

Testimony:

My duties as a York County Juvenile Probation Officer have afforded me the opportunity to supervise the female juvenile offender population that are Court ordered to a residential facility. York County currently has eight females in out of home placements that are considered long term placements. There are 125 male juvenile offenders in placement. All female juvenile offenders have been placed as a result of an adjudication of delinquency ranging from Misdemeanor Offenses to Felony Offenses. The primary concerns for each female client are the mental health issues and substance abuse issues. Each of the 8 females currently in placement have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. My experience finds that each female has a history of sexual abuse (victim) and has never been offered treatment as a result of that abuse. The juvenile offender have not learned healthy or positive coping skills to deal with the trauma. As a result, the female has resorted to substance abuse and has severe difficulty controlling her behaviors. Additionally, family issues emerge as a result of the female acting out in a negative manner.

A major obstacle to effectively treating female offenders in York County is the lack of services for females. The residential facilities that offer quality treatment are not as prevalent as they are for males. For example, there is no facility in Pennsylvania designed to treat a female adolescent that has been found to committed a sexual offense. To date, York County has two to three providers that have proven to be effective in treating PTSD and substance abuse issues in adolescent females. The programs offer rigorous treatment for the above-mentioned issues; however, it is a slow healing process for any child dealing with trauma. This results in a length of stay being anywhere from 6 months to over a year. Additionally, female juvenile offenders who are in placement usually have significant mental health issues that need to be stabilized prior to addressing the substance abuse issues and family relationship problems. It has been my experience that female clients entering residential placements also struggle to succeed in an educational setting. Females are typically behind in their education. This is largely attributed to truancy issues. It has also been determined that the female offenders have not been able to focus in an educational setting as a result of mental health disorders and symptoms of PTSD. This often is overlooked by school districts.

The transition for any female from placement back in to the community is a significant factor in preventing recidivism. The focus needs to be that aftercare begins at disposition and all parties need to be involved in the treatment planning of each child. This includes Juvenile Probation, Residential Facility, Family, School Districts, and any other agency involved. It needs to be a "team approach" in order to allow for a smooth transition back in to the community. The emphasis has been on continuity of care rather than discharging a female offender without any services already in place. This includes a solid educational plan, counseling services, medication management, designated support system, and employment opportunity. It is significant to monitor the female offender on a regular basis in order to ensure compliance with probation conditions as well as to determine that the female is not displaying any signs of returning to negative behaviors.

It is my opinion that prior to discharging a female from residential placement, it is imperative that family counseling is facilitated. This will address the issues that resulted in the child being removed from the home and will also provide the primary caretaker the

opportunity to learn different and/or more effective ways of managing the child's issues. The child will also be able to see the effect that her behavior has had on the family as a result of the counseling sessions. It is also helpful to have a relapse prevention plan in place as well a defined set of rules for each child.