



On Balance

A publication of Dane County's Department of Human Services and the Dane County Juvenile Court Program

September 2014
Volume VIII, Number 2

Andre Johnson Is the New DCDHS JJ Services Manager

By Rhonda Voigt, DCDHS Juvenile Justice Supervisor

On April 21, 2014, Andre Johnson took over the Juvenile Justice Services Manager position previously held by Stephen Blue. Andre has hit the ground running, tackling his new job responsibilities head on.

Andre held the position of supervisor for the Neighborhood Intervention Program beginning in February 1999. During his 15 year tenure, Andre was instrumental in the creation of several new programs: Electronic Monitoring, Weekend Report Center, RePlay (middle school alternative for boys), Focus (residential care center), Gang Squad (now Gang Response Intervention Team), Juvenile Cognitive Intervention Programming, High Risk Supervision (including GAIT, CASE and Monday Call Ins) and most recently, neighborhood outreach to three of our neediest communities: Bettys Lane/Theresa Terrace, Darbo/Worthington and Allied Drive. Andre has facilitated JJ staff training opportunities in Motivational Interviewing, Gang Conferences, Disproportionate

Minority Contact/Confinement Conferences and our new COMPAS assessment tool. Andre has participated in many committees over the years including those noted above as well as many others such as Community Trends, Gang Task Force, MMSD Central Review (middle school alternative programs), and Juvenile Jus-

from to 1993 to 1999, Bootstrap from 1991 to 1993, and Dane County Shelter Home from 1992 to 1999. Andre received his BA in Sociology with a Criminal Justice Certificate from UW Madison. Andre is a true Madisonian, having graduated from West High in 1986.



Andre is a proud father of two children. His daughter Lenai, a freshman at UW Madison this fall, is contemplating a major in Women's Studies. Andre Jr. is a sophomore at UW Madison studying business. Andre has always been an avid supporter of his children's many athletic endeavors. Andre's life partner, Maria Cody, works at UW Medical Foundation. Together they serve on the board of Unidos and are active in many other community events. During his free time, Andre likes to play volleyball and darts, fish, attend community festivals, walk and take tropical vacations in the winter (Mazatlán, Cancun, Cozumel, St. Thomas, Dominican Republic and especially, Jamaica). Andre is an avid football fan, rarely missing a Badger or Packer game.

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tice Supervision and Coordination Team. Andre received the George Northrup Award in April 2014 for his outstanding service to the youth and families of Dane County.

Before coming to work for Dane County, Andre worked at Community Adolescent Programs (now YSOSW)

Welcome to your new position, Andre! Wishing you many years of continued success.

On the web @ www.countyofdane.com/juvenilecourt
www.danecountyhumanservices.org

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UTILIZING THE COMPAS RISK ASSESSMENT

By Deb Vieaux, DCDHS Juvenile Justice Supervisor

Dane County Department of Human Services- Juvenile Justice (JJ) is now utilizing the COMPAS risk assessment to help formulate case plans and service recommendations. As of last June, new referrals that arrived at DCDHS offices had a new assessment process applied to them including an interview with the family and a new youth assessment tool administered by juvenile justice social workers.

The COMPAS assessment is evidence based tool that measures risk for recidivism in juvenile offenders. It is accessed on-line and provides outcome data to help assess risk to reoffend, criminogenic risk factors for individual youth, and informs a case plan created by a social worker. Although COMPAS is new to our county services, it is used by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections to assess adult and juvenile offenders both in the community as well as in institutions, and by a growing number of local county governments in Wisconsin. The COMPAS is also used in other states and jurisdictions in the U.S. and has been normed with both adults and juveniles.

The COMPAS provides us with a risk level to indicate likelihood to reoffend, as well as identifying and rating the needs of a specific youth that are predictive of reoffending. Dane County social workers are utilizing the COMPAS risk level rating and the identified high needs, to identify goals to work on with each youth. The goal is to focus our resources on what evidence tells us reduces risk of recidivism. COMPAS assists us in focusing court recommendations on the identified risks, needs, and goals for a specific youth. Long term goals include the Juvenile Justice System being able to identify the trends in our community and develop insights into which programs address which targeted needs/goals.

