

DYRS Testimony on Social Work

Good morning Mr. Chairman, committee members, and other distinguished participants. My name is Adina Fuller and I am a licensed social worker at the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services – Washington DC’s juvenile justice system.

Prior to coming to DYRS, I was a social worker in DC’s child welfare system.

As a social worker at DYRS, I am responsible for managing the care and supervision for 27 youth on my case load. These are all youth who have been committed to the department by the DC Family Court for acts of delinquency.

DYRS case management protocols mandate that I see all the youth on my case load twice a month, talk to them once per week, regularly update their case files in our data management system, and connect my youth with appropriate services, programs, supports, and opportunities.

Most of the youth committed to DYRS come from the most vulnerable communities in Washington. I often have to provide support and guidance not only to my client, but also to their families. My job takes me into the schools, neighborhoods, and homes of all the youth I serve.

The goal of our agency is to ensure that youth are provided with opportunities that will provide an enriching and educational experience that will enable them to become productive citizens in their communities.

Over the past four years, DYRS has been engaged in a huge reform effort. In order to **improve public safety and achieve better outcomes for youth** DYRS has been making a number of changes in the system.

DYRS has adopted the principle of **Positive Youth Development** as its overarching reform agenda – **to build on young people’s strengths and assets instead of solely dwelling on their deficits.**

DYRS has added a host of new services and supports for the youth and the family we serve, including: in home family counseling, service learning, employment training and job placement, new educational experiences, and other Evidence Based Practices.

To give a snap shot of a day in the life of a DYRS social worker, I will briefly review the case of one of my youth:

CASE REVIEW

A day in the life of Social Worker is often varied by the circumstance of the youth and family whether it is a crisis, counseling support, and/or information and referrals that will enable a youth and family to address their needs and concerns. I spend countless hours

beyond my tour of duty counseling youth and families on developing a viable transition plans out of the juvenile justice system. Throughout the process of engagement and assessment, it is important for youth and families to identify their strengths and needs. It is my job to identify the resources, services, and supports that would enable to them achieve their goals that would enable them to become self sufficient and to accept personal responsibility for their lives. Those experiences must be meaningful, which improves the likelihood that the youth and family will be vested in improving the quality of their lives.

Some parents seem to rely upon me as a co-parent, particularly, if they are unable to effectively reason with their adolescent. I have a young person who will completing his stay in one of our therapeutic group homes whose relationship with his mother has significantly improved during this out of home place. While in placement, the youth and family were connected to the Department of Mental Health Services to receive individual therapy (youth), family therapy, and medication management. The family meets with the Psychologist on a biweekly basis in their home while the young person participates in individual and group therapy with a Psychologist in the therapeutic group home. He also attends an after school program at Sasha Bruce Youthworks. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the young and family have improved their capacity to function as a unit. We have regular team meetings on a monthly basis to discuss our next steps and goals that will ensure the young person will successfully transition home. I have to maintain regular contact with parents who have provided insight of how they intend to supervise, reward and encourage her child to continue making responsible choices. When given an opportunity whereby parents and children can learn to effectively communicate with each other, it is amazing how they come to appreciate each other's differences when placed in an setting that is non threatening and non judgmental. I also work closely with teachers who often contact me to set schedule parent/teacher conferences and to schedule individual education plans (IEP) meetings to ensure that the young person is receiving educational supports and services. I have to maintain contact with the group home staff and therapists to discuss the young person's adjustments in a structured settings and encouraging youth to sustain their compliant attitudes and behavior during weekend visits at home. This young person will be returning home within the next 30 days with an identified transition plan. He will continue to receive special education services with District of Columbia Public Schools, third party intensive monitoring, continued in-home family therapy with Universal Healthcare, a core service agency with the Department of Mental Health, and continue to participate in the afterschool program with Sasha Bruce, which will continue to provide him with the opportunity to participate in constructive activities

I have a youth who invited me to attend his graduation from a DC Public School. While under my supervision, the youth and family were referred to individual where he learned how to manage conflict and peacefully resolve differences by asking for the support of other adults in the school setting. We met on a biweekly basis to discuss what he learned in anger management and to explore after school employment opportunities. He was assisted with completing online job applications with CVS Pharmacy, Harris and Teeter, and Home Depot. After some careful thought and consideration, he decided that he

would play in his high school band and volunteered at So Others May Eat, serving meals for the homeless, because it was important for him to demonstrate that he had varied interests, talents, and his way of giving back to those who were less fortunate. Although he erred in his judgment, he demonstrated that it was a regrettable offense, but he did not allow it ruin his chances of becoming a productive young adult. He recommended by his teachers to participate in group interviews that were held at Trinity College asked to vie for an opportunity to receive a scholarship from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. He seemed so poised when he answered questions whose themes centered about race/ethnicity, team building, and diversity. I am happy to report that he will be attending Johnson and Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island in August 2008. He plans to major in Business Administration and Culinary Arts because he intends to own his own restaurant in the Washington, DC. He was awarded a scholarship after completing the rigors of their program. He plans to major in Business Administration and Culinary Arts because he intends to own his own restaurant in the Washington, DC.