

Regionalizing Residential Services for Girls*Missouri Offers Roadmap***Executive Summary**

Maryland law requires regionalized services for youth involved in the Department of Juvenile Services and makes no distinction between boys and girls. Though girls comprise a small percentage of the youth incarcerated in Missouri--as in Maryland--the state still maintains regionalized residential programs for girls. Known for its successful residential programs for troubled youth, Missouri is a model for regionalizing residential services for girls.

Background

Missouri has turned its juvenile justice system into a nationally recognized model on dealing effectively with troubled youth needing residential placement. The Missouri Model, as it is commonly known, is made up of small facilities, designed generally for no more than 50 youths, and located in sites that are close to the homes of these youth. These facilities have highly trained and educated staffs who work with youths in small groups. Missouri uses a rehabilitative and therapeutic model that enables the youth to make positive and lasting changes in their lives.

This issue brief examines the extent to which Missouri is able to use its proven model for girls.

Missouri and Girls

Girls comprise a small percentage of the youth incarcerated in Missouri's juvenile facilities. In Missouri, there are, on average, 106 girls in residential treatment; this constitutes, about 15 percent of the total population.

One of the main components of the Missouri model is the involvement of families in the rehabilitation process. This means the facilities should be accessible to the families of the youths. In Missouri, the distance a family has to travel to get to its regional facilities is about an hour. For each region, programs are designed in ways that are responsive to the needs of the community.

In Missouri, as much as possible, the girls are treated within their home regions.

Limiting Need for Secure Placements

Missouri uses an assessment system that makes every effort to keep the youth in the least restrictive environment that best addresses her needs and is close to her home community.

To score girls for placement, Missouri uses an intake tool to measure for risk, needs and seriousness of offense. The three scores are entered into a placement grid to determine the recommended level of care. The grid takes aggravating or mitigating circumstances into account. The placement can be made up or down one level without the approval of the director. A move of two or more levels up and down would require the approval of the director.

As a result, on average, placement assessments determine that only 5 to 6 girls need to be placed in a secure facility at any one time.

Using Co-Ed, Secure Facilities

Missouri does not have a secure facility for girls. It has found that it is more cost-effective to operate co-ed facilities rather than several small, secure facilities for girls.

Missouri has three co-ed facilities: Watkins Mill, which houses 20 girls and 30 boys; a St. Louis campus, which houses 30 girls and 70 boys; and a Southeast Campus, which houses 10 girls and 10 boys. The St. Louis campus consists of six different facilities. The co-ed facilities do not allow intermingling between the boys and girls. They do not attend classes together but can engage in sporting events between each other.

Using Moderate Secure Facilities

There are three, moderate girls-only facilities in Missouri: two 20-24 bed facilities and one 10-12 bed facility. These facilities are not fenced but have an exterior door lock. They have an open-dorm type room with 12 beds per room. There is a day room where the girls convene house meetings and watch television. The facility has a kitchen, cafeteria, library, and an outdoor recreational center.



Programs Based On Needs

The program for girls in Missouri facilities is needs-based. The program does not focus on the offenses the girls committed, but rather on what might have triggered the offense. There is a group counseling approach to the treatment programs in the facilities. However, individualized family therapy, substance abuse counseling and mental health services are all provided when needed. Vocational classes are provided as well. The girls do everything together and are encouraged by staff to help each other. Staff act as facilitators and lead the daily evening meetings that take place five days a week.

The girls with placement scores suggesting secure placement tend to have more serious offenses. These are girls given double staff supervision, meaning there is a lower staff to youth ratio.

Individual Treatment Plan

An individual treatment plan is used to determine the course of girl's treatment. The treatment plan not only addresses delinquent behavior that resulted in court referrals, but it also focuses on aspects of the girl's life that can influence their overall ability to be successful. When issues arise that are critical to the treatment process, the process can be modified.

Family Involvement and Therapy

The family is vital to the treatment process. Services provided to the girl take into account the values and behaviors established within the family system. Family expertise and participation is essential in the youth's treatment process and facilitates holistic change within the youth's family. Missouri involves the girls, parents, alternative caregivers, as well as siblings when appropriate. The service coordinator or case manager completes a needs assessment and initiates a family therapy referral. As soon as a referral is made and contact is established with the family, the therapy begins. Issues that can be addressed include communication skills, anger management, conflict resolution skills, and appropriate familial boundaries.

Aftercare Services

Prior to a girl's release, the service coordinator works in conjunction with the youth's guardians and facility staff to begin developing an aftercare plan. The service coordinator supports the family and at the same time works towards making them self-

sufficient. The service coordinator assists the families in a variety of ways, such as helping them make referrals for family therapy, assisting in job placement, and advocating for the girl in the public school system. The length of the aftercare service depends on the specific needs of the girl and her family, but it is rarely less than four months.

Implications for Maryland

Missouri shows that it is possible to use a regionalized approach to treating delinquent girls, even though there are few of them. In other words, it is not cost prohibitive to use the Missouri Model for girls.

Maryland currently has one secure facility for girls, the Thomas J. S. Waxter Center. Waxter is decrepit and ineffective. However, merely replacing Waxter with another facility may eliminate the poor physical conditions, but it will not better protect public safety or improve outcomes for girls. Recidivism in a new facility will be just as catastrophically high.

The Missouri Model produces vastly lower recidivism. The only objection raised from Maryland officials to use the Missouri approach for girls is cost.

The following are steps Maryland can take to cost-effectively use the Missouri approach for girls.

1. Use a need-based assessment, with limited staff overrides, such that the only girls identified for secure placements are those few that really need it.
2. Use co-ed secure facilities, so that girls who need a secure program can still be treated in their home regions whenever possible.
3. Make maximum use of moderate-secure facilities for girls, which can be cost-effectively operated regionally.
4. Include the critical components of the Missouri approach for girls, including needs-based programming, family involvement and therapy and individual treatment plans.
5. Provide effective aftercare for girls once they leave residential programs.