The Juvenile Justice Assessment (JJA) that serves as the report to the court has been modified, and a COMPAS case plan is attached to each JJA. Service providers see this new case plan as they receive referrals related to the COMPAS cases processing through the assessment and court system. The COMPAS case plan identifies the risk level, strengths and needs of the youth and list goals related to approximately 3 need areas identified for the particular youth. It is hoped that a focus on the specific areas that are directly related to offending behaviors will lead to positive outcomes

such as minimizing the involvement of low risk youth in the JJ system reducing supervision time for all youth and reducing recidivism.

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Comments? Call Dawn MacFarlane 242-6267 or macfarlane@countyofdane.com

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CAPS - A New Middle School-Based JJ Initiative

By Heather Crowley, DCDHS Juvenile Justice Supervisor

The CAPS (Child and Parent Support) Program has been up and running since April of this year. A collaboration between Jefferson Middle School and DCDHS, this program is an intensive community-based support program for 6th and 7th grade youth and their families. The pilot is guided by an advisory board of both county and community agencies, and consists of; DCDHS supervisors and Managers, representatives from Juvenile Court, UW ADAIP, MMSD, DJC, MPD, and Youth Services. Representatives from Public Health, the faith community, and other community organizations have also been invited. The youth identified deal with issues varying from poor school performance, bullying or being bullied, poor school behavior, ongoing family crises, and mental health issues. The parents of these youth also need to be able to recognize the needs of their children and support them in suggestions made.

Jefferson School Social Worker, Sarah Estrella, has been integral in program implementation. She has iden-

tified youth based upon the criteria suggested by our advisory board, contacted the identified families, and provided information to DCDHS regarding ways the program could support the youth and families. Though we received referrals for both boys and girls, only the parents of the boys chose to participate. Currently, there are 5 families involved, with the boys now entering grades 7 and 8. The program is voluntary and will be a resource to families with the aim of preventing youth court involvement and improving attendance, behaviors, and grades. The program also provides parent support by meeting regularly to discuss situational and ongoing factors affecting youth and family functioning, as well as helping parents advocate for the needs of their family. The program coordinator also provides somewhat of a mentoring role. Much of the summer was spent not only checking on the summer school progress, but participating in activities with the kids which may be old or new experiences for them.

As the program has progressed, the youth, school staff, and parents have become more comfortable contacting the program coordinator regarding behavioral, mental health, educational, and other concerns. Some crisis-oriented work is involved, but the eventual goal is for families to be able to address issues independently and divert kids from further negative community involvement. The program will be ongoing as an intensive community based prevention program. The hope is that this program can be a guide for youth returning to the community from out of home placements, utilizing the same framework to prevent future placement and maintain youth in their family home.

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Professional Walleye Fisherman, Joe Carter, Spends Day with NIP Youth

By Josh Clauer, DCDHS Program Leader

Last May, Gang Response Intervention Team (G.R.I.T.) Program Leader Joshua Clauer reached out to college friend Joe Carter who is a school teacher in Dubuque, Iowa. When Joe Carter is not teaching, he is a professional walleye fisherman on the Cabela's National Walleye Tour. He is the only African American professional Walleye Fisherman not only on the tour but in the world.

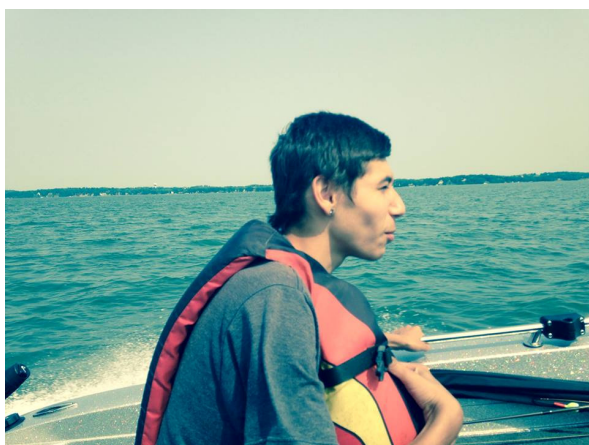
In late July, George Brown, Joshua Clauer and Joe Carter got a group of NIP youth together and took them out on Lake Mendota for a day of fishing. Although the fish weren't biting that day, there were a great deal of positive outcomes and positive reinforcement that occurred while on the water. One youth was quoted saying, "Man, the city don't look so dirty and ratchet from out here!"



