Development of the Youth Specialist

A joint labor-management committee made up of JCOs, selected by the Union, and administrative staff from the facilities worked together to revise the former JCO position description and clarified the roles and responsibilities of the Youth Specialist.

Youth Specialists are more involved in youth-centered activities and have greater opportunities to develop positive relationships with youth in their care.

Youth Specialists

Effective the first of January 2010, Juvenile Correctional Officers (JCO) are now Youth Specialists. This new title reflects the importance of their presence in the facilities and allows for greater participation in activities and programs for youth, Interdisciplinary Teams (IDT), training and skill building.

Roles of the Youth Specialist

Educator: The Youth Specialist supports the youth’s educational goals and encourages youth to engage in lifelong learning. This could be demonstrated through activities such as assisting youth in completing college applications and leading personal growth and development activities.

Mentor: In this role, the Youth Specialist builds relationships with the youth, serving as a coach or a life guide. This could be demonstrated through giving strength-based feedback, assisting in completing a job application, conducting mock job interviews, leading activities that recognize a youth’s strengths and encouraging youth participation.

Role Model: During the course of a work day, the Youth Specialist demonstrates appropriate social skills, speaks positively about the facility and their coworkers and leads by example. This includes following through with job responsibilities, knowing the rules and applying them fairly and consistently and offering support and assistance to colleagues and youth. The Youth Specialist provides rehabilitative activities and structured programming and is a key participant in Interdisciplinary Team meetings.

Authority Figure: The Youth Specialist sets reasonable expectations and holds youth accountable by supporting and encouraging pro-social conflict resolution, role modeling effective problem solving and enforcing sanctions when necessary. The Youth Specialist practices patience, consistency and understanding within the context of adolescent development. This could be seen through setting limits, making sure basic needs are met, giving praise and encouragement and teaching youth personal hygiene and basic living skills.