

Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities

Hearing on

Meeting the Challenges Faced by Girls in the Juvenile Justice System

March 11, 2010

Gary Ivory Testimony on Behalf of Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.

Chairwoman McCarthy, Ranking Member Platts and Members of the Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities, thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Gary Ivory. I am the National Director of Program Development for Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP). YAP is a national non-profit organization founded in 1975 by Tom Jeffers. YAP began by helping to return felony youthful offenders in Camp Hill Prison (near Harrisburg PA) back to their homes and communities of origin. The program provided intensive supervision and 24/7 support, up to 30 hours per week, for each youth and his/her family. For those youth that received services, approximately 78% did not recidivate and experienced positive gains in education and employment. The core of the model then, and now, is the recruitment of paid “advocates” as positive adult role models. Advocates are recruited from the neighborhoods in which the youth whom they serve reside. Advocates are familiar with neighborhood conditions and resources. Advocates also are able to relate to the culture and language of the youth and family that they serve.

The mission of YAP is to develop home and community-based alternatives for youth and adults who are at high-risk of being institutionalized (jails, detention centers, group homes, psychiatric hospitals, etc.). YAP provides a safe, cost-effective alternative for many jurisdictions nationally. Currently, YAP operates over 120 programs in seventeen states, including Washington, DC. YAP serves over 10, 000 youth and families annually. We have over 2, 300 full and part time staff.

Today, I will present on some of the great work that YAP is doing in Clark County (Las Vegas) Nevada. This program is serving a large number of female offenders who have been adjudicated delinquent. YAP is under contract with the Department of Juvenile Justice Services and the Juvenile Court to keep from re-offending.

YAP started the program in Las Vegas almost five years ago. YAP was charged with helping to reduce the number of female offenders that were housed at the Clark County Department of Juvenile Justice Services detention facilities and to develop alternatives to out-of-home placement. YAP helped to demonstrate that delinquent youth can improve their educational and vocational circumstances in the community without jeopardizing public safety. Since 2006, each of these goals has been accomplished. To date, the program has achieved an 80% or higher success rate. We define success by measuring the

following: reducing youth recidivism rates; preventing out-of-home removal and helping youth successfully complete the terms and conditions of their probation.

Over many years, we have observed some specialized needs of female offenders that are very different from their male counterparts:

- Most have been sexually abused at some point in their lives
- Their needs and support systems are very different and often go unmet in programs that are geared towards working with males
- Many programs are geared to working with males, not females (staffing patterns often reflect this)
- Females who are involved in “sexual trafficking” often have significant safety issues and fear of reprisal/safety is paramount
- Placements out of the home (detention, correctional placements, foster care) tend to be less tailored to meet their needs and they are often abused in these settings

Some key program components of YAP that we find work well with female offenders include the following:

- Individualized approach to working with females based on their needs, including recruiting female staff who have sometimes been through the juvenile justice system as role models
- Family-centered approach, rather than just focusing on the needs of the youth
- Unconditional caring/support; a never give up attitude
- Holistic approach: multiple needs are addressed simultaneously
- 24/7 availability
- Wraparound approach where services and supports are literally wrapped around the youth and her family
- Supported Work (subsidized employment) in an area of interest
- Flexible funds to address emergency needs (clothing, housing, fees for programs)
- Never give up approach!

A key ingredient to our success in Las Vegas has been our Supported Work Program. Supported work is a form of subsidized employment. Based on a youth’s interest, YAP finds a local employer who will employ the youth 10-20 hours per week. The employer agrees to provide a safe work environment for the youth and provide direction and support. The youth is paid at minimum wage, although some employers add to their salary to increase their hourly wage. Employers often hire youth once their 3-4 month Supported Work Program ends. In Las Vegas, we currently have 15 youth working through our Supported Work Program. In addition to helping with a legal source of income, it helps young women with a career track, marketable job skills and as an alternative to the underground economy, especially gangs and prostitution. This also helps them to pay fees and restitution that might be owed to the Court.

In January of this year, I was in Las Vegas visiting our program. One of the young women in our Supported Work Program was referred to YAP because of teenage

prostitution. She had been gang raped. After assigning her an advocate to work with her, we helped her with a job through our Supported Work Program. I visited her while she was working at a job site. She has a young child and the job is helping her pay the bills and help in developing a career track. She is now working in a restaurant and is finishing her high school diploma and will be attending community college. YAP will be assisting her with a \$1,000 scholarship through our YAP Endowment Fund. She is doing very well because of the unconditional support and care that we have provided her. She has had no contact with the juvenile justice system for over a year.

Lastly, I would like to mention the cost savings of YAP and our outcomes. The cost of operating YAP averages \$60 per day nationally. The cost of secure detention ranges from \$150 per day, or often much higher. The cost savings for a YAP program versus secure detention, correctional and residential placement are substantial. In addition, YAP outcomes are far better. For example: the recidivism rates for youth returning from correctional placements is often 50% or higher. YAP has over ten (10) external evaluations on our programs. Those outcome studies demonstrate YAP's impact on the youth we serve. Again, our outcomes indicate that 80% of youth are positively discharged from our programs and YAP also has shown positive outcomes working with female offenders.

I hope my testimony has shed some light on the YAP model and some challenges faced working with female offenders. Thank you again for inviting me to participate in the hearing today, I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.