This was a powerful statement considering the other conversations that were occurring on the boat about making positive life choices, gangs and being respectful at all times.

Joe Carter has asked to come back to spend more time with our youth on the water and has shown a great deal of interest in making this a yearly event because he knows how powerful it is to expose our youth to new things.

Aside from thanking Joe for coming to Madison and taking our youth fishing, we also would like to congratulate him for receiving the IOWA D.A.R.E Teacher of the year award. Congratulations, Joe Carter!



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Dane County Juvenile Detention Offers Diverse Programming

By John Bauman, Dane County Juvenile Court

This year the youth in Detention have benefited by diverse programming facilitated by some local organizations. Youth have participated in programs that teach life skills, coping mechanisms, job skills, physical health improvement and technical skills. The following are the programs that the youth have participated in:

UW Physical Therapy

Students from the UW Physical Therapy Department come once a week for 1 ½ hours to teach youth yoga, stretching and relaxation techniques. Youth receive skills that will allow them to remain calm in stressful, emotional and crisis situations.

Madison Library

Staff from the Madison Library teach youth the art of personal branding and messaging by use of technology including computers, iPads, etc. Youth have made animated videos by using action figures, clay and other objects and have also created some very elaborate recycle art projects through the Library service.

Dogs on Call

Dogs on Call, through membership of Pet Partners, is a community organization that provides health and therapy through use of dogs. Services are provided for residents in assisted living, UW students, hospitals and, as of July, the Dane County

Juvenile Detention Center. During each visit youth are allowed to pet dogs which serve as a therapeutic tool for youth who are homesick or who have pets of their own but are not allowed to see them while in custody. Some youth have never been in contact with animals and therefore this serves as their first experience being around a pet of any kind.

Commonwealth

Commonwealth staff facilitate their weekly curriculum entitled “Youth Employment & Financial Literacy Workshop” for all youth. This curriculum teaches youth in the areas of developing resumes, job interview skills, job searching, and spending plans in order for them to become competitive while searching for employment.

UW School of Psychology

Psychology students provide weekly lessons to youth on a variety of topics including Decision Making, Conflict Resolution, Problem Solving and Relationships.

UW Extension

UW Extension staff provide weekly lessons on healthy foods, meal planning, diet and health coaching.

Cooking Class

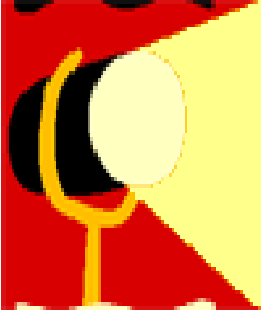
Every Sunday morning the residents participate in a cooking class in the

Detention kitchen. They learn to prepare meals that they would be able to make at a later time and they also are able to eat what they prepare.

First Wave Hip Hop and Urban Arts Learning Community

Detention is currently developing a partnership with First Wave, which is multicultural artistic program for incoming students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Comprised of young artists and leaders from across the U.S and beyond, First Wave offers students the ability to create and express themselves while obtaining a college education. First Wave is under the umbrella of the Office of Multicultural Arts Initiatives or OMAI. The First Wave Learning Community is the first university program in the country centered on urban arts, spoken word and hip-hop culture. Students will be introduced to other students in the program through lectures, performances and presentations with the hope that they may express interest in obtaining a college education, while capitalizing and creating through their talents.

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Staff Spotlight – Lasisi Ibrahim

By Linda Johnson, DCDHS Substitute Care Social Worker

Lasisi Ibrahim was born and raised in Nigeria. His family included his parents, sisters and many extended family members. His parents taught him to work hard and to only take what you needed, sharing with others in need. He was accomplished in school and was chosen to attend college, which was quite an honor.

At the age of 30, Lasisi relocated to the United States. After settling in Madison, he soon began attending the UW-Madison, graduating with a Masters of Educational Administration in 1982. During these years, Lasisi forged many personal and professional relationships and decided to call Madison his home.

Over the years, Lasisi worked with individuals with AODA issues while employed by the Tellurian Street Team. He gained experience working with people with developmental delays while at REM and RFDF. His work at Goodwill Industries increased his knowledge in the field of mental health.

