The Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Project; Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania is the recipient of the 2011 John Neufeld Award

A narrative of the program as submitted is as follows:

The origins of the Pennsylvania Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Project in the Westmoreland County Juvenile Court can be found in the work of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee (JJDPC) of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). Each year, the Committee identifies an “area of emphasis” for the next year. The JJDPC, using a small discussion group format, ranks all of the major initiatives within the juvenile justice system that could be pursued in the upcoming year. The need to develop gender specific services ranked second, behind education on Balanced and Restorative Justice.

Because the JJDPC had a strong interest in gender specific services, prospective applicants were encouraged to consider submitting concept papers that addressed the needs of adolescent girls in the juvenile justice system. At the same time, the JJDPC was also engaged in a discussion of how to use federal “Challenge Grant” funds that were to be directed toward mental health or gender specific services. In responses to an RFP published by PCCD a concept paper calling for the creation of a PTSD treatment program for adolescent girls in the juvenile justice system in Pennsylvania was submitted.

The success of the Juvenile Court in Pennsylvania has been based in part, on the ability of the system to modify its philosophy and behavior in order to address the changing needs of the community, victims and the young people who enter the system. The current Vision and Mission Statement of the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice System—Community Protection, Victim Restoration, and Youth Redemption—reflects

the changes created in the Juvenile Act during the Special Legislative Session of 1995. In creating the Balanced and Restorative Justice Philosophy, the Special Session emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to the problem of crime committed by juveniles. The philosophy now directs the operation of the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice System.

Westmoreland County was selected to become the "Demonstration Site" for the Pennsylvania PTSD Project. The goal of this initiative is to develop a demonstration program for identifying, assessing and treating stress and trauma in girls who enter the juvenile justice system. It is our hope that other Counties will use this information as a guideline in establishing services for girls who enter the Pennsylvania juvenile justice system, who have post traumatic stress disorder.

Westmoreland County has been involved in the Pennsylvania PTSD Project since its inception. Juvenile Court Judge John Driscoll attended the very first conference on the PTSD Project and became an enthusiastic advocate for the program. Chief Juvenile Probation Officer Adeline Beighley became a strong advocate for the program and later became a member of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee and a member of the Female Services Subcommittee that oversees the PTSD Project.

Deborah Ciocco, a senior probation officer was involved with the Female Services Subcommittee prior to being asked to act as the PTSD Project Coordinator. It is she who facilitated all the trainings. The PTSD Trainings and the three other trainings she developed, Stress in Adolescence, Mental Health Issues in Adolescence, and StressLess are all offered to participants. Mrs. Ciocco travels Statewide to Probation Department, agencies, schools, Institutions, Children & Youth Services, and mental health detention centers to present. However, it should also be noted that Westmoreland County is home to the project and all topics are offered on site at the Westmoreland County Juvenile Probation Department on an ongoing basis.

The Pennsylvania PTSD Project builds on one of the most urgent needs in the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice System, as identified by practitioners and policy makers, the creation of gender-specific services for girls. The issue of services for females who enter the juvenile justice system is not just a Pennsylvania concern. The Federal Office

of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) have identified services for delinquent young women as a national priority. The OJJDP established a Challenge Grant Initiative to help states create services for delinquent girls. In Pennsylvania, a portion of these Challenge Grant Initiative funds were directed towards the Pennsylvania PTSD project.

Collaborative Effort

One of the most critical needs of the Pennsylvania juvenile justice system, as identified both by practitioners and policy makers is the creation of gender specific services for delinquent girls. In 2004, approximately 22.6% of the dispositions in juvenile court were young women. Placements occurred in 12.2% of these dispositions. Young women who are placed in residential treatment programs face specific problems not encountered by young men. One of the major problems is finding appropriate services. Given the limited number of young women placed compared to adolescent males, young women often spend extended periods of time in juvenile detention facilities waiting for residential placements. A second major problem concerns the types of residential services available. Because residential services for females are limited, young women are usually placed in programs that are required to work with a wide variety of behavioral, emotional, intellectual, and mental health issues, all at the same time and in the same facility. In contrast, the spectrum of services for adolescent males is more fully developed, allowing juvenile courts to secure services tailored to young males that require specific treatment for mental health, sexual offenders, conduct disorders and lower intellectual functioning.

