



New York State  
Office of  
Children & Family  
Services

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Testimony of Ines Nieves-Evans  
Associate Commissioner, Division of Rehabilitative Services  
to the  
Council of the City of New York  
Committee on Juvenile Justice Hearing on  
Oversight of Discharge Planning Services

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Tuesday, April 11, 2006  
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State of New York



George E. Pataki, Governor

Good afternoon Chairperson Gonzalez and distinguished members of the City Council, my name is Ines Nieves-Evans, and I am the Associate Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services' (OCFS) Division of Rehabilitative Services. In this capacity, my primary responsibilities include oversight, monitoring and implementation of programs and services in the residential facilities in the areas of education, health and mental health, counseling, specialized programming, and supervision of the Bureau of Classification and Movement.

On behalf of Commissioner John A. Johnson, I am honored to have this opportunity to appear before you today to provide testimony on programs and services available to youth in OCFS's juvenile justice system. I would first like to spend a moment discussing OCFS's principles and values that guide the way that we conduct business as we carry out the important work of helping our youth so that they can lead positive and productive lives.

## **Overview**

Under Commissioner Johnson's leadership, OCFS has established an operational framework, which defines the way that OCFS delivers services to children, youth and families. Essentially, OCFS will provide services that are developmentally appropriate, family centered, community based, locally responsive, and evidence and outcome based. We believe that whenever possible, each child should be served in his or her family and each family should be served in their community.

The Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) supports and monitors facility-based operations and programs, as well as detention, aftercare and a range of community-based programs. DRS is directly responsible for the operation, supervision and management of 31 residential facilities, two reception centers, and eight day-placement centers. As of March 2005, there were a total of 2,193 youth in care within OCFS facilities and aftercare, plus another 1,045 from across the State placed in authorized agencies.

OCFS serves male and female youth between the ages of 11 and 21 who are remanded into the care of OCFS by the family courts or committed by the criminal courts.

Over the past several years, crimes against persons have accounted for approximately 40 percent of admissions. Additionally, approximately nine out of 10 youth entering the OCFS facilities are found at Intake screening to have at least one special service need: substance abuse (82 percent), mental health (57 percent), special education (18 percent), health (52 percent) and/or sex offender (12 percent).

The agency provides a wide range of programs across three levels of security (for example, secure, limited secure, non-secure), as well as a variety of alternative community placement options. After a full assessment and screening at reception, youth are placed in the least restrictive setting that best matches their custody requirements and program service needs. Facilities provide clean, safe, secure and orderly operations that meet or exceed the National American Correctional Association standards of best

practice and quality services. A range of program services is provided to address individual youth needs, and offer opportunities for positive development while in OCFS care—opportunities to acquire skills to reduce the risk of re-offense. Programs also help provide a seamless delivery of services upon return to the family and community.

OCFS is also responsible for the case management of youth placed by the courts for placement in specific voluntary agencies. There are approximately 757 of these “replacement youth” out of New York City in voluntary agencies.

Additionally, OCFS has responsibility to open the youth’s case once his/her custody is placed with us; review and monitor the initial service plan developed by the voluntary agency; and maintain the liaison between the local districts, the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), and the courts.

We have joined with local districts and ACS to intensify monitoring of youth, their treatment plan and permanency planning, and to seek a reduced length of stay for these children. We are in discussion with ACS to examine ways to use Evidence-based Community Models to serve these youth within their family structure and the community.

### **Discharge Planning**

Discharge planning for youth is a key element in a total conceptual framework that identifies and assesses causative factors for youth; develops reintegration strategies during institutional placement; and drives the development of transitional planning, including intensive community supervision and the development of re-entry services for youth within the community.

### **Assessment**

The assessment of youth is the first step in the planning process. OCFS has two reception centers for youth entering the State’s juvenile rehabilitative system. The boys’ reception center is located in the Bronx; the girls’ reception center is located on the Tryon Campus in Johnstown. Clinical providers use standardized assessment instruments to evaluate presenting issues and placement needs of the youth, including screening in the areas of mental health, substance abuse, education, sex offender, limited English proficiency and health. The results of these assessments form the basis of the first treatment plan. This plan is developed in multi-disciplinary treatment team meetings within the youth’s first 30 days of placement in our facilities.

