

Promising Practices in Personal, Carceral, and Care Systems

“Reducing Inequalities Between LGBTQ Adolescents and Cisgender,
Heterosexual Adolescents: A Workshop”

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine

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“Model” Youth Justice Agency

Goal: Develop policies and procedures pertaining to the respectful and equitable treatment of LGBTQI+ and GNC youth, provide staff training (professional development), and provide post-training technical assistance

- Located in the South
- Majority youth of color
- Majority of security staff are of color
- Relatively high number of LGBTQ youth, particularly trans youth
- Quite a few staff members with military backgrounds
- Very religious
- Very political

“Model” Youth Justice Agency

Challenges

- External stakeholders discouraged me from accepting the contract because they didn't think there was enough support for the work
- Tremendous amount of external political opposition which almost derailed the initiative; staff led the “resistance”
- Not enough external support and community connections for LGBTQ+ youth and their families in certain regions of the state, particularly for youth of color

“Model” Youth Justice Agency

Advantages

- The leader of the initiative was respected by his colleagues, and mindfully selected staff he thought would be very supportive
- Military veterans: important for highlighting the importance of policy and procedure
- Very easy to discuss racism (including racism within the LGBTQ+ communities), and anti-LGBTQ beliefs and attitudes with most of the staff
- Religion: remind people what their professional responsibilities are and how this assistance is designed to help them meet those responsibilities; do NOT recite the First Amendment to people, this is generally not helpful

“Model” Youth Justice Agency

Successes

- Policies and procedures adopted
- Youth training: unexpected and unplanned but with great results
- More staff members are better equipped to look for resources in the community, and are mindful of ensuring that these resources effectively serve youth of color
- Trans youth are now regularly assigned to a placement that aligns with their gender identity if that is their choice
- People in new “leadership” roles remain committed to reform

Solutions

- **Policies and procedures:** 3 Cs (care, custody and control) or 3 Ss (safety, security and supervision); intake/screening instruments and guidance for people conducting screening; ensuring respectful treatment even when trans youth are assigned to a placement that doesn't align with their gender identity; probation guidance (note: if they have agency counsel, ensure that they participate at the early stages)
- **Staff trainings (professional development):** should occur even if a policy isn't "complete" or doesn't exist; as many people as possible should be invited because everyone contributes to the culture of the facility; include partner CBOs and other agencies; post-training assistance should be provided (this includes being available to them outside of business hours and providing support if they are experiencing harassment from their colleagues because of this work)
- **Youth trainings on SOGIE:** should be age-appropriate and a mental health provider should be available during and after trainings (be prepared for possible complaints from parents/guardians)
- **Assist justice-focused CBOs and other programs (including faith-based programs) with addressing SOGIE if they don't already; do NOT rely on LGBTQ community centers to provide services:** many of these centers do not have a strong racial justice lens nor do they serve youth involved with the system; do NOT encourage attorneys to add attendance at such centers to probation terms

Lessons

- **Cultivating relationships:** absolutely important and can require a lot of time and energy
- **Unions:** it's important to be aware of their views, and whether they will help or hurt the effort
- **Post-detention placements:** there are not enough placement options/support for minors when they leave the facility and can't return home
- **LGBTQ community centers:** they need to do more work on developing a strong racial justice lens and serving youth in the system

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