

# The South Carolina Department Of Juvenile Justice: Raising the Voices of Girls

By Susan Alford

*“As a former member of the state legislature, and a long-time observer of state government, I can say with all sincerity that the Department of Juvenile Justice has succeeded, perhaps more than any other state agency, in revitalizing and enhancing its programs so as to better fulfill its mission.” — Joseph F. Anderson Jr.*

These words, written in December 2005, attest to the turnaround that has taken place within the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) under Director William R. Byars Jr., and following 13 years of contentious litigation concerning conditions in agency facilities. The quote is all the more remarkable in that its author is Joseph F. Anderson Jr., chief judge of the U.S. District Court, District of South Carolina, who presided over the DJJ case.

When Gov. Mark Sanford tapped Byars, a former family court judge, to be director of DJJ in 2002, he gave his appointee two charges: to resolve the federal lawsuit and to end the practice of warehousing children. Byars reversed the department’s legal stance, publicly embraced the federal court’s findings and proposed a competent plan of action to address the court’s issues. By year’s end he had negotiated a settlement of the lawsuit and was moving forward with a sweeping plan of reform to embrace the entire juvenile justice system. Notably, Byars brought about numerous improvements to the services and supervision provided to youths in DJJ custody, including smaller treatment-oriented programs for appropriate lower-risk offenders.

## Gender Equity for Female Juvenile Offenders

When Byars became aware of serious gender-inequity issues that existed for females in custody, he made a firm commitment early in his administration to remedy these issues and to elevate girls programming as a key platform of his systemic reform initiative.

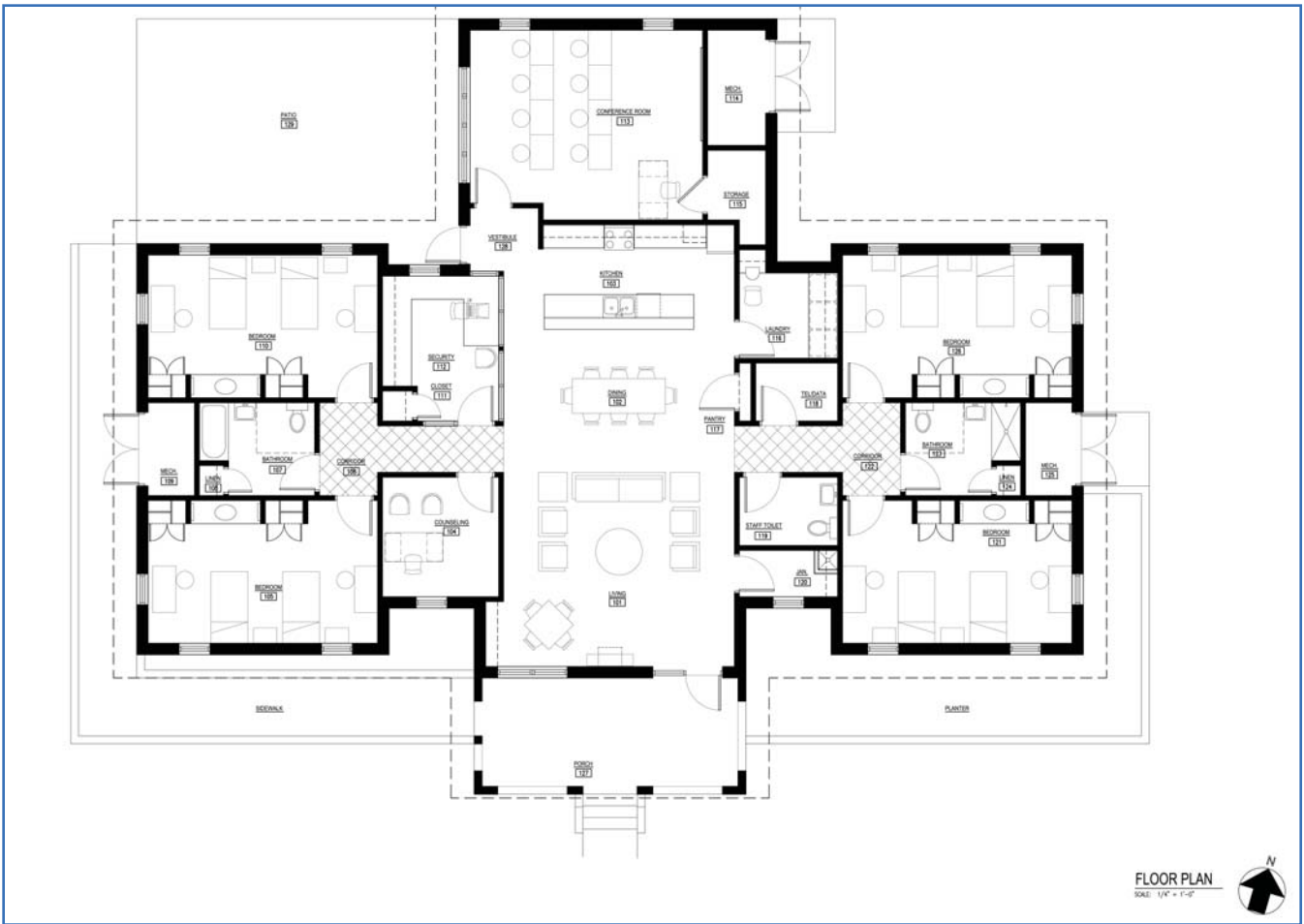
In order to begin addressing the inadequacy of services being provided to girls in the juvenile justice system, the first order of business was to move the girls out of the physically inadequate Greenwood Center. The current female facility is located on the Willow Lane campus, which has its own perimeter security fence that makes it possible to achieve complete sight and sound separation from male juvenile offenders. There are two living units, which enables the separation of passive and aggressive offenders

