Message from DYS Director Harvey Reed
Alternative Therapies Helping Youth at DYS
April 27, 2017

We have added tools available for staff to use to help youth at DYS. Each youth has a unique personality, history, special interests, likes, and dislikes. With this in mind, we have expanded the range of complementary therapeutic approaches available to reach our youth.

This year we introduced art and music therapies at the juvenile correctional facilities. These options are ideal for youth who do not respond as well to “talk therapy.” Art and music therapies resonate with many of the youth in our facilities, especially those with cognitive limitations, language deficits, and difficulty expressing themselves verbally as well as those with a history of trauma.

Art therapy is a mental health profession in which participants use different art media and techniques to explore feelings, manage behaviors, develop social skills, reduce anxiety, and increase self-esteem. This expressive form of therapy uses the creative process of making art to improve a youth’s physical, mental, and emotional well-being. One youth recently said, “The group helps me to cope, especially with my anger.”

One staff said, "Our facility's art therapist does a great job, and the youth consistently tell me how much they enjoy the class.”

Art made by a Circleville JCF youth during an art therapy session with Mr. Kemp
Similarly, music therapy is an established health profession that uses music within a therapeutic relationship to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of participants. It can provide an alternative way to communicate that can help youth who struggle to express themselves in words.

Kudos to all of our art and music therapy providers:

Circleville JCF: Curtis Kemp Art Project and Central Ohio Music Therapy

Cuyahoga Hills JCF and Indian River JCF: The Art Studio and The Music Settlement

For several years now, we have made occupational therapy available to youth. Occupational therapists are skilled at working with youth on school functioning, behavior, recreation, social skills, appropriate use of time, and preparation for adulthood. Through hands-on activities, these therapists help build up youths’ abilities. The therapy is especially valuable in building positive pathways in the brain that improve behavior. Our therapists are able to work with youth who are agitated, help them regain composure, and then talk about the situations that led to the agitation in the first place.

If a youth is angry, a therapist might have the youth use a sensory widget like a hand puzzle or stress ball to calm down. Their tools include everything from music (rhythmic, classical, and nature sounds), calming videos, and games to help improve the youths’ abilities to focus. Sensory inputs help offset stress so that the youth can move beyond the agitation and have more clear thinking and positive behavior.

*Occupational Therapist Rachel Snodgrass works with a youth at Circleville JCF*
Occupational Therapist Jay Covey catches up on the computer at Cuyahoga Hills JCF

Occupational Therapist Amy Luedy completes an assessment with a youth at Indian River JCF

Occupational therapists also help youth to learn and develop life skills. For some youth, this begins with basics like grooming and social skills. The therapists work with youth on skills including applying for a job, budgeting, taking public transportation, parenting, renting a first apartment, and more. This work supports our core value of providing youth everything they need to succeed.

April is Occupational Therapy Month, and I hope you will join me in thanking our Occupational Therapists:

Circleville JCF: Joan Hedrick, OTR/L (Occupational Therapist) and Rachel Snodgrass, MOT, OTR/L (Occupational Therapist)

Cuyahoga Hills JCF and Indian River JCF: Jay Covey, OTR/L (Occupational Therapist), Amy Luedy, M.S., OTR/L (Occupational Therapist), Meredith McCartney, COTA/L
These therapeutic approaches are enhancing socialization, assisting in recall and language skills, and decreasing the frequency of agitated behavior. Further, youth are learning to manage emotions and stressful situations, express themselves in healthy ways, and have improved motor development. Whether traditional therapy or art, music, or occupational therapy, the end goal is helping troubled youth improve their behavior and develop skills that will help them succeed in the long-term.