Often working two jobs while attending university classes, Lasisi gained expertise in working with individuals and families, often from complicated backgrounds, and those most in need in our community. His list of awards include the 1994 Union of Nigerians Distinguished Service Award, 1998

Harambee Community Award, 1999 REM Spirit of Support Award, 2001 and 2002 REM You Make a Difference Awards, 2002 Nigerian Women Organization Excellent Service and Support Award, 2005 African Association Valuable Contribution Award, 2008 ARC Special Recognition Award and 2009 African Association Outstanding Service Award, all of which he is very proud.

Enjoying the community, knowing its resources, and his love of working directly with people, natural leadership and mentoring abilities led Lasisi to consider fostering. In 2003, with the encouragement of a close friend, he became a licensed foster parent for the Dane County Department of Human Services. A year later, Lasisi retired from REM to foster full time. That same year he built a five bedroom house to accommodate up to four youths, each with their own bedroom.

Lasisi found his calling as he thoroughly enjoyed working with youth and their families. Due to developing skills as a foster parent, his commitment to his "sons," his work with professionals (teachers, therapists, attorneys, social workers, police, etc.) and his availability, the Depart-



Lasisi Ibrahim and Sadat Abiri

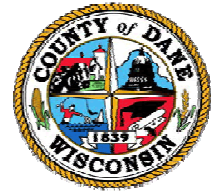
ment began to place youth with more complicated histories in his care.

Boys placed with Lasisi over the years have benefited from his caring and support. He serves as an excellent role model as well. He exhibits open and positive communication, an ability to analyze, solve problems and then follow through with a plan, and how to see the best in others. The boys are encouraged to learn life skills such as cleaning, cooking, finding employment, and saving money. He also works with them on intangible skills such as how to treat others, how to be responsible, to be punctual, and to fulfill your commitments.

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DANE COUNTY COMMUNITY RESTORATIVE COURT: REPAIR HARM - REDUCE RISK - RE-BUILD COMMUNITY



Background:

Since 2009, Dane County has been addressing racial disparities in the criminal justice system utilizing the past work of the Dane County Task Force on Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System (2009) and the Dane County Juvenile Justice Disproportionate Minority Contact Solutions Workgroup Report (2009) as well as other critical community reports, including The State of Black Madison - Before the Tipping Point and most recently the Race to Equity Report.

In 2014, the Dane County Board passed a resolution to create a pilot community court designed to use national best practices to utilize county and community strengths to resolve misdemeanors before charging. Research and program design is completed and the community justice coordinator position will be hired by September 2014.

Dane County Community Restorative Court will rely on restorative justice practices - a national best practice - to focus on addressing the harm done to victim and communities by holding offenders accountable and repairing relationships.

What are restorative justice (RJ) practices?

Restorative justice practices see crime as more than breaking the law - it looks to the harm done to the people, relationships and community. Restorative justice practices require the cooperation and collaboration of the community and the government. Restorative justice focuses on healing the injury caused by harm, balancing effective services for victims and when appropriate, the offender.

What does the Dane County Community Restorative Court (CRC) hope to achieve?

Reduce Racial Disparities in the Dane County criminal justice system.

Efficient case resolution. Participants can have a case resolved more quickly than in the criminal courts.

Community-driven solutions. The community that is affected by the crime gets to direct the plan for repairing the harm.

Reduce burden on criminal courts. The Dane County CRC has the potential to significantly save both time and money for criminal courts and the agencies that work in them.

Reduce recidivism. By keeping low-level offenders out of the traditional system—and keeping convictions off their record (and off CCAP), the community court removes an obstacle to meaningful participation in the community. As individuals gain a true understanding of the impacts of their actions, they may be less likely to reoffend.

What sorts of crimes will the Dane County Community Restorative Court handle?

The Dane County CRC will handle non-domestic violence related misdemeanors committed by 17-25 year olds in a specific geographic area.

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Strength Building in the Allied Neighborhood

By Aaron Perry, DCDHS Program Leader

As a member of NIP - Gang Response Intervention Team (GRIT), I was recently assigned to the Allied Drive neighborhood to have a greater presence Madison's high risk neighborhoods. Allied Drive is a neighborhood well-documented with challenges in regard to crime, drugs and safety.

