

**Connecticut Juvenile Training School**  
**Advisory Board**  
**Meeting Minutes, 9/13/16**

**Present:** Debra Bond, CJTS Clinical Director; William Carbone, Senior Lecturer and Director of Experiential Education, University of New Haven; Francis Carino, Supervising Assistant State's Attorney; Liz D'Amico, Ph.D., LCSW Behavioral Health Clinical Director; Antonio DePina, DCF Parole Services; Lara Herscovitch, Deputy Director of the CT Juvenile Justice Alliance for Abby Anderson; Joette Katz, DCF Commissioner; Eugene Riccio, Young & Riccio; William Rosenbeck, CJTS Superintendent; Ann Smith, JD, MBA, Executive Director, AFCAMP

**Guests:** Fernando Muñiz, DCF Deputy Commissioner

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**Welcome**

Attorney Carino acknowledged that with members present, a quorum was established. Meeting began at 5:20 p.m.

**Review of June, 2016 meeting minutes**

Minutes were accepted with two minor amendments.

**Admissions data**

A graph identifying types of admissions and by quarter was shared with the group to better see how kids are coming in and in what categories. There is a reduction in parole admissions. Few new admissions in the first quarter but increased in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> to 30. Region I (Bridgeport) had 12 new commitments and this is not new information as Bridgeport has always had a larger number compared to other regions. Many of the youth come from detention. Mr. Carbone asked if the kids coming from Bridgeport are different and if there is a graph that states the story of why they are coming back. Mr. Muñiz stated that Bridgeport always had a higher rate of delinquency rates and lower in CPS involvement, meaning under reporting on CPS and over involvement in JJ. We historically do not question a court's decision when youth are committed to DCF. A question was raised if there was a demonstrable difference between boys that go to CJR and the ones that come into CJTS. CJR is a 4 month program with 8 beds where 6 are active. CJR has ten exclusionary items where they will not accept, for example if there is no family involvement they will not accept a young man. They also have the right to reject a placement. Atty. Carino commented that the graph is almost a mirror image between parole and congregate care admissions and asked if there was any change in policy. The answer was no change to policy. Mr. Carbone asked if there is an alternative to CJTS. Commissioner Katz stated that DCF has 19 private providers, some with empty beds. However, some are not equipped to handle this population, some have been rejected and some get ejected. DCF engaged with CJR as we wanted a program with a

focus on mental health and substance abuse. Dr. Bond added that CJTS accepted a placement of a young man until a family was located. Mr. DePina stated that some boys prefer CJTS as opposed to other residential placements as their stays at CJTS are shorter. Dr. D'Amico stated that as our admissions decreased the percentage of kids returning remained the same. Atty. Carino added that we are seeing more serious charges for the boys at CJTS and Manson youth. Mr. Muñiz clarified that with raise the age, the young men over the age 18 who are rearrested on the adult side are suppressing the numbers at CJTS and increasing at Manson Youth. In addition, they are not going to detention but Manson Youth. It is important to point out that those outliers are shifting the LOS up primarily for kids of color. Mr. Carbone acknowledged that it is hard to control for court cultures but questioned if there was an effort to equalize kids coming in and if there are alternative placements does DCF make it possible? He also questioned if there are identifiable gaps. Mr. Rosenbeck clarified that if there are options, we place the boys there. Oftentimes boys may be rejected from a facility but we continue to try again and again, and sometimes they accept them. Atty. Smith asked if a youth does not have a weapons charge what is the basis for being rejected from a facility and if we see any patterns. Mr. Muñiz will request this information from Beacon Health and will share with this group. Mr. DePina stated that he is seeing a lot of youth coming in with aggressive behaviors and car theft charges. Mr. Carbone asked for clarification whether it is the Department's feeling that the young men are here because this is the right place or if there is a lack of something more appropriate at the community level. Mr. Muñiz clarified that if a young man meets the level of criteria for other placements and are not able to be placed there immediately, they may need to be placed at CJTS first. Mr. Carbone acknowledged the remarkable progress in reducing the number of youth at CJTS. Commissioner Katz acknowledged that oftentimes providers may be saying one thing to the advocates and something else to DCF. Providers don't want to be a locked facility. This notion that there are a private providers who are stepping up and want to take our youth is not accurate as they are telling us no. Dr. Bond stated that we have some kids who say they want families but then when we try them in foster care settings they don't function well. Mr. Rosenbeck stated that we also found that for some kids referring them into a congregate care setting was not the right approach so we have them here shorter and have them spend most of their time in the community. We do our best to keep them at CJTS as short amount as possible and longer in the community. Atty. Smith stated that although we see some potentially positive outcomes we just don't have a long enough history. We only know about the youth up to a certain point in time. It's troubling as we don't know their quality of life and what is happening with those youth. How do we measure success? Mr. Rosenbeck added that we get kids with huge deficits in education and when they are with us longer their educational impact is greater. As we transition them out into the communities, education is not a very positive intervention to them as they are walking into a school half way through the year and struggle with reengagement in their school districts. Dr. Bond spoke about a young man who struggled after his father died and got involved in the JJ system. He received a weapons charge and was expelled from school. We collaborated with his godfather and the superintendent of schools asking for a second chance. We were able

to get him into an alternative program and if he did well the expulsion would be lifted, but three days home the youth stopped attending school. Mr. DePina acknowledged that this is very common as a lot of the schools have many barriers. Commissioner Katz added that many youth are taking advantage of the virtual academy and it is helping but it is not fool proof. Atty. Carino stated that if the youth know that if they serve their time and are out, there is not incentive to engage in treatment, so we may need to revisit the LOS practice.