Our Classification and Placement Bureau places youth in the most appropriate facility based on the youth’s presenting service needs. Each youth receives an individualized treatment plan designed to address his/her unique needs. Parental involvement and participation is encouraged. Specifically, parents are invited to participate in scheduled treatment team meetings, in meetings in person and via the telephone or videoconferences.

The teams are comprised of medical, clinical, educational, counseling and residential staff. Youth are active participants in their own treatment/transitional planning. They are informed of their program treatment goals and participate in the development of the permanency plan.

Youth in OCFS residential care receive and are expected to actively participate in a variety of services and programs which include counseling, health, mental health, substance abuse, education, recreation, employment services, ministerial services and programs to address special needs.

The facility Core Counseling Curriculum consists of the following:

- **Life Skills** – A method of teaching pro-social interaction in a group setting through worksheets and group exercises.
- **Aggression Replacement Training** –
  - SLT Structure Learning Training/Skillstreaming – A method of teaching social skills by breaking them down into steps.
  - Anger Control Training – A process of teaching youth how to recognize and deal with their anger more appropriately.
  - Moral Reasoning – Involves youth in discussions about dilemmas in order to expose them to different levels of moral reasoning in an effort to promote tolerance for differences of opinion and to foster empathy and understanding of others.
- **Victim Awareness** – A method of teaching youth the impact of crime on victims, and sensitizing youth to the impact of crimes on victims, families and the community.
- **Adelante** – A curriculum for girls on abuse awareness and prevention.
- **Life Skills Advanced** (secure facilities only) – A program using technologies to improve access to health, literacy and work readiness information and resources.

As the youth exhibits growth and progress in the facility program, staff begin to shift the facility focus toward preparation for community re-entry. At approximately six months into the residential stay, field teams from the youth's home catchment area conduct home assessments and intensify the work within the youth's family to prepare them for the youth's community re-entry.

The field teams are responsible for navigating services for the youth and removing transitional barriers to community re-entry. Of paramount concern is the expeditious re-enrollment of youth leaving our facilities into the public school system. In order to adequately prepare the youth, OCFS requires youth in our facilities to attend classes not only during the regular school year but also over the summer months. This intensive

educational programming has resulted in significant improvements in the academic functioning of our residents. Upon entering OCFS placement, two-thirds of youth score below grade level in reading and over 90% score below grade level in math. During their placement, many youth improve their reading and math skills to the point that they reach “grade level.” In addition, two-thirds of the youth taking the GED exam during OCFS placement pass at a higher pass rate than the statewide rate for all youth.

It is of utmost importance to OCFS that our residents are prepared to return to school and are admitted into the school system without delay.

We know that young people leaving our facilities must have supports available to them upon their return to the community. Key to their success is the ability to participate in the workforce. OCFS has implemented several initiatives to help our young people be better prepared to compete in the workforce including:

- Retooling our training programs to respond to the needs of business.
- Partnering with private industry to provide youth with the necessary vocational skills and tools they’ll need when they leave one of our facilities.
- Expanding our professional certification programs from major employers and associations.
- Developing a Youth Portfolio that each youth completes to showcase his or her talents.

### **Follow-Up Services**

There is no more critical period of time for the success of our residents than during their transition back into the community. At this point, the field team assumes the case management responsibilities in the resident’s home community. Provision of aftercare services and monitoring are done on many levels, including OCFS field staff personally monitoring and working with the youth in the community. To further enhance youth’s successful transition into the community, under Governor George E. Pataki’s and Commissioner Johnson’s leadership, OCFS developed and strengthened the evidence-based models in the community, which focus on post-residential services to youth.

We also contract with external stakeholders to assist youth and families in this transition; for example, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and collaboration with the faith-based community. Our aftercare support in the NYC area consists of:

- **4 Aftercare Offices** – Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn (with a satellite office in Staten Island) and Queens (with satellite offices in Wyandanch and Central Islip). Counselors meet with the families to assist the facilities in designing a release plan that will best meet the youth’s needs when returning home from a residential facility.

- **2 Intensive Aftercare Programs** – Located in the Adam Clayton Powell State Office Building, but servicing all boroughs except Staten Island.

