

REGIONS: Re-Entry, Goal Oriented, Individualized Opportunity to Nurture Success A stronger path for youth rehabilitation



Connecticut Junior Republic REGIONS

Background

Dating back to the early 1970's, a growing national movement emerged that relying on large institutions to house youth in the juvenile justice system was failing in many ways. Several states, including Massachusetts, were the first to close this type of facility and invest in statewide networks of small, community-based programs. Further detailing these facilities as “dangerous, ineffective, unnecessary, obsolete, wasteful, and inadequate” was a 2011 report *No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration* by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

“The idea of shuttering youth corrections facilities and substantially shrinking the number of youth in confinement may sound radical. But the reality is that in large swaths of the nation . . . it’s already happening. Often prompted by lawsuits and revelations of abuse, or by mounting budget pressures, or by studies showing high recidivism, many states have slashed their juvenile corrections populations in recent years – causing no observable increase in juvenile crime rates.” (Implementation Of New York’s Close To Home Initiative: A New Model For Youth Justice, The Center for Children’s Law and Policy, February 2018)

In 2015, Connecticut Governor Malloy announced the closing of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS) by June, 2018. The Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee began reviewing models across the country to develop non-prison-like, secure facilities that would ensure public safety and be more rehabilitative for youth.

In April, 2018, we wrote an Issue Brief on *Close to Home*, a model developed in 2012 in New York to “minimize the dislocation of youth from their families and build positive connections between young people and their communities.” They defined and adopted eight core principles: Public Safety, Accountability, Evidence-based and Evidence-Informed Treatment, Educational Continuity and Achievement, Community Reintegration, Family Engagement, and Collaboration, and Permanency.

We reviewed the report “Implementation of New York’s Close to Home Initiative: A New Model for Youth Justice” from the Center for Children’s Law and Policy. They provided recommendations for other states looking to implement a Close to Home model that would enhance the likelihood of success including:

- Invest in diversion practices that will downsize the juvenile justice system, make it more efficient and effective and provide pathways out of the system for youth.

- Engage the community to offer a public forum for input and comment.
- Merge systems for the most efficient and effective delivery of services (DOJ and ACS).
- Monitor agencies for compliance with state foster care regulations and policies.
- Make out-of-home placement decisions prior to adjudication so that multi-agency teams can assess mental health, child protection, and educational needs.
- Strengthen aftercare by ensuring youth are transitioned from a highly structured program to aftercare services with the same service provider so that trust built with the program staff will help youth apply new skills, strategies, and insights.
- Improve re-enrollment and re-engagement with community schools so that youth with a history of unmet special education need and a history of poor attendance have needed supports upon re-enrollment.
- Utilize evidence-based tools for intake and assessment of youth. An area that revealed itself for additional improvement is their intake and assessment of youth. While multiple factors were part of their assessment, the process did not have the capacity to identify youth with intellectual disabilities or who may have problematic sexual behavior and are not adjudicated for the offense. Unfortunately, these youth were sometimes not linked with the appropriate services.
- Improve community-based services for girls to assess needs in the community with an eye toward meeting needs earlier and before contact with the justice system.

What emerged in the State of Connecticut are the REGIONS Treatment Programs.

Re-Entry, Goal-oriented, Individualized Opportunity to Nurture Success (REGIONS)

Since our Issue Brief on the Close to Home model, the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch has accomplished their goal to develop a range of residential programs that include the Re-Entry, Goal-oriented, Individualized Opportunity to Nurture Success (REGIONS). The Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch began developing a new process that includes:



Increasing the cognitive-behavioral group offerings (curricula) throughout the service continuum.

- Expanding evidence-based, in-home programs such as multi-systemic therapy-family integrated treatment (MST-FIT) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT);
- Providing educational and vocational services; and
- A range of residential programs that include the Re-Entry, Goal-oriented, Individualized Opportunity to Nurture Success (REGIONS) treatment programs.

The process in Connecticut to determine if a youth will be placed in a residential facility, per statute, is that Probation Supervision with Residential Placement is ordered only if “such placement is indicated by the child’s clinical and behavioral needs or the level of risk the child poses to public safety cannot be managed in a less restrictive setting.” The Probation Officer completes a Pre-Dispositional Study (PDS) and the PrediCT delinquency risk assessment to provide social history, identify risk-relevant factors and needs, determine the likelihood of reoffending, and recommend measures to reduce risk, address needs, and protect the community. A Clinical Coordinator conducts forensic clinical assessment and SAVRY violence risk assessment to identify clinical and behavioral needs, determine amenability to treatment, prioritize treatment needs, and recommend the type of treatment setting to reduce delinquency risk factors. The Prosecutor and Defense Counsel make arguments and the Judge considers all information and orders the disposition.