Thanks in part to a negotiated agreement between the Dane County Juvenile Justice Manager and the Chief Operating Officer from the Boys & Girls Club, the doors of the Boys & Girls Club remained open from 5 pm – 9 pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings throughout the summer. In addition to the extended hours of operation, Dane County provided 100 club memberships for youth throughout the City of Madison, which reduced the financial burden on the household. These commitments increase GRIT's ability to significantly reduce targeted youth's criminogenic factors.

The first phase was launched in June which included the creation of a summer youth basketball league. A total of 8 teams with more than 60 players from across Madison participated each night, and more than 70 additional youth cheered from the Boys & Girls Club bleachers. On June 30, we hosted a summer league All Star game in which the Fitchburg Police Department played against league players. A fun time was had by all, and even the Mayor of Fitchburg attended.



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NIP Right Track Work Crew “Summer of Maturity”

By Tyrone Mahone, DCDHS Program Leader

The Right Track Work Crew finished its third summer on a positive note. The summer was spent at three work sites; Second Harvest Food Bank, Community Action Coalition, and Dane County Parks Department. These organizations provided a positive work experience for our youth. Staff at all organizations were courteous, friendly and, most importantly, committed to helping youth of Dane County.

Our work for the Dane County Parks Department involved clean-up, and restoration at a few of the parks. As you all are aware, we had a number of storms come through the county early this summer. Rhea Stigel-Mier provided our work crew with opportunity to clean up brush from the storms at Lusier Family Heritage Center of Madison, and Schumacher farm of Waunakee. In addition, to clean up at Schumacher, youth started on a restoration project. This involved pulling weeds, garlic mustard and other invasive plant species. At Viking Park in Stoughton, youth also removed invasive species of plants from the site. Although the work

was hard and the weather was hot, our youth managed to do a great job. Diane Schwartz, the site coordinator at Schumacher Farm Park had this to say about the boys and their work. “We love having young people working at the park. The work here isn’t glamor-

ous, mainly pulling weeds, and cleaning brush, but the boys did a great job and didn’t complain. I hope they learned something too. I would definitely have them back.”

Work at the Community Action Coalition involved sorting of clothing, that in turn will be given to families in need in the county. Youth had to sort and separate clothing by gender, size, and season. Out of season clothing was packed and shipped to another site. Being our first time working with this organiza-



tion, the youth made a great impression. In fact we were asked to come back later this summer, as the staff acknowledged the maturity, attention to details, and overall positive attitude of youth. Unfortunately, we had booked the remaining weeks of summer at other sites. Thanks to the youth, we are now able to build on this new relationship going into next summer.

The majority of our summer was spent at the Second Harvest Food Bank where youth were responsible for sorting and packaging a variety of foods. They packaged vegetables, sorted meats by type, and bagged potatoes and pasta noodles. The food sorted by youth will be delivered to smaller community pantries to be distributed to families throughout Dane County. Our group completed 120 hours, the value of which equates to 7,841 meals.



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Andre Johnson –

CYF Juvenile Justice Services Manager

First and foremost I would like to thank my predecessor Stephen Blue for his many years of service to the youth and families of Dane County. Stephen was a tireless advocate who impacted the lives of thousands of youth during his 37 years of public service. Stephen was also a mentor of mine and helped to mold me into the person that I am today. I definitely have big shoes to fill.



Juvenile Justice (JJ) in Dane County has undergone a variety of changes in the past few years.

- The JJ system has examined the disproportionate involvement of youth of color in our system and has sought solutions that will have a positive impact on that issue (such as the development of our Court Diversion Unit).
- Training on the Juvenile Cognitive Intervention Program was provided to the staff from the Neighborhood Intervention Program and other POS agencies.
- JJ has undergone a major practice enhancement which led to specialization of staff into either intake or ongoing roles.
- All JJ staff were trained on the use of Motivational Interviewing and are incorporating those principles into the work we do with youth and families.
- Dane County Juvenile Justice Services has adopted an evidence based risk assessment tool, COMPAS, which will help inform our social work practice in Dane county.

