

TESTIMONY
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
BEFORE THE
LEGISLATIVE YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL
31ST LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

September 4, 2015

Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room

“THE SERVICES THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES HAS AVAILABLE TO THE YOUTHS IN OUR COMMUNITY.”

Good Day Honorable Senator Terrance Nelson, Legislative Chair, Legislative Youth Advisory Council, members of the Legislative Youth Advisory Council, other members of the 31st Legislature present, legislative staff, fellow testifiers and the listening and viewing audiences. Thank you for the invitation and opportunity to testify today at this Legislative Youth Advisory Council Youth Hall Meeting where we have been asked to share information about the services that the Department of Human Services has available to the youths in our community/ territory.

My name is Carla A. Jarvis, District Manager of the Department of Human Services, Division of Juvenile Justice. Also present with me today is Natalie J. Lewis, District Manager, Office of Intake and Emergency Services. We are elated to be able to participate and to share as well as to show our sincere commitment to the young people of these Virgin Islands. The Department of Human Services provides a wide array of services to our youths. Youths can receive services from our Office of Intake and Emergency Services, Division of Children and Family Services, and Juvenile Justice Services. However, contrary to what many people believe, the majority of the youths that are in the juvenile justice system are not in YRC. The Department's programs work together with community agencies, private providers of counseling and other psychological services, families and even the police and Courts in order to protect children and to heal and strengthen families.

Office of Intake and Emergency Services

The Office of Intake and Emergency Services often referred to as Intake, never sleeps. This is the entrance to the Department or the first stop for most individuals seeking assistance. The Intake Social Workers are the start of the Child Welfare System. They receive and investigate reports of alleged child abuse and neglect twenty-four hours a day seven days a week, the reason why we say they never sleep. Social workers also work with children who are experiencing behavioral difficulties, teen pregnancy, mental health and are at risk for becoming delinquent. Once a referral is received the Social Worker begins to work with the family. After an assessment the decision will be made to refer the family to community agencies for services or to transfer the case to the Division of Children and Family Services or Juvenile Justice Unit, when appropriate. The Intake staff also makes presentations to a variety of audiences to educate about child abuse.

Division of Children and Family Services

The Division of Children and Family Services provides long term services to families who are a part of the Child Welfare System. Both the Protective and Foster Care and Adoption programs are in this division. The Protective Care Unit works with families to try to prevent the need to remove children from their homes. In-home services are provided to families considered to be high risk while the children remain in the home. Crisis Intervention, Advocacy, and Referral Services for Individual and Family Counseling, Anger Management, Substance Abuse Treatment and Parenting Education are some of the services offered. The Foster Care program involves the recruitment and training of Foster Parents and Relative Homes. They monitor the homes and offer counseling and case management for the children and their families. Most foster children are placed in Family Foster Home/ Relative Homes in an effort not to separate them from family. Other placements include residential facilities that operate as a Group Foster Care setting such as: Nana Baby Home, Queen Louise Home for Children and the Boys and Girls Group Homes.

The Division of Juvenile Justice Services

The Division of Juvenile Justice Services (DJJS) provides case management services to minors and their families in the territory in accordance with applicable federal and local statutes. The clients include: juvenile delinquents, pre-delinquents, Person In Need of Supervision (PINS). The services include pre and post-trial services for juvenile delinquents which often involves individual, family and group counseling. Clients can be referred from the Office of Intake and Emergency Services, the Division of Children and Family Services or the Court. The majority of services are provided by Social Workers or by contracted programs while the minor remains in the home. The overall goal of this Division is to assist the youth in making appropriate changes in their lives so that they will not become a part of the criminal justice system or in cases where they have already been adjudicated, services are aimed at helping the youth and their families make the changes in their life that will prevent them from continuing down a path that involves the penal system.

The **St. Croix Division** serves pre-delinquents, PINS (Persons in Need of Supervision), Adjudicated Youth, and their families. The Social Workers conduct investigations, make recommendations to the courts, provide treatment and have oversight for alternative sentencing programs, acts as an advocate for services on the minor's behalf, in addition to pre and post-planning for youth remanded to the Youth Rehabilitation Center (YRC). The Department also contracts with residential facilities locally and on the US mainland. Locally, we have a crisis center, boys group home, girls group home, and girls cottage to provide therapeutic settings for those minors needing out of home care. The DJJS' focus is not solely the minor as we are aware that the minor's family plays a vital role in making positive changes.

