



COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
January 24, 2022

Minutes

In Attendance:

Renee Ciconte, Deputy Director, Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services
Joe Bryant, DYRS
Danielle Stevenson, DYRS
Natasha Smith, DYRS
Aileen Fink, Director, Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health
Eric McLaurin, DYRS
Kathleen Covelli-Reyes, CSD
Raheem Perkins, DYRS
John Schmidt – Delaware Council on Gambling Problems
James Zirkle, DFS
Tricia Lyons, YOO
Judy McCormick
Tim Brandau, Community Member

Welcome

Director Ciconte welcomed the group. Meeting began with general opening remarks at 10:04am.

Change in Leadership

Director Ciconte discussed the passing of Director John Stevenson. Director Ciconte had been acting as Director in his absence. She was named as the new DYRS Director as his successor in November 2021. A new Deputy Director has not been selected at this time.

COVID Update

Since the start of the pandemic, DYRS has had a total of 144 positive secure care youth COVID19 cases. 120 of those youth are recovered. DYRS saw a dramatic increase in positive cases beginning in January. Due to this increase, DYRS was no longer able to manage a single isolation unit at Stevenson House Detention Center. Positive youth are now isolating in their facilities. Unlike the Delta variant where the division was able to isolate and mitigate, the Omicron variant spread quickly throughout the buildings. Some youth are symptomatic and some are asymptomatic, but symptoms are very mild. There have been 160 positive secure care staff cases since the start of the pandemic; 142 of which have recovered. Most staff are returning within the CDC guidelines. Staff are still required to either be tested weekly or be vaccinated for COVID19. Division leadership is not aware of how many staff are vaccinated, as



we are not permitted to ask. Adherence to the policy is maintained by central DHR. Staff are required to attest they have been tested weekly if not vaccinated. If staff do not attest they receive a warning and have to test within 3 days. If staff continue to not adhere to the policy, a reprimand is issued followed by removal from work without pay.

All youth entering detention are quarantined upon arrival, helping to mitigate spread. Secure care staff are required to wear full PPE when working with COVID positive youth. Additionally, the division will be mandating the use of N95 masks for all secure care staff. Youth are faring well and the facilities are continually working to keep isolated youth engaged. Education is providing these youth with packets to continue with their education, as that unit struggles with COVID related shortages as well. DYRS is currently working with education to develop virtual learning strategies that can be used with youth in isolation. Family visitation is also being done virtually at this time.

DYRS continues to follow CDC guidelines with cleaning. Four disinfectant sprayer backpacks were purchase for facility use, in addition to a contracted vendor spraying each facility weekly. This vendor also has a custodian on site that cleans and disinfects high touch surfaces throughout the day.

YCOP Closure

The YCOP program officially closed as of 01/01/2022. The program housed youth aged 16 and over sentenced in Superior Court. With the closure of this program, DYRS will now house these youth until they reach age 18. With this change, DYRS is enhancing security measures in our facilities to include adding an astetic fence along Faulkland Rd. to help deter walk-aways, upgrades to the doors at Ferris School, new outdoor cameras, updated exterior lighting, and a fencing project for Ferris school to include a shaker system and razor wire. After the Ferris upgrades are complete, the division will move to address NCCDC security updates. In addition to these projects, DYRS has already added contracted security outside of State working hours, inhouse campus patrol during state working hours, and the SJO unit has been moved on campus.

There are no youth in this demographic at the moment. DYRS has been challenged with how to program for these youth. As part of this programming, DYRS must address how to prepare these youth for becoming adult inmates, as many of them will be relocated to DOC upon their 18th birthday.

Staffing Challenges/Incentives

Currently DYRS is experiencing staffing challenges, like most of the country. A hiring event was held in December that proved successful. DYRS is trying to find ways to decrease the time it takes to start a new employee on the job. DSCYF has already increased the sign on bonus to \$5000 and the recruitment bonus to \$2500, paid in installments. Additionally, the number of reference checks needed for YCS staff has decreased as well. Currently there is a bill being



introduced that will allow new employees to start working pending their drug screening results. The division is currently pausing additional hiring events until positive COVID cases have subsided.

Due to the staffing situation, DYRS has been able to secure ARPA funds to offer staff a \$300 incentive for working overtime shifts in the facilities. Staff can also receive an attendance incentive if they meet the criteria. Additionally, DYRS has signed a MOA with DOC to allow adult probation officers to cover overtime shifts in DYRS facilities and receive the \$300 bonus for each shift as well, along with signing another MOA with the local union to allow all juvenile probation officers to work one shift a week in a facility to assist with adhoc duties. These MOA's are effective until April. These staff received a one day training to prepare them for working in the facilities.

Additional Items

John Schmidt from the Delaware Council on Gambling Problems spoke to the group about his recent work with Ferris School and Stevenson House Detention Center. These sessions are being done virtually for the time being and seem to be going well. He shared challenges with getting the message out and with not knowing when facility population turns over. He is currently waiting on facilities to inform him of when he can return to do more work with the youth.

Next Meeting: **March 14, 2022 @ 9:00am**
 DSCYF Admin Campus, 1825 Faulkland Rd. Conference Room #199