

Long Creek Youth Development Center  
Board of Visitors  
Annual Report '16

The Board of Visitors, (BOV) for Long Creek Youth Development Center (LCYDC), is charged with ongoing review of policy and practice, and management goals. In this report, we have found it imperative to highlight the current state of the mental health needs of residents, particularly acute care needs. LCYDC strives for and delivers excellent risk reduction, educational and vocational programming for youth in their care, however, this year has proven challenging and ultimately tragic.

Last Spring, concerns were raised regarding several youth being placed at LCYDC, with a high level of acute mental health care needs, that require alternative mental health/medical treatment facilities. Not only did this trend continue, it has had tragic consequences.

In late October of 2016, a youth in the detained unit hung themselves in their room despite constant observation and watch. Sadly, this youth passed away from these injuries. Shortly thereafter, another youth resident attempted to strangle her self and required critical hospitalization. To date, several youth continue to self-harm, have made attempts or threats to strangulate themselves, and require unsustainable levels of constant observation.

These vulnerable acute level youth residents, are merely being managed for safety and not specifically treated for their acute level needs. They do not receive the depth of mental health interventions and medical treatment that they require, potentially causing a further increase of psychological risks. LCYDC is doing the best they can with the tools they have, but they are being asked to do things they are not trained for and/or in the scope of their programming. Current safety management practice of youth in acute crisis consists of:

- Removal of clothing for safety and use of a smock cover-up.
- Use of correction restraints- such as mechanical restraints to keep them safe.
- Daily ongoing mental health assessments to determine the amount of constant one-on-one observation and supervision.
- Co-mingling with non-acute care youth residents, which can be traumatizing, triggering and at the least, destabilizing for other residential youth seeking to engage in their own treatment program.

Youth residents at LCYDC work hard to engage in their individualized therapeutic, educational and risk reduction programming in an effort to change the course their lives have taken. For these residents, co-mingling with youth in acute crisis can be

traumatic, decrease their ability to feel safe, and minimize their efforts to effectively receive treatment.

The impact of this high level acute care need on staff is also significant. These dedicated and talented staff at LCYDC, are not trained or equipped to treat such acute mental health care needs, and they also may be experiencing the secondary trauma associated with such high level of crisis. Staff currently monitor, watch, and observe these youth at an unsustainable rate just to keep them safe. Again, staff only observes and monitors these youth in crisis, the specific acute mental health treatment for these youth is unchanged.

Such high level of acute care can contribute to staff turnover, burnout, or the inability of staff to build positive relationships with all youth residents. These relationships are essential to the successful risk reduction programming for all youth residents.

#### Recommendations:

The alarming trend of placing and maintaining youth in acute mental health crisis at LCYDC must be immediately examined and remedied. LCYDC is not medically equipped to deal with the delicate needs of these vulnerable youth. Simply put, LCYDC is not an acute care mental health facility. The following review and actions are recommended:

- Youth in acute crisis must be immediately placed in an appropriate therapeutic facility to receive intensive mental health evaluations and acute care treatment.
- Youth in acute crisis should not co-mingle with the general population of youth residents, to maintain their own dignity while receiving treatment, and to maintain safety for all youth residents at LCYDC.
- A multi disciplinary review of acute care therapeutic options in Maine, and barriers to access and/or maintaining placement.
- A multi disciplinary review of the amount of youth in need of acute care services being placed out of the State of Maine.

These tragic events have also shed a light on the current practice of placing youth in detention, often, for undetermined amounts of time while waiting for sentencing and available therapeutic placement options. Additionally, youth arrive to LCYDC from residential placements. These practices must be reviewed:

- Youth placed in “detention” are they able to receive and/or are they receiving the right types of assessments and services?
- Multi disciplined external review of available/or lack of therapeutic level placement/programming options in Maine.
- External review of the barriers to access/maintain placement in available treatment settings.

### Staffing Levels and Rehabilitative Programming:

LCYDC is a constant balance of maintaining safety, while also reducing risk through educational and rehabilitative programming. When educational, security and/or mental health staff are cut; it compromises the ability for these staff to form positive, therapeutic relationships with the kids. First, these are not just any staff. They are gifted, and talented in their ability to simultaneously maintain safety in the facility while also crafting powerful relationships with youth residents. It's these relationships that pave the way for therapeutic interventions to happen. This is the magic formula-

Connections build empathy. Young people engage in criminal activity when they don't have a mind of empathy. When youth are in distress, or live in dysfunction, shutting off empathy is their coping skill. Change happens when they build positive relationships. These relationships are the magic.

Lastly, we are very concerned about the proposed budget cuts to the education/teaching staff. Several key staff already left over the last six months. In addition to the high school curriculum, the teachers are supporting accreditation, college level courses, innovative programs- such as the highly effective culinary program, athletics, Career Center and the new, needed Small Engine Repair program.

These programs are essential to risk reduction and a youth's successful transition back to their community. We must work to preserve the potential of these youth! Any cuts to the A.R. Gould School program must be met with an extensive and careful review in order to maintain accreditation, these highly innovative and successful programs, and the high quality staff and teachers needed to run them.

In LCYDC, young people learn new ways to cope, build upon education and vocational success and create pathways for a positive reintegration into their communities. These programs decrease the probability youth will return to the criminal justice system, or any other system. If we lose the ability to reduce the risk for these youth, they will be back. If we lose the ability to do the bare minimum, it can be deadly. There is no room for error.

Tonya C. DiMillo  
Chair, BOV, LCYDC