The **Pre-Delinquent** population is referred to the DJJS by the Office of Intake and Emergency Services (OIES). These minors are referred for voluntary services by their parents who are seeking assistance in addressing their children's behaviors that are interfering with the minor's development and the home environment. After the initial assessment, a treatment plan are created, and the minor's case is transferred to the DJJ for continued assessments and monitoring. The minor's assessment includes all aspects of the adolescent's life, to include but not limited to: mental health, physical health, school status, and family relations.

The **PINS** population, usually starts as a pre-delinquent case. The case progresses to a PINS when after receiving services, the minor continues to exhibit behavioral issues and are out of their parents' control. The parents file an affidavit with the Attorney General's office to petition the Court to intervene on their behalf. The case is monitored through the Court for a period of time determined by the Court. The minor receives services through the Department's Psychologist, Social Workers, and through privately contracted psychologists and therapists.

The **Delinquent** population like all other populations receive the same level of services. In addition, the Social Workers also serve as juvenile probation officers and carries out the mandates of the Court. The minor is usually ordered to attend counseling, educational/vocational programs, pay restitution to victims, and perform community service hours. They also engage in any other services or programs that the Social Worker deems necessary.

The Department of Human Services administers an alternative sentencing program for adjudicated youth through a contract with the Virgin Islands Behavioral Services (VIBS) in the district of St. Croix entitled Juvenile Intensive Support Services (JISS). JISS serves 24 youth in a community based program to prevent incarceration, as well as help to transition post-discharge youth from the YRC back into to the community. The scope of services for JISS was expanded to include the pre-delinquent population and PINS. It is an intensive wrap-around program involving both youth and families. JISS provides regular face to face supervision, group and parent counseling, school monitoring, random drug screens, and curfew checks. The JISS Program has continued to be an effective program for our clients in the JJ system. The program accepts our delinquent, pre-delinquent and PINS population.

In the St. Thomas Division, the Juvenile Wrap Around Program (JWRAP) which currently serves 35 minors are in place to enhance its work with adolescents. Through the Fall (October to January), Spring (February to June), and Summer (July to September) sessions, the Higher Achievement Wisdom and Knowledge (HAWK) group equip the young adults with the necessary tools that will help them make a successful transition from childhood into adulthood. Through this program, we attempt to provide the understanding that their person — the physical, the mental, and the spiritual — is sacred and that they are loved, respected, and valued by their community.

The DJJS continues to refer clients to several government agencies and utilize programs such as the Strengthening Families Program held at the AZ Academy and The Village and Parenting classes and counseling for sexual assault victims through the Women’s Coalition of St. Croix. The LEPC and Crime Prevention Council on Night Out Against Crime Drugs and Violence, and Red Ribbon Week activities.

Assist the Superior Court, Family Court in providing a Juvenile Enrichment Day twice per year, partner with the Crime Prevention Council to host the Careers Before Tears Job Fair, maintain a close relationship with the *Nigel Hodge Foundation* which allow our clients to coordinate, planned and successfully ran two family fun day -- one recently, the Back to School Fun Day held on August 21, 2015, and to further expose our clients to the arts through participation at the Pistarckle Theater and Reichhold Center for the Arts.

The Youth Rehabilitation Center (YRC)

The Youth Rehabilitation Center (YRC) is the only secured detention facility in the territory that provides detention for pre-trial and adjudicated delinquents as well as adolescents legally transferred to adult status for committing serious felonies. The facility has the capacity to house up to fifty-two minors. YRC provides intake, social services, education, recreation, nutrition, health and mental health services, as well as all Court related and mandated services

The mission statement of the Youth Rehabilitation Center is to protect the community by providing a safe, secure and positive environment in which staff model and teach juveniles socially acceptable behaviors so that they can become self-sufficient and law abiding citizens. YRC shares the same goal of the Division of Juvenile Justice Services which is to assist our youths with making appropriate changes in their lives so that they do not become a part of the criminal justice system.

We once again want to thank you for the opportunity to testify and share the services that the Department of Human Services provide for the youths in our territory and commend your efforts to get the youths involved by letting them know that their voices need to be heard. We challenge you, the Legislative Youth Advisory Council to continue to live by your statement: “We believe one youth can make a significant difference, but a group of determined youths can change the course of our Virgin Islands history”.

This concludes our testimony and we remain available to answer any questions this Council may have.
Thank you.