It is indeed an exciting time for Juvenile Justice as we examine new ways to improve how we work with youth and families. One thing that is evident is the need to use Evidence Based Practices (EBP) in our work. We have begun to take steps in that direction by training all staff in Motivational Interviewing and Evidence Based Practices and adopting an evidence based risk assessment tool (COMPAS). We have also committed our JJ system to using evidence based tools such as the Carey Guides in the work that we do with young people. In the coming months and years, we will be implementing additional system changes with EBP helping to guide changes in our practice.

Below I have listed some links about Evidence Based Practice and the Carey Guides for your reference.

<http://jjie.org/hub/evidence-based-practices/>

<http://jjie.org/the-skinny-on-evidence-based-practices/107405/>

<http://www.modelsforchange.net/index.html>

<http://www.njjn.org/about-us>

<http://www.thecareygroup.com/>

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Ibrahim

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Life evolved as it has a way of doing and in 2011 Lasisi and Sadat Abiri were married. Sadat joined the household, fully knowing her husband's career choice. To give credit where due, Sadat was the friend who several years earlier had encouraged Lasisi to foster. Sadat brings a feminine touch to this male dominated household by way of decorating, finishing the landscaping and taking over much of Lasisi's closet! On a more serious note, Sadat is a very skilled, professional woman who worked for years as a psychiatric nurse and is now a Nurse Practitioner. She highly values education, is very experienced in working with others, has won numerous awards (including 2002 State of Wisconsin Governor's Minority Award and 2014 YWCA Women of Distinction Award) and has raised four very

accomplished children of her own. She deserves (and has had) many articles written about her, although this one is focused on Lasisi!

Lasisi has provided a welcoming home to many boys over the years - 55 to be exact. He has also assisted other foster parents as well as the Department in providing respite for other boys when needed. Lasisi is a strong advocate for families and they feel respected by him. Often family members are invited over for holiday celebrations, some which Lasisi and Sadat do not celebrate in their own faith. The couple, who are Muslim, are accepting and supportive of all their boys in their personal choices of involvement in religious organizations, or lack thereof.

Lasisi appears to be a happy man-- happy with his family as well as his career. He loves to attend cultural festivals, always including the boys

and exposing them to different customs. He volunteers at WORT, again often including the boys. Once or twice a year Lasisi will donate his time and equipment to DJ for dances for adults with developmental delays in the Madison area. This is one of his favorite activities, one in which he gains as much as he gives.

So many people have benefitted by having Lasisi as part of their lives. Many boys who have aged out of foster care continue to stay in contact with him for years. Other foster parents know they can always count on him for sound advice, help with respite, or transportation. And our Department is deeply appreciative that he is always there for us, providing a safe place for our boys and helping them to become young men, often in the face of adversity.

Allied

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Our 2nd initiative includes the creation of a youth employment training program specifically geared for the 9 members of the Allied Brotherhood group who recently graduated from 8th grade. The Brotherhood group is co-facilitated by NIP - GRIT, and consists of 18 middle & high school African American youth. Meetings are held every Wednesday evening from 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm.

There are two additional Dane County Juvenile Justice Initiatives on the horizon that include hosting an Allied-Parent meeting to improve social cohesion among neighbors, as well as establishing a small Allied Neighborhood Advisory Team to improve communication and create a rapid response plan among community stakeholders.



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DCCRC

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Why 17-25 year olds?

Studies in neuroscience have shown that a young person's cognitive development continues into this later stage and that their emotional maturity, self-image and judgment will be affected until the prefrontal cortex of the brain has fully developed (guidelines currently state age 25). At the same time, social services decline for this transition from youth to full development.

Why the South Side of Madison?

South Madison was chosen because it is a community of strength with strong community anchor organizations, strong resident involvement, and police commitment to restorative justice principles. An additional reason for choosing this location is misdemeanor frequency in the 17-25 year old age group. Community collaboration is a critical piece of the initial set-up and will follow equity and social justice for community engagement best practices.

How are individuals selected for the Community Restorative Court?

The Community Restorative Court will accept referrals from different stakeholders within the justice system, including the district attorney, law enforcement, and occasionally community members.