The practice of placing delinquent girls who have a wide range of problems in the same facility is somewhat modified by the fact that often the common thread that unites these young women is the issue of **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder**. Beginning with Hoover (1947) and followed by Finkelhor (1984), society has come to recognize that abuse among children is a major social problem. The Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention and the National Center for Juvenile Justice National Reports for 2006 indicate that during the years of 1993-2003 a child had a 2.5 times greater chance of being a victim of rape or sexual assault than an adult. Twenty six percent of

victims reporting to law enforcement were under the age of 18. Statistics indicate that 70% of those were victims of sexual assault, 11% robberies, and 10% murder.

Sexual abuse involving girls in the general population suggests approximately 10 to 25% of all women have been the victim of some type of sexual abuse (Kilpatrick & Best, 1990). Data from clinical populations suggest a range of 25 to 50%. With the layering of emotional and physical abuse on top of sexual abuse issues, it is clear that many girls placed in residential programs experience posttraumatic stress disorder. The issues of family and community violence only add to the amount of trauma experienced by many of the young women who enter the juvenile justice system. Whether the adolescent is diagnosed with a conduct disorder, emotional problems, mental health issues or other difficulties, many have experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.

Although there is significant literature on working with adult clients who are experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder, there is limited information on working with delinquent girls who have experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. A review of the literature resulted in no findings on specific and comprehensive treatment curricula on how to treat this problem in adolescent girls placed in residential programs by juvenile courts. The current literature on posttraumatic stress disorder treatment also failed to provide materials that focus on two major elements essential to the Pennsylvania juvenile justice system: competency development and formal assessment. The inability to assess competency development makes it difficult to know if the treatment provided has led to changes in the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of the client. The need to research the effectiveness of the service being provided is also an essential point in program development.

A second issue of concern is the knowledge base and skill level of the staff that provide the day-to-day supervision and treatment of these young women. Most residential childcare staff who work with young women are college graduates who do not have advanced training in psychology or social work. In addition, training programs on working with delinquent girls who are experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder are limited. Because training is limited, staff do not always have a complete understanding of the dynamics of this illness and how to respond in a therapeutic manner.

Because of the problems listed above, a proposal to create a PTSD treatment curriculum for adolescent girls in the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice System was designed. This treatment curriculum was developed by a work group of juvenile justice practitioners who work with adolescent girls. The girls being treated had considerable input into the final content and shape of the curriculum.

Each county in Pennsylvania has a unique juvenile court history that must be considered before attempting to implement any of the policies and programs that are presented below. This is a description of how the Pennsylvania Westmoreland County PTSD Project can be implemented in any county. It is not a description of how the project should be implemented.

As in any new endeavor, the implementation of this project has required **creativity, flexibility and determination**. Because this project was the first of its kind, creativity was critical to both the planning and implementation phases. Questions as to how all the different services being provided to adolescent girls in the Westmoreland County Juvenile Justice system could be identified and coordinated required considerable creativity. County personnel showed substantial flexibility in developing contracts, accounting processes and audit procedures. Perhaps the key ingredient in the development of this project has been the amount of determination that it has taken to develop a demonstration site. Many supporters of this project showed a lot of determination in pushing through all the obstacles, difficulties and frustrations that arose.

Pennsylvania enjoys a reputation for being one of the most advanced juvenile justice systems in the country. Much of the credit for this success comes from the people and agencies willing to “think outside the box” and to dream big dreams. This demonstration site project is one small attempt to advance the practice of juvenile justice in this state and country.

Improved Competencies Through Skills & Training.

The response to the implementation of this project was both immediate and surprising. While a mild interest in the program was anticipated, the response would be more accurately described as amazing. The following two examples will help to illustrate the response to this project.