In 2018, CSSD/Judicial released its first request for proposals (RFP) to open REGIONS treatment programs in Connecticut. The REGIONS treatment model incorporates Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and aligns with Risk Reduction and the Risk-Need-Responsivity principles and the Positive Youth Development approach. There are multiple REGIONS facilities focusing on specific groups in the juvenile process. These include secure, staff secure, and limited secure facilities.

REGIONS Hardware-Secure

These facilities for boys are currently in the Detention Centers (known as Juvenile Residential Centers effective January 1, 2022, per Public Act 21-104) in Bridgeport and Hartford, and a Contracted Program for Boys with Community Part-

ners in Action in Hamden. Each of the Residential Center has a 12-bed capacity for REGIONS. At these facilities, Yale Behavioral Health provides clinical treatment as well as a psychiatrist. Bridgeport Public Schools, and Hartford Public Schools, through DOMUS, provide educational programming. The goal is to move the REGIONS programs out of the Juvenile Residential Centers.

The contracted secure program with Community Partners in Action began accepting admissions in December 2020. There are currently 10 beds and an additional 6 will come online in 2022. At this facility, boys have access to the following services:

- Behavioral health services provided by Yale Behavioral Health
- Medical services provided by Wellpath
- Education provided by ACES
- Vocational education includes:
 - ✓ Certifications through EastConn (ServSafe, OSHA, First Aid/CPR)
 - ✓ Gardening with hydroponic greenhouses
 - ✓ Culinary Arts training
 - ✓ Forklift training with a forklift simulator
 - ✓ Truck Driving training with a simulator
 - ✓ Spray Painting training (e.g., house painting, auto body work) with a simulator
 - ✓ Barbering training
 - ✓ Music production (coming soon)
 - ✓ Video production (coming soon)

REGIONS Staff Secure Residential Treatment Program for Boys

The Staff-Secure Programs for Boys are currently contracted at three locations: Boys & Girls Village in Milford, the Connecticut Junior Republic in Waterbury, and Community Partners in Action in Hartford. The treatment and programming provided is like that in the Secure programs for continuity of care. Each program is an approved private special education program and provides on-site, hands-on vocational programs.

Boys and Girls Village REGIONS House

This 12-bed staff secure, residential facility is for adolescent boys who are on probation and require a residential level of care. The goal of this 4-6-month program is to therapeutically intervene in the cycle of offending and is designed to address juvenile delinquency risk and needs. Youth appropriate for the REGIONS House often have a lengthy history of involvement with the juvenile court system and have experienced a variety of challenges including in the educational setting, disengagement from past treatment services, involvement with antisocial peers, a lack of prosocial and developmentally appropriate recreational activities, have exhibited impulsive and/or oppositional behaviors, and often have experienced significant family distress. The program employs a restorative practice and a risk reduction framework. Behaviors are reviewed daily, corrective teaching is utilized on an ongoing basis, and the program includes a motivation system to promote strengths and positive behavior. Services include assessment, treatment, attainment of individualized goals, vocational instruction and participation, on-site schooling, and staff-supported reintegration back into the community. Psychiatric evaluation and ongoing psychiatric oversight and medication management is integrated within a comprehensive multidisciplinary treatment team, using DBT interventions that target improved functioning and behavior. All youth attend their on-site school, Charles F. Hayden, for assessment, reconnection to the educational system, and credit recovery. After-care support is also provided following discharge back to their home community.



Connecticut Junior Republic

The Connecticut Junior Republic provides four distinct residential programs to serve boys who require residential care on a long- or short-term basis. Whenever possible, these programs seek to reunite young people with their families as soon

as possible. Intensive home-based, family-focused services are generally provided during residential care and following discharge for all youth. The REGIONS Staff-Secure Program is located at CJR's Waterbury campus and provides residential treatment, including clinical, educational, vocational, and recreational services, for boys, ages 14 to 18, and their families. Over the course of up to six months of treatment, the REGIONS Program works with the boy and his family to identify specific goals and implement individualized services to promote his successful return to his home and community.

