

## Meeting the Behavioral Health Needs of Young People in the Juvenile Justice System

### Court-involved youth who have significant behavioral health needs

Between 90 and 100 percent of the young people who enter the deepest end of the juvenile justice system have experienced complex trauma, including witnessing or experiencing violence at home, in the community or at school. Some of these young people require medication. For example, on June 12, 2010, of the 111 young people who were detained either at the Youth Services Center (YSC) or the New Beginnings Youth Development Center (NBYDC), about 26 percent were prescribed psychotropic medications.

### In the past, the juvenile justice system was not prepared to help young people

Prior to 2005, young people who entered the juvenile justice system were inconsistently screened to see if they had behavioral health needs (or not at all). There were no real comprehensive assessments done to map out an approach to treatment, and it took too long to get young people into acute hospital beds if they had severe mental health issues. If a young person was at-risk of self-harm or suicide, they were sometimes not placed in the right rooms for their protection, and taken off protection without a process or plan.

### Today, the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) is focused on addressing young people's behavioral health needs

### An integrated approach to dealing with young people's trauma

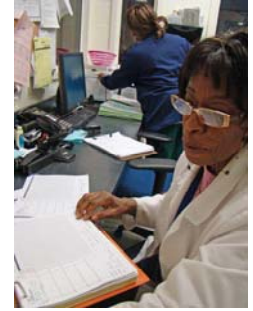
Recognizing the challenges and trauma these young people have experienced at home, school and in the community, DYRS applies a trauma-based model at New Beginnings to deal with young people's behavioral health needs. ***At New Beginnings, clinicians or behavioral health staff travel with the young person throughout the course of day—to school, meals, and recreation—to monitor and support them, and are part of their treatment throughout their stages in the juvenile justice system.*** Staff at New Beginnings and the Youth Services Center, are trained in the provision of trauma-informed care. Young people are supported to cope with the various forms of stress often associated with the trauma they have experienced.



***DYRS medical staff assesses a youth's health at the New Beginnings Youth Development Center***

**Speedier intake, screening and assessments**

Young people admitted to YSC or NBYDC receive an initial behavioral health screening within 4 hours of admission utilizing the MAYSI-2 to quickly identify high risk youth or youth in crisis. Initial intake is completed by qualified mental health professionals (QMHPs) within 24 hours of admission. Behavioral health staff administer appropriate assessments (e.g., CASII and GAIN-Q) to determine the level of mental health and/or substance abuse treatment needed.



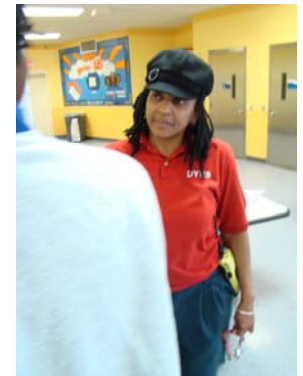
*DYRS health staff review medical charts and assessments*

**More clinicians and behavioral health staff that meet young people’s needs**

In the past there were one or two clinicians for DYRS facilities with hundreds of young people. Today, the DYRS behavioral health staff includes clinicians, social workers, and other mental health professionals, and at New Beginnings clinicians are actually assigned to *each* living unit—for a ratio of about one clinician to every ten youth. Staff work in the living units of these young people, and care is integrated into their daily lives.

**Better protections for youth at-risk of self-harm or suicide**

At YSC and NBYDC, youth identified as possible suicide risks are monitored by QMHPs on at least a daily basis. Once off suicide precaution status, regular monitoring of these youth continues.



*DYRS staff counsels youth*

**Better and more immediate responses for young people with the biggest needs**

Youth identified as needing emergency psychiatric hospitalization are assessed, monitored and admission to a psychiatric hospital is arranged. Youth sent to YSC with a court order for an immediate forensic assessment for possible hospitalization are appropriately assessed, and DYRS arranges for additional evaluations as needed such as psychiatric, psychological or neurological evaluations. Staff are available to provide crisis intervention 24/7, either in person or through an on-call system. Those youth whose behavior puts them at risk are seen intensively and behavioral staff work closely with living unit staff. Consulting psychiatrists prescribe and monitor psychotropic medications and provide diagnostic clarification.

**Treatment planning integrated into the plan for a young person’s return home**

Behavioral health staff participate in Youth Family Team Meetings to help plan for a continuation of care as a young person returns to the community, providing additional assessments, and referrals for youth to mental health services outside of the facility. The planning includes links to agencies that can meet their needs, recommendations on the levels of services needed and their connection to responsible adults (e.g., Probation Officers, Case Managers and parents), and documentation so that young people are accepted into appropriate programs. This includes contact with young peoples’ families when appropriate.

### Connection to evidence-based practices

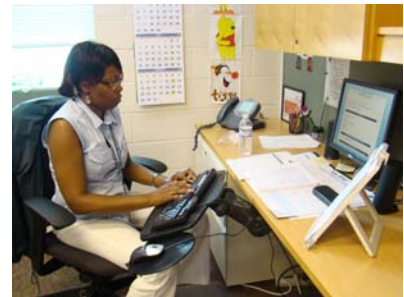
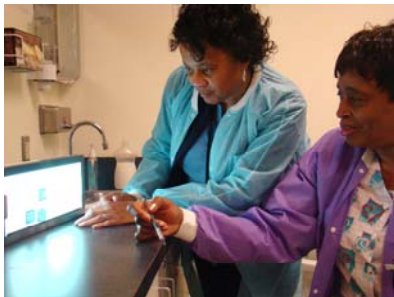
To address their delinquency and behavioral health needs, young people under the new system are referred to Multi-Systemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy and other evidence-based practices that are proven to reduce recidivism.

### Addressing a spectrum of young people's behavioral health needs

Staff provide therapeutic interactions to stabilize youth, develop improved coping skills, educate them on areas of concern (e.g., sleep hygiene, anger management strategies, and substance abuse) and assist youth in working with identified mental health concerns through both group and individual sessions. Behavioral health staff work to stabilize youth's behaviors and promote integration into their units, develop goals, objectives and interventions to include in the youth's individual service plan (ISP), and provide individual counseling services to youth regarding educational issues as identified in their Individualized Education Plans. The system provides substance abuse treatment utilizing the Seven Challenges Program and group and individual therapy to assist youth in accomplishing ISP goals.

### Innovative services to improve parenting

In collaboration with the Georgetown University's Early Learning Project, DYRS' behavioral health staff is providing a fatherhood program titled "Baby Elmo Parenting Program"—an initiative designed to encourage the development of positive relationships between young fathers and their children while they are in secure facilities.



*From left to right: DYRS medical staff review a youth's dental x-rays; Mental/Behavioral Health Specialists; Juvenile Justice Institute Counselor preps for a group session with youth at the New Beginnings Youth Development Center*

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**Mission:** The mission of DYRS is to improve public safety and give court-involved youth the opportunity to become more productive citizens by building on the strengths of youth and their families in the least restrictive, most homelike environment consistent with public safety.