

Changing The Lives of Youths

By Susan L. Clayton

Barbara Templeton, a community resource supervisor for the West Virginia Division of Juvenile Services, has had a tremendous influence on the way in which courts deal with juvenile offenders in the state's eastern counties. Among other services, the aftercare component of DJS provides linkage and referral support for juveniles upon their return to the community.

While pursuing her master's degree in counseling, Templeton took a position as a counselor at the West Virginia Industrial Home for Youth, where she has been based for seven years. "I already had a degree in psychology. ... It just seemed logical — my love of children combined with my degree — this is where I needed to be," Templeton said.

Eventually, Templeton moved into a case management position in the aftercare department and later became a corrections program specialist supervising caseworkers. It is then that she had the opportunity to write a model re-entry court program, known now as the Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Initiative. Templeton said this never had been used for juveniles.

Templeton began by approaching three rural counties on the eastern panhandle of the state, where she already worked well with the judges, probation officers and law enforcement. They agreed to participate in the

pilot program, which began in June 2003. A few years later, Templeton's department was awarded a grant, effective July 2002 through July 2005. "Now we are a model for other states to follow, as we are always trying to improve our program," she said.

The program targets high-risk male and female offenders ages 14 to 21, and combines intensive aftercare services and judicial supervision in an effort to hold juveniles accountable and promote positive behavior through frequent home and school visits, monthly court reviews, and graduated sanctions and rewards. "It provides a mechanism for children to be monitored by the court while being assisted by Barbara's staff in finding a job, receiving counseling and using other resources that will provide the child with his or her best opportunity to succeed and not re-offend as an adult," said DJS Director Manfred G. Holland. The program, which now includes 10 counties, uses community-based workers along with institutional-based workers. "Basically, we took a small seed and nurtured it and helped it grow in terms of providing services for our kids and families," Templeton said.

The Re-entry Court Program is very intensive. Staff begin working very closely with the juvenile offenders when they are first committed. "We do monthly interviews with them, develop re-entry goals and monitor their progress," Templeton said, adding, "We share information with other treatment staff, go out and visit mom and dad in their homes to help build a better relationship with the child's family, help provide information for treatment and discharge planning, and attend release hearings."

Templeton noted that re-entry planning is done about two months prior to release in an effort to link the juveniles with the resources they need — counseling, school, jobs, etc. Once they are released on probation, home visits are conducted at least once a week and school visits at least once a month. Staff are in contact with employers and

parents. "Once a month, we go back into the courtroom in front of the same judge with the child to review their behavior, and if they are doing well, we try to give them some type of reward or incentive such as a gift certificate or CD. If they're doing poorly, we try to impose a graduated sanction, such as community service or tightened curfews," Templeton said. "The end goal is to keep them out of trouble and help them be successful and productive in the community."

Community partnerships are critical to the success of the program. "We have knocked on doors, shared information with [service providers], addressed their concerns as well as the needs of our kids and discussed what services they can provide," Templeton said. She pointed out that personally visiting key service providers and building a solid working relationship are instrumental. "They have opened their doors and their hearts to myself and my staff in terms of services, assistance and ideas in an effort to help our kids and families."

Templeton noted that the Re-entry Court Program is only a part of the community resource department; she supervises the entire eastern region. The program only serves high-risk youths who are likely to re-offend. "So, I have to make sure that intensive aftercare re-entry and aftercare services are provided to the other kids and their families as well," Templeton said.

Juvenile aftercare has come a long way since Templeton joined DJS. "Barbara's ability to build community partnerships has been instrumental in the success of the program," Holland said. He added, "Her ability to know what resources exist in each small community has made her a respected public servant as well as an advocate for children who deserve the best chance possible to succeed after incarceration."

Susan L. Clayton is managing editor of Corrections Today.



Barbara Templeton