The Connecticut Junior Republic also offers other staff-secure residential services:

- TRAC: Therapeutic Respite and Assessment Center for Boys in Litchfield which has 8 beds and is a 30 to 90-day length of stay.
- TEAM: TRAC Expansion for Adolescent Males in Litchfield which provides 6 beds as a detention diversion and respite program with a 30-day length of stay.
- AMIR: Adolescent Male Intermediate Residential in Litchfield which provide 8 beds and 4 months of residential treatment for youth under probation supervision.

Community Partners in Action, Hartford

The REGIONS Staff-Secure Program in Hartford opened in 2020 and provides up to six months of residential treatment, including clinical, educational, vocational, and recreational services, for boys ages 14 to 18 and their families. REGIONS provides each participant with individualized services that support and enable his successful return to his home and community.

REGIONS Limited Secure

There is currently one REGIONS Limited Secure Program for Girls. It is operated by Journey House at Natchaug Hospital in Mansfield and is a hardware secure facility with the ability for going into the community. Natchaug Hospital's Journey House program is a 12-bed specialized residential treatment facility on the Mansfield campus for adolescent girls ages 12 to 18 who are involved in the court system. Residents are only admitted with a referral from the juvenile justice system. Referred girls have identified needs for behavioral health services and may have a history of one or more of the following circumstances - significant trauma, mental illness, victimization as domestic minor sex trafficking, a history of substance abuse, and assaultive and/or self-injurious behaviors. Journey House offers a variety of evidence-based treatment modalities that are carried out in individual, group, and family settings, including:

- Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)
- The Seven Challenges® substance abuse treatment
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
- Accelerated Resolution Therapy (ART)
- Emotional Freedom Technique
- Trauma-informed yoga

Residents and the treatment team collaborate on discharge planning, which includes coordination of individual and family therapy, medication management, identification of a primary care physician, and any vocational, recreational, or educational planning.

Girls under traditional probation supervision in need of intermediate residential treatment are served by the North American Family Institute (NAFI) in Litchfield which has 8 beds.

REGIONS Programming

The REGIONS programs provide individualized services to children while protecting public safety and have available capacity to serve children who have been adjudicated and cannot be served in a less restrictive setting. Each REGIONS

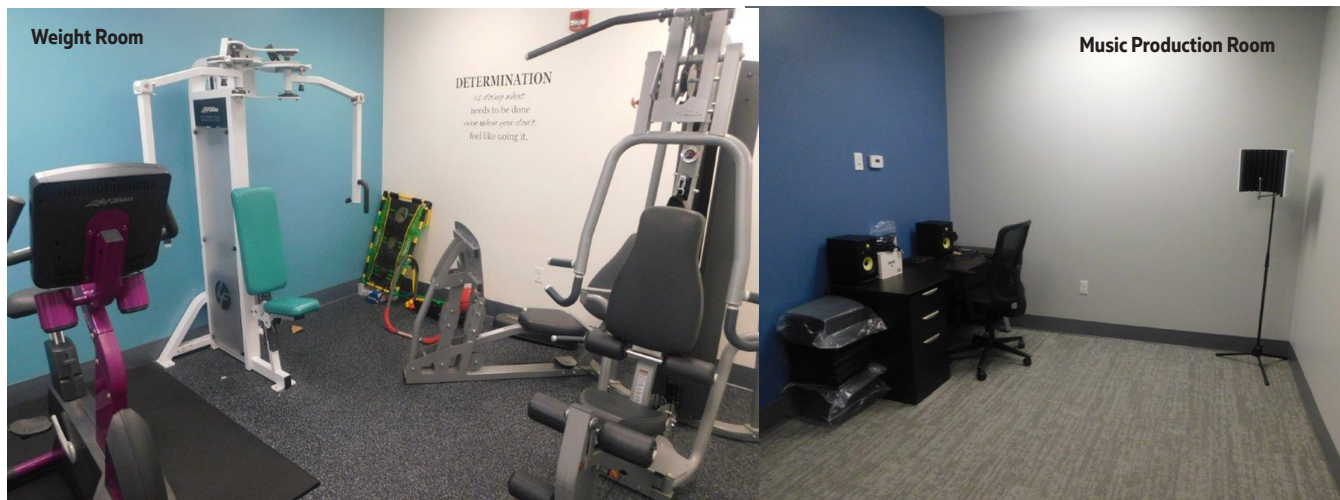


treatment program has a:

- Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) including the Youth, Youth's Attorney, Family, Probation Officer, Unit Staff, Clinician, Education, Healthcare, Recreation, Reintegration Mentor, and Community Partners.
- Within one week of entering the REGIONS program, a youth's education records are transferred to the facility's education provider.
- A clinician works with the youth's family, within seven (7) business days, to assess the youth's vulnerabilities that contribute to adverse outcomes, their strengths that can be leveraged to help protect against them, and factors the family identifies within the home or the community that contribute to the youth's vulnerabilities.
- An Integrated Treatment Plan is developed within 10 business days of admission and the MDT meets monthly to discuss the behaviors, progress, challenges, and needs of the youth and update and change treatment goals where appropriate, taking into consideration the youth's and the youth's family's input. The meetings are held in person or using virtual face-to-face platforms. Where a family member cannot access technology to fully participate, the REGIONS program provides the family with the needed technology.
- Discharge planning starts immediately during the treatment plan meetings. During the initial treatment plan meeting, a discharge checklist is completed to identify which resources will be available to the youth upon discharge and which resources are not yet available and will need to be planned for prior to discharge. The discharge checklist includes a plan for housing, clothing, food, health insurance, medication management, education, community mental health services, transportation, identification documents, public assistance, extracurricular activities, mentoring, and employment.
- The other MDT members ensure the youth and their family understand where to access resources and works with the youth and their family to address any resource concerns prior to discharge.
- Not more than thirty (30) days prior to discharge, the youth and the youth's family are provided, verbally and in writing, information outlining what is expected from the youth while on supervision after discharge. In addition, the REGIONS education provider updates the education records and transfers the educational records, including assigned credit, to the next education provider identified by youth and parent/legal guardian.
- A youth's readiness for discharge is determined by team consensus that treatment goals have been met.

A Tour of a REGIONS Facility

While the facilities may look a bit different, the basic components of the REGIONS are the same. Every facility works to create a more comfortable and home-like environment than what is available in typical correctional facilities.





Classroom



Barbershop



Fork Lift Simulator



Theater Room



Common Area



Common Area



Youth's Bedroom



Family Room



What's Next

Currently, JBCSSD is awaiting bids from the most recent RFP, which closes on 9/30/22, to open additional REGIONS secure facilities. There is also a current bid open for a REGIONS Transitional Living Program. This new program will be an additional discharge resource for youth ages 17 and 18 who will be better served transitioning to independent living than returning home to their community. They awarded a contract to the Development Services Group (DSG), with 2 subcontractors, the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute and the University of New Haven Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences, to complete a process and outcome evaluation on the changes to the juvenile court process, the REGIONS treatment model, and community supervision practices under the new system per Public Act 18-31. Preliminary recommendations from an initial process evaluation are being implemented. The outcome evaluation is expected by October 2023. JBCSSD continues to improve the REGIONS programs and are increasing vocational opportunities in all programs and linking to opportunities/building partnerships in the community. They will continue training and implementation of DBT at all programs and are providing a Family Support Specialist at Hamden. They have expanded the capacity of Reintegration Mentors at the contracted programs to support the youth for 12 months post discharge and have contracted for Credible Messengers to work with the youth discharging from the Bridgeport and Hartford REGIONS Secure treatment programs. JBCSSD has also sought additional funding to provide Family Support Specialists at all REGIONS programs, and salary increases for other staff to successfully recruit and retain well-qualified and experienced childcare and supervisory staff. . The goal of REGIONS is to reduce recidivism risk, increase well-being, and provide for a successful return to the community through the development of positive relationships; learning, skill-building, and success; and the development of youth strengths and prosocial interests. The building blocks for success are being well established here in Connecticut.

Sources

- Issue Brief III, Close to Home, April 2018
- Implementation of New York's Close to Home Initiative: A New Model for Youth Justice, Center for Children's Law and Policy, February 2018
- <https://cpa-ct.org/>
- <https://www.bgvillage.org/>
- <https://www.ctjuniorrepublic.org/page.cfm?p=1>
- <https://natchaug.org/programs-services/journey-house-program>
- <https://www.jud.ct.gov/cssd/juvres.htm>

The Tow Youth Justice Institute is a university, state and private partnership established to lead the way in juvenile justice reform through collaborative planning, training, research and advocacy.

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