s not like we’re defending champions. It would be unlikely that New Haven would be given the award two years in a row.” He went on, “But we need to make sure we don’t fall from this level of achievement. We need to continue to be innovative, continue to make progress in the areas of safety, education, and social services for youth in order to prevent their return. The best piece of advice I give the kids when they leave is, 'Don’t come back!' I tell them, it’s easy to say; hard to do. I remind them that they need to follow through with their conditions of release by working with probation, their family, and the resources that have been set up for them. CSSD needs to stay ahead of the curve, too. We need to make sure we continue to do all that we can when they’re with us, so that we never see these kids again.”

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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)*