### **Closure Plan**

Mr. Muñiz stated that he is in the process of incorporate feedback from the JJ workgroups. Essentially effectuating the closure of CJTS and looking at the environment of how we operate and how we close it. We are in the process of scheduling a site visit to a facility in Massachusetts. Goals 1 and 2 are about coordinating between our workers and private providers to ensure youth are not returned to the facility. This may require more frequent check-ins with them while out in the community. Goal three is to look at vocational training, jobs and programs with a focus on family engagement. Perhaps getting service providers into the facility before discharge. The 4<sup>th</sup> goal is the right-sizing of CJTS and make sure that staffing is appropriate. We will need to keep a close watch on this one. If kids are staying longer it will increase the population. Our overall trend is significantly lower now than it was 10 years ago and we are seeing that overall caseloads are going down in DCF. The final goal is to redesign CJTS programming. We will look at the program and decide what gets carried over, i.e., Boys Club, rehab activities, education and what works in the housing unit. One area that was identified is to change the YSO job description to one that is more a therapeutic which will enhance the way the units work. To change the job description to one that requires an appropriate background, one that may require us to retrain staff to make the environment more therapeutic and less correctional. Ms. Herscovitch asked if there were lessons learned from changing the job description from Parole Officer to Juvenile Justice Social Worker (JJSW). Mr. DePina stated that change is always difficult and a struggle to buy in. Once they learned they were not going to lose their hazardous duty status it was easier. Commissioner Katz added that the JJSW picked up the CPS piece. Mr. Muñiz stated that we do not hire anyone into the JJSW position who does not have the CPS experience.

Atty. Carino commented that the kids will tell us the fun things that they like in the program as we see that there are less interventions in rehab activities. He asked why we would close this program to which Ms. Herscovitch suggested he review the OCA reports. Mr. Muñiz stated that the boys identify their rooms as “the box” or the “cell”. They like The Boys Club and gym activities and stated that what replaces CJTS needs to be less correctional. In the event that we stay we would need to change the living units. We have asked to look at surplus facilities and put forth an opportunity to redesign something to be better a setting.

Mr. Rosenbeck stated that CJTS currently staffs third shift with 7 staff. Commissioner Katz added that when she talks with the kids, they say that although they like being in control and have the ability to come in and out of their rooms, they feel safer when their doors are locked. Based on the feedback received there are many things that can be done at CJTS at no cost or low cost. We are in the process of adding a budget associated with some of the action items such as transportation. We are hoping to have a final action plan in October and start looking at surplus properties and engage architects in order to make the closure effective per Governor Malloy's timeframe. Dr. Bond added that CJTS offers the same clinical services as Journey House with the exception of the milieu but the restorative justice is a way of doing that. Ms. Herscovitch added that the Alliance is finishing up a lengthy report on the feedback they received about the statewide system and hope to release it by mid-day tomorrow. A lot of it is about reentry and prevention. Commissioner asked if costs are associated with their recommendations as every commissioner was asked to reduce their budget by an additional 10%. Ms. Herscovitch stated there was. Mr. Muñiz added that there is no funding associated with the right-sizing of CJTS as those funds are gone. Mr. DePina requested that all options are considered, and that we use this opportunity to enhance the juvenile justice system and we don't swing too far as it is a delicate balance.

Mr. Rosenbeck stated that the PREA auditor who was on grounds during our recent audit stated that CJTS is beautiful facility and the ACA auditors were impressed with our space. In addition, the Safe Crisis Management trainer who travels to many facilities expressed on many occasions that this is a great spot for kids.

### **Deep End Diversion Project**

The restorative justice model is shifting the way we work with our youth. It is a way to reduce arrests in congregate care. Last year we had 57 but we strive for none. We received a grant, hired a coordinator, organized an implementation team and trained 120 staff. We have circles meetings twice a day with a talking piece and a restorative approach where the youth have a voice. We have discharge and intake circles. We were pleased to see our lowest interventions in June, July and August as we began the restorative justice work. Each circle begins with an opening such as a statement or an inspirational quote. There is a manual that we can use that offers proposed questions for discussion, but it is an open discussion. Following the introduction everyone has an opportunity to speak, they also have the option to pass. Some find it difficult but many like it and find it a positive experience. As we began the discharge circles our first youth invited two kids and when those kids left they invited other kids and they themselves moved the process along. Some find that it is a nice way to leave the facility. The YSO's have been trained and are embracing the model.

In addition CJTS has enlisted Susan Reilly and Lyman Legters, national juvenile justice experts from the Casey Family Programs to look at the work at CJTS and the environment.

**Public Comments**

None.

*Meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.*

*Minutes respectfully submitted by Irene Yanaros*