Dane County Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System Sub Committee Members:

Co-Chairs: Supervisor Shelia Stubbs, District Attorney Ismael Ozanne, Judge Nicolas McNamara

Members: Lte. Richelle Anhalt, Dane County Sheriff's Office; Dee Dee Watson, Public Defender's Office; John Bauman, Juvenile Reception Center; Ron Chance, Department of Human Services; June Groehler, Madison Police Department; Jeff Kostelic, County Executive's Office

Staff: Colleen Clark, Dane County Board Office

Technical assistance provided by: Jonathan Scharrer, Clinical Instructor, Restorative Justice Project - Director, Frank J. Remington Center, University of Wisconsin Law School.

The Center for Court Innovation, New York.

Committed to collaboration and reform in criminal justice

**Questions? Email: babal.christopher@countyofdane.com
608-283-1219**



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NIP Right Track *Continued from Page 9*

In addition, we processed 29,835 pounds of food. Project supervisor Santeon Racquemoire stated this about the work crews, "I think they have done a great job. These young men are focused and get a lot done for us." In addition, Jamie Andaverde, another project supervisor, echoed Santeon's remarks, "I think this is a great experience for them," he said. "We appreciate the work done and they complete projects asked of them." The biggest compliment came from Volunteer Services Coordinator Pam Higham. "It has been great to have the young men around. They are always on time, consistent, well behaved and allow our project supervisor to do a good deal of planning this summer. We really appreciate the work they have done".

I would like to thank the Dane County Parks Department, Community Action Coalition, and the Second Harvest Food Bank for working with our youth this summer. This was a great experience for them and we look forward to next summer.



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GANG RESPONSE INTERVENTION TEAM (GRIT) PRESENTS AT CENTRO HISPANO

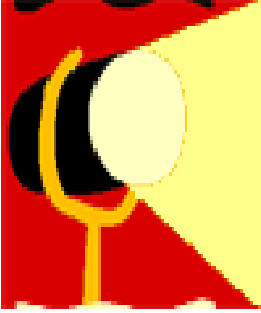
By Randy Molina, DCDHS Program Leader



Randy Molina (left); Jessica Canela of ComVida (center); Josh Clauer (right)

On August 19, the Gang Response Intervention Team (GRIT) was invited to present to a group of youth from the ComVida program at Centro Hispano. ComVida is a program that aims to divert Latino youth from negative behavior through positive interactions and a variety of workshops. Josh Clauer and I were asked by ComVida coordinator, Jessica Canela, to speak on the dangers of gang violence as it relates to youth in our community. The group consisted of high school age Latino males. We were able to cover a variety of gang issues including violence, education, future employment and downfalls of gang lifestyle. The presentation was informal and allowed for a back and forth discussion where the young men were allowed to share some of their own experiences. They seemed very receptive to the things we were talking about especially as it related to the issues currently going on in Madison. We were able connect even more by describing some of the challenges we faced as young men growing up in similar environments. After the presentation, we felt that we had made a great partnership and hope to find ways to keep the relationship going with Centro Hispano as well as the youth in the group. We have offered our services on any issues related to gangs that may come up in the future and look forward to more collaboration.

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Agency Spotlight – Briarpatch Youth Services: New Name, New Facility, Same Diligence

By Dean C. Bossenbroek, Briarpatch Youth Services

When Tyler Schueffner approaches young homeless people on the streets of Madison, he is armed with a wealth of information about available services. He knows where hungry homeless youth may seek free food, housing assistance, job search assistance, crisis counseling; mental, dental, and general health care; help with getting back into school. Schueffner, Briarpatch Street Outreach Program (SOP) Coordinator, provides all manner of sage advice to young people about how to get off and stay off the streets. He knows that given a stable living situation, even the most unstable individuals are able to negotiate with the system for success.

Schueffner and his SOP staff provide hands on assistance to young people in search of housing, jobs, and health care. He dispenses all this information with compassionate efficacy and plenty of empathy during relatively short interactions in distracting circumstances. At the end of the day, when homeless youth walk away from SOP staff, they are better prepared to improve their situation.

The walking away part is where Schueffner's solid footing of knowledge devolves into the uneven slippery descent of an unstable reality: the homeless youth's attention necessarily turns to her immediate situation. Where will she survive the night? What extreme circumstances will she have to endure to survive? And when the morning arrives, will she have the energy to follow through with her stated best intentions during her meeting with Schueffner?

The answers are often negative.

