

Appendix C

Community Corrections Facilities: S.H. v. Strickrath

Footnote Material for Fred Cohen

by

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I. Background

The following are impressions based on my visits to the Northern Ohio Juvenile Community Corrections Facility in Sandusky and the Multi-County Juvenile Attention Center and Community Corrections Center in Canton on October 10-11, 2007. Shelly Fitzhugh and John Ward, Director of Community Corrections Programs, accompanied me on these site visits.

II. Assessment Strategy

Both visits began at 9:00 a.m. and ended by 3:00 p.m. The visits contained five activities:

1. An entrance interview with administrative staff to explain the reason for the community correction facility (CCF) visit and to hear the facility administration describe the nature and extent of its programs and services,
2. A tour of the facility conducted by youth,
3. A structured interview with one group of 6-8 residents per facility using questions from the youth interviews at the JCFs,
4. Interviews with one group of four line workers (JCO equivalents) from each facility using questions from the JCFs, and
5. An exit interview with administrative staff regarding staff training services and follow-up questions from the first four components.

III. Findings and Impressions

Both facilities appear to operate very good treatment programs, and this elicited several constructive exchanges and discussions of programs and services. In all, both visits were quite pleasant. My initial impressions lead me to believe that more treatment is occurring at these two community corrections facilities than at any of the juvenile corrections facilities (JCFs).

A. Staffing

Even though staff credentials are similar to the JCFs for the line staff positions and the therapists (counselors, social workers, and caseworkers), there are two noticeable differences at both facilities. First, the living units are small. The Multi-County CCF has two 12-bed units (total capacity of 24), and the Northern Ohio CCF has two 12 bed units and one six bed unit for a total capacity of 30.

Second, staffing patterns are substantially different than the JCFs. Both CCFs operate below a 1:12 ratio of direct care staff to youth. Both facilities are prohibited from counting middle managers and counselors (social workers and caseworkers) in the 1:12 ratio. If the facility has a supervising direct care worker (JCO), that individual may be counted in the 1:12 ratio. This is a distinct difference between CCFs and JCFs regarding staffing patterns.

Given this staff count strategy, both CCFs operated near a 1:8 ratio. For example, Northern Ohio has two youth leaders and a youth leader supervisor on each waking hour shift for a maximum capacity of 30 youth. This equates to a 1:10 ratio; however, on the day of the assessment there were only 25 youth in residence (a ratio of 1:8.3).

For Multi-County, there are three youth specialists (JCOs) assigned to each waking hour shift. Administration indicated that it never goes over capacity, so the staff ratio never exceeds 1:8.

Ironically, both institutions have counselors, recreation therapists, unit managers on the living units at various times during waking hour shifts, and these support staff would be included in the staffing ratio at a JCF.

B. Other Effectiveness Factors

These CCFs present programs and operations that correspond very closely with the type of intervention expected from a correctional intervention. In addition to a sufficient number of good staff, several additional factors contribute to success:

1. All youth have their own rooms; there is no double occupancy. Stated differently, both CCFs operate at or below rated capacity.
2. Residents from both facilities were polite, well-mannered, and thoughtful, indicating the acquisition of necessary social skills. The vast majority of youth in both groups indicated that the treatment programs were effective, that they provided useable tools, and that staff were a big help in encouraging youth to change their behaviors.
3. At both facilities, all youth and staff interviewees indicated that fights hardly ever occur and no one could recall the last time there was a physical restraint. Both groups spoke favorably about the other.

4. It is important to note that the average length of stay for each program was less than nine months. Staff noted that there is a phenomenon with many youth where they peak in terms of cognitive and behavioral changes, and it is important to release youth at or near the peak. This sensitivity to release being linked to changes in the youth are clearer in the CCFs than the JCFs.
5. In both facilities, residents and staff indicated that both groups occasionally use profanity, but there is no use of profanity directed toward an individual.
6. The school program at the Northern Ohio facility could serve as a model. The computer classroom contains the Virtual Learning Academy, a computer assisted instructional program linked to the public schools. Successful completion of various modules translates into academic credit in the public schools. One youth talked about how he spends additional hours every week on the program, how he has caught up with his class, and how he is on schedule for graduation. This type of arrangement instills hope. Each youth commented about how beneficial the Virtual Learning Academy was in maintaining high school graduation as a viable goal. There needs to be some type of equivalent program offered at the JCFs.
7. The CCFs follow the Missouri model of small facilities (less than 50 beds), small living units (fewer than 20 youth), and a reasonable staff ratio (1:8). In the presence of good programs, competent therapists (all are licensed in Ohio), and a stable and caring direct care staff, it is not surprising that the recidivism study of the CCFs by the University of Cincinnati indicates that recidivism is around 20%.
8. Neither CCF reported a skimming or creaming strategy to select only the best kids and to weed out potential troublemakers. Clearly, those youth with substantial histories of violence appear to go directly to DYS; however, there are a substantial number of youth in DYS who could benefit from the CCF programs. Likewise, replication of the CCF model could help reduce the overcrowding in the JCFs.
9. Aftercare represents a concern for both facilities. DYS does not provide aftercare services, so reentry activities are the responsibility of the youth's juvenile court probation officer. As a result, there is little consistency in reentry services. Typical of descriptions of probation officers, most staff complained that youth rarely see their probation officer between the commitment to the CCF and a month or so before release.
10. Training occurs regularly, but the size of the facilities creates the litany of problems associated with efforts to training small numbers of staff. In both facilities, staff have been trained as trainers to expand the amount of training hours produced annually.

IV. Summary

If these CCFs are representative of the types of programs and services available through all CCFs, the community corrections programs are a positive factor in the juvenile justice system's efforts to rehabilitate youthful offenders.

Each facility possesses the program ideas and materials to handle a larger population of youth. The dilemma is the same as the one currently plaguing DYS: Population or capacity expansion without the addition of new beds and new staff will result in overcrowding and understaffing, which will scuttle program effectiveness measures and outcomes.