The Intensive Aftercare Programs are based on a theory-based set of principles that include: working with the youth and family from day one, better coordination between facility and community-based programs, continuity of care and services, and increased involvement of the family in the process.

- **“Back to Your Future” (BTFY)** – Started in 2004, BTFY is a community-based program for revocators, which is evidence-based, that focuses on risk factors that led youth to re-offend and revoke.
- **3 Evening Reporting Centers (ERC)** – Two homes in the Bronx and one in Brooklyn. Programs service youth and families from their communities.

The ERC’s provide the highest level of aftercare supervision. The release readiness score is generated while a youth is in the facility and will designate the need for this type of supervision. Youth report to the ERC program six days a week and most holidays. While at the ERC youth receive individual counseling, Independent Living Skill Classes, Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT), homework assistance and recreational/cultural activities. We understand the important role that family support plays in residents’ successful participation in facility programs and successful re-entry in the community. Therefore, families are included in the treatment planning process along with the staff mentor and case manager.

- **Foster Care** – For all areas of NYC and Long Island.

If youths are unable to return to their home, they may be matched with a foster home that is certified according to the OCFS Foster Care Policies and Social Services Law. After trial visits, they are released from our residential facilities to the foster home, with supervision and case management services provided by an aftercare case manager.

### **Evidence-based Community Initiatives (EbCI)**

As I mentioned earlier, in an effort to strengthen services to the youth and families served, several programs are offered to OCFS youth through EbCI Community Initiatives. The Evidence-based Community Initiatives are integrated programs designed to reduce the re-offense and (re-arrest) rate of juvenile delinquents placed with OCFS and to aid in positive community transition for these youth. The EbCI programs include:

- **Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST)** – Intensive family and community-based treatment that addresses the multi-determinants of serious anti-social behavior in juvenile delinquents. The MST first pilot was launched in 2001.
- **Functional Family Therapy (FFT)** – Established in 2003, the FFT program services youth and families from the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn. FFT is an

intensive family and community-based treatment that addresses the parenting needs of the caretakers of youth in order to reduce re-offending.

- **Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC)** – Therapeutic foster homes are utilized for youth who have problems with chronic anti-social behavior, emotional disturbance and delinquency. MTFC was launched in 2003.
- **Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT)** – A systematic cognitive behavioral approach used to increase the youth's awareness of the consequences of the values, beliefs and attitudes that led to his/her maladapted behavior.

In addition, several programs have been added to enhance the aftercare experience:

- **NYS Alliance of Boys and Girls Clubs** – for youth returning to the Bronx and Manhattan communities.

This re-entry program was started in 2001 as a collaboration to service some of the community's most high-need youth and families. In this effort, the program has evolved to include a Welcoming Center that connects youth to medical, dental, mental health, recreational and various social activities.

- **Alliance with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program** – At year-end 2004, OCFS entered into a contractual partnership with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters of NYC Juvenile Justice Mentoring Program.
- **Adolescent Portable Therapy (APT)** – operated by The Vera Institute of Justice for the five boroughs of NYC.

This program addresses the needs of the most serious adolescent drug abusers with an innovative model of treatment. It is an intensive, outpatient, and family-based service for youth who are arrested and detained in NYC. The focus is on the family.

It takes partnerships and collaboration among many local, state and community agencies if we are to provide integrated services to youth and their families that will best meet their needs. OCFS works directly with various NYC departments and programs, such as the NYC Department of Education, ACS, Children's Coordinated Services Initiative, and Juvenile Justice Committees, to assist the youth and families in receiving the supports and assistance they need to be successful.

The OCFS re-entry back to the community process begins on Day 1 of placement, and every effort is made by our staff and through our programs to strengthen the youth's assets and build upon them. Our goal is to build, strengthen and support our youth and their families by creating linkages within the community that will increase the youth's chances of success upon re-entry back into the community.

In closing, I would like to commend the leadership across several of NYC agencies that we work closely with for their commitment and dedication to helping our youth and

their families. I would also like to acknowledge that much remains to be done and, therefore, I ask for your continued commitment to the work and challenges ahead of us.

Finally, thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

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