Youth Services of Southern Wisconsin recently changed its name to Briarpatch Youth Services (more on that later), as the agency concurrently sharpens its focus on the issue of homeless teens and young adults. The new facility on Rimrock Road includes space for an eight-bed, temporary shelter for homeless teens and runaway youth. The agency is currently working to secure the funds necessary to open and operate the shelter. When it opens, the Briarpatch Youth Shelter will serve homeless, throwaway, and runaway youth, ages 13-17 with length of stays ranging from 1-28 days. During their time in the shelter, youth will have direct access to the sorts of services Schueffner and his staff now provide assistance in obtaining.



Briarpatch Youth Services is now located at 2720 Rimrock Road in Madison. The new building has space for a temporary shelter for runaway and homeless youth.

The differences will be many: having a safe, warm, place to sleep at night is prominent. There are on site laundry and shower facilities. Being rested, clean, and presentable relieves all manner of stress, and will make following through on housing and job interviews much more likely. Additionally, youth will be able to talk to crisis counselors in the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Program, whose services have been the cornerstone of Briarpatch for over 40 years. They will have the opportunity to participate in job training through the Youth Job Center (YJC). Access to support groups like Choices and Teens Like Us is right down the hall. Parents of residents may take advantage of the Briarpatch Parental Support Services. All of these programs have been operating successfully for many years under the Briarpatch Youth Services umbrella.

The much needed shelter and related services will be available as soon as the necessary funding is secured. In the present, Briarpatch has shouldered additional advocacy responsibilities. Briarpatch Youth Services has received a federal grant to establish the Briarpatch Transitional Living Program (TLP) in collaboration with Madison Community Cooperative (MCC). Similar to the services to be provided by temporary shelter staff, young adults living in the TLP will have access to an abundance of onsite services.

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MCC will manage the property and the leases with TLP residents while Briarpatch staff will provide case management and support services. Molly Leimontas and Olivia Rico are coordinating the daily operations of this new venture with support from Schueffner. The TLP will provide housing for up to nine (9) homeless young adults at any given time. In addition, TLP staff will provide outreach, case management, life skills training, job readiness training, and aftercare services. The TLP will primarily serve young adults 18-21 years of age. Some non-residential services will be available for 22-24 year olds as well. TLP residents are expected to stay at the house for 6-18 months. The program's primary goal will be to ensure that each young person is prepared to live independently, and has a realistic plan for doing so, before they leave the TLP house. The Briarpatch TLP will be the only service of its kind in Dane County.

Rico and Leimontas are amped about their roles as advocates for the TLP cooperative's residents. They laud the fact by combining traditional transitional programming with the cooperative model, the resulting hybrid will be different than what is currently available. They stress concepts such as empowerment, dignity, and member inclusiveness.

Instead of telling co-op members what other people think they need, Leimontas and Rico will fashion their support around what individuals feel they want. By creating a philosophical atmosphere focused on social justice and the idea that every human being has a right to housing, the co-op will function with policy input from the members who reside there. These ideas are central to making the successful transition from surviving on the street and couch surfing to a stable living situation in an apartment.



Transitional Living Program Advocates Molly Leimontas and Olivia Rico seen on the steps of the co-op are stoked about their jobs.

Formerly known as Youth Services of Southern Wisconsin, the renaming and rebranding of the agency's image evolves at the same time as these initiatives gain traction in Dane County.

When Briarpatch, Inc. and Community Adolescent Programs, Inc. (CAP) merged in 2003, the name of the organization was changed to Youth Services of Southern Wisconsin, Inc., which is a mouthful. Service providers, volunteers, and most importantly, the youth they serve struggle with saying and remembering it. It's generic sounding, long, is a tongue twister, and "Southern Wisconsin" doesn't accurately describe the service area. After 11 years, the name has failed to catch on. With a new building, and plans to open a much needed shelter

for runaway and homeless youth, the time is right for a change.

The agency consulted with youth, volunteers, staff, community members, donors, and other service providers. With the help of a professional marketing firm, they decided on Briarpatch Youth Services. The new name is more recognizable, easier to remember, easier to say, and honors the agency's long history of service to our community.

Briarpatch Youth Services continues to provide a wide array of time tested programming for over 2000 clients annually.