



WHAT'S WORKING

A Message From DJJ Director Andy Block

March 21, 2016

Transformation Seeds Blooming In The West

CSU 27 Sees 100% Probation Alternative Rate For Last Six Months Among Low-Risk Kids

The simple step of collaborating with attorneys to request a pre-dispositional social history on court-involved youth, as opposed to the usual practice of placing youth on immediate probation at the adjudication hearing, has resulted in a new season of change in this area of southwestern Virginia.

Consider the recent case of two teenage girls who were caught for felony shoplifting – their first brush with the law. Standard practice, according to CSU 27's Christiansburg Field Office Supervisor Doug Poe, was that the judge would likely place the girls on probation, followed by CSU staff conducting a social history. Until six months ago, Poe estimates that about 28 percent of their active caseload of low-risk kids automatically received probation.

But knowing that DJJ is trending toward more probation alternatives for low-risk youth, staff began requesting pre-dispositional social histories when probation was being considered, which provides them strong information to make a recommendation to a judge.

"In the case of the girls, our social history told us that they had an appropriate situation at home," Poe says. "They were not abusing substances, and they were having no issues at school. So the judge assigned them to community service, had them pay restitution, and that was it. We



The CSU 27 Christiansburg field office team, from left: Probation Officers David Gaskill, Hollie Fitzgerald and Lori Craig; Office Services Assistant Margie Crotts; Probation Officer Daziah Richard and Field Office Supervisor Doug Poe. Not pictured: Probation Officer Jon Hilton. The field office represents the counties of Montgomery and Floyd, and the City of Radford.

think the chances are good that we won't hear from those girls again."

The new approach has had significant positive results...so much so that the field office reports zero low-risk kids on probation in the last six months, with the yearly percentage down to 10 percent and dropping. CSU 27 Director Rob Hiatt reports an overall probation caseload reduction of more than 14 percent as a result. While it's still early to gauge long-term results, Poe notes with favor that, as far as he knows, none of the low-risk youth who have been kept off probation have re-offended.

Western Regional Program Manager Robert Foster notes that this

positive trend could not have been realized without the cooperation of the Commonwealth's attorneys, defense attorneys, and judges representing the counties of Montgomery and Floyd and the City of Radford.

"The experience of CSU 27's Christiansburg office has really been a perfect storm of factors that we believe is setting the trend for how our agency serves our youth in the future," Foster says. "The routine preparing of the pre-dispositional social history gives our judges a powerful tool with which to make better decisions about a youth's future; we are getting low-risk kids into the services they need, and we are getting the right kids on probation."