- A training program on the PTSD treatment curriculum was offered as part of the JCJC Juvenile Justice Week Program. The meeting room was set with 30 chairs. An additional 45 chairs were added, others stood in the back of the room for the three hour training program. The feedback at the end of the training was extremely positive with the common theme “most of the girls we work with have PTSD.”
- A statewide conference on the PTSD treatment curriculum was held. The grant submitted to PCCD had proposed a conference for 40 people. The response to the conference announcement was extraordinary. When the conference began, more than 120 people attended. The response to the conference was simply overwhelming. The audience was more than 90% female and the constant theme was: “It is about time we start paying attention to the needs of adolescent girls.” More than half of the participants asked what they could do to be directly involved in the project.

Improved Leadership Through Training.

When it became clear to the JJDPC and to PCCD staff that the PTSD project was meeting a substantial unmet need, the project was revised to accomplish the following goals:

1) To educate the juvenile justice professionals about PTSD in adolescent girls (more than 13,000 juvenile justice and related social service personnel have received more than 100,000 hours of training on understanding PTSD);
2) To equip juvenile detention centers and juvenile probation offices with the ability to assess PTSD in adolescent girls; and

3) To create a work group that would implement the PTSD treatment curriculum in selected residential facilities.

Additionally, the decision was made to continue to fund the PTSD grant under the federal Challenge Grant funding stream which was earmarked for gender specific services and served as a more logical source of funding for the project.

Accomplishments:

- **Westmoreland County Juvenile Court is well known as the Center for all PTSD work in Pennsylvania.**
- **Field Testing and Revising the PTSD Treatment Curriculum**
  The PTSD Treatment Curriculum Work Group decided to field test the entire curriculum in several residential programs. Staff met with Eliana Gil, a national expert in the field of working with abused adolescents. Ms. Gil examined the curriculum in detail and made several suggestions. She stated that the curriculum was done "…very well." The curriculum was revised during the second half of the year and as of June 2011 has been revised once again to include working with males in the Juvenile Justice System.
- **Creation of a Training Curriculum for Juvenile Probation Officers**
  A six-hour training program on "Signs & Symptoms of PTSD in the Adolescent Population" was developed. This training program was then offered throughout Pennsylvania. This was also offered as a train the trainer project, so that the 66 other Counties in PA could return and train their own staff.
- **Training of Juvenile Detention Staff**
  A "**Train the Trainers**" program was developed and conducted that focused on (1) Understanding PTSD and (2) Assessing PTSD. This model required a three-day meeting each month and attempted to engage all 23 juvenile detention centers in Pennsylvania. The goal of this effort was to have a staff member in every detention center to train their peers in understanding and assessing PTSD in adolescent girls.

- **Training of Juvenile Detention Administrators**
  Working with the President of the Juvenile Detention Centers Association of Pennsylvania (JDCAP), a meeting of the detention home administrators was scheduled to educate them about: (1) the work being done on behalf of the "Training the Trainers" effort; and (2) the prevalence of PTSD in adolescent girls placed in juvenile detention centers.
- **Training of Juvenile Court Judges**
  Working with the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, the project conducted a half-day training program at the Annual Conference of State Trial Judges and a workshop at the Annual Pennsylvania of State Trial Judges and a workshop at the Annual Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Conference.
- **Training of Public Defenders/District Attorneys**
  Working with members of the JJDPC, the project developed a training program to be conducted at the Annual Conferences of both these organizations.
- **Training of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers**
  Working with the President of the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers (PCCJPO), the project developed a training program that was conducted at the quarterly meetings of the PCCJPO.
- **Creating and Purchasing Public Education/Training Materials**
  The project developed five videos during the first six months, as follows:
  Volume I: Understanding PTSD in Adolescent Girls
  Volume II: Treating PTSD in Adolescent Girls
  Volume III: PTSD and Adolescent Girls in Police Custody
  Volume IV: PTSD and Adolescent Girls in Juvenile Detention
  Volume V: PTSD and Adolescent Girls in Juvenile Probation
  The project also purchased large volumes of PTSD education materials to conduct a statewide public education campaign, within the juvenile system, concerning PTSD in adolescent girls.
- **A Stress in Adolescence Psycho-Educational Curriculum was created.**
  This 20, one hour session curriculum was developed for use with any adolescent (i.e., schools, faith community, service agencies, boy scouts, girl scouts, etc.).

- **Mental Health Issues in Adolescence Training Curriculum**
  Developed by the PTSD Project Coordinator, this one day training educates those working with adolescence.
- **STRESSLESS**
  This training was also developed by the Project Coordinator. This fun one day training experience refreshes staff from burn out, vicarious trauma and stress.
- **Publication** of a quarterly newsletter the **PTSD POST** is sent out to over 7,000 professionals nationwide.
- **Three Annual Statewide Conferences** on PTSD have been held in Westmoreland County. These were offered free of cost. Funded by Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) grants. Over 1,000 professionals attended.
- **The 1st PTSD Aftercare Curriculum** in the State. This newly created 8 session PTSD Aftercare Curriculum enables Master's Level Therapists to work with the adolescents at the point of placement for up to 3 months after release. Identified as a weak point in the system, this curriculum enables the family to make therapeutic changes/improvements as the adolescent does likewise. Family weekend sessions are held during home visits to ensure success upon release.
- **Project Coordinator** trains Nationwide and Locally for Professional Conference.

Multi Jurisdiction

During the second year of the project, the massive statewide education program that took place led to an expanding interest in the project. Many participants asked how they could be involved in the project. Some wanted to be trained in the PTSD treatment curriculum, some wanted to be able to conduct PTSD awareness training in their agencies, some detention staff wanted a set of skills to use with girls in detention who had been identified as having PTSD, and some participants were determined to do something unique for the young people they serve. For example, Tom Marshall, the Principal of the Greensburg-Salem Middle School, said he wanted to develop a stress and trauma education program for the girls in his alternative education program. Working with a school-based probation officer, this program has been created,

implemented, and field tested offering a 20 session psycho-educational curriculum for use with any adolescent.

Because of the truly extraordinary positive response to the PTSD project, a long-term continuation plan was developed by the PTSD Project Implementation Work Group. This plan calls for the following: (1) ongoing training on the PTSD treatment curriculum; (2) continuing the work of The PTSD Treatment Curriculum Work Group, to revise and update the curriculum; (3) developing a “Managing Stress in Adolescence in the Detention Environment Psycho-Education Program” for girls in detention who manifest signs of having significant stress or trauma issues; (4) continuing education on understanding PTSD; (5) expanding the public PTSD education/awareness program; and (6) expanding the PTSD training program to related human services (schools, faith community, mental health programs, etc.).

- **Training of Juvenile Justice System Personnel**
  The statewide free training program on understanding PTSD was continued, and held throughout Pennsylvania and included the distribution of public education materials.
- **Public Education/Awareness Program**
  The project continued to provide a large amount of public education/awareness materials within the juvenile justice system and Courts (i.e., CASA Volunteers).

By the end of the third year, the PTSD Project had developed a national reputation and a number of PTSD training programs were held outside of Pennsylvania. For example, trainers involved in the project traveled to Connecticut to present at the National Coalition of Juvenile Justice Annual Conference. Trainings were also conducted on behalf of the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the United States Department of Justice.

Ms. Elissa Rumsey, of the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the federal juvenile justice monitor for Pennsylvania, visited one of the residential placements to study the Pennsylvania PTSD project. In her exit interview, she stated that the “PTSD project is an exciting and wonderful program.”

Awards

Program of the Year Award by the Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges' Commission (JCJC) in 2004

The International Association of Correctional Training Personnel's Award for Training System Atlanta 2006

Juvenile Justice Trainer's Association (JJTA) Organization Award for Excellence Vegas 2006

Pennsylvania Association on Probation, Parole and Corrections Probation Officer of the Year Award in 2007

Mental Health America of Westmoreland County's Innovation Award in 2009

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On behalf of this year's selection committee and the entire MAACM Board, I would like to congratulate the Westmoreland County, PA for their outstanding efforts in developing and implementing this innovative and truly worthwhile program.

Very truly yours,

Kevin A. Cross, Pennsylvania, Chair of the John Neufeld Award Committee

Members of the 2011 John Neufeld Award Committee:

Richard Abbott, Maryland

Howard Berchtold, Jr., New Jersey

Myrtle Thomas, Delaware