— an important security and treatment issue. Other features of the female facility include a permanent school building, a gymnasium, recreation fields for team sports, multiple and well-appointed visiting areas, and access to a chapel, all of which were lacking in Greenwood. The female facility has a capacity of 64 beds, 29 of which were occupied as of mid-October.

The renovated school building for girls contains an upgraded media center with gender-responsive resources. Middle school, high school and special education levels of instruction are provided in classes that feature low teacher-to-student ratios. The school also houses a greenhouse program and a culinary arts class. The culinary arts class sponsors the Willow Café, where girls prepare and serve innovative menus for DJJ staff and guests, in a classroom they decorated as a restaurant. After-school enrichment activities funded through a 21st Century grant include computers, life-skills training, character education, creative expression, women’s history and black history studies, and community service projects.

Once the females moved to Willow Lane, DJJ developed a comprehensive array of programs and activities for committed females, including:

- Alcohol- and drug-abuse counseling, which had been lacking at the Greenwood facility in its last years of operation;
- Individualized sex offender treatment;
- Skill-streaming groups to teach and encourage socially appropriate behavior;
- Process groups dealing with sexual abuse and domestic violence;
- Other core treatment groups on dealing with grief and loss, effective parenting and stress management;
- Alpine Tower challenge activity (an outdoor adventure-based skills program) and music/drama activities; and
- An increase of 30 hours per week in the availability of chaplain services.



The Girls Transition Home includes bathrooms with shower/bath combinations, areas designed for personal hygiene and family-oriented living space.

The organizational infrastructure of Willow Lane was redesigned to promote more integrated, cohesive relationships among staff across disciplines, and new staff positions were created, to include a lead clinician for girls and youth specialists to act as advocates for girls.

In addition, DJJ took steps to address the other gender-equity issues related to community beds within the system. Access to alternative programs for committed female offenders improved as the department assumed control of all 24 beds at Camp Ghigua (a wilderness camp for girls) and added 15 beds for low-risk and status offenders at the Youth Development Center created by Clemson University’s Youth Learning Institute. The agency also has opened female wings at all three evaluation centers (72 total beds), thus providing females with equal access to regional services as they undergo predispositional evaluations or admissions processing upon final commitment to DJJ custody. The department used VOITIS (Violent Offender Incarceration Truth in Sentencing) funds to design the eight-bed Girls Transition Home, to be built on the Willow Lane campus, where staff will teach transitional living skills to girls in confinement. State funds were obtained to staff the transition house with a clinical director, sex abuse counselor and independent living counselors.

### From Equity to Paradigm Shift

Although equity issues were successfully addressed, the agency’s biggest challenge was yet to be faced. How could the department provide equitable services to young female offenders, as well as provide them with services specific to their needs? And how could that be accomplished at Broad River Road Complex, a campus with more than 300 juvenile male offenders where services were geared to the predominant population being served?

To tackle this challenge, the agency began to aggressively train staff on girls’ specific needs and issues. An updated curriculum provided staff who were accustomed to working with males with new strategies for working effectively with young women. Further training prompted a review of staff practices and it became clear, at the operational level, that in order to effectively meet the needs of girls, all services and operational procedures had to be scrutinized through a new gender-responsive lens. All staff, from clinical to recreational to classification to health services to food services, had to acknowledge and accept that what works with boys does not necessarily work with girls, and that boys’ needs and girls’ needs are most adequately addressed in the context of their differing developmental pathways.

Funded by the Serious and Violent Offender Reintegration Initiative grant, interdisciplinary teams of agency staff visited girls programs in Michigan and South Dakota rec-



The Girls Transition Home is an eight-bed cottage that will house girls who are nearing release back into the community.

ommended by the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, to learn about gender-specific levels systems, assessment and treatment programming. DJJ's deputy director for rehabilitative services, Jerry Adger, who led these best-practices site visits, began promoting a paradigm shift for girls' programs at the Broad River Complex. Adger determined that he could use the girls facility as a prototype or pilot for re-examining facility operations, implementing a strength-based, less punitive approach on a small scale with females, so that this approach could eventually be replicated to encompass male residents as well. In October 2005, he decided to begin an arduous journey of re-examining everything at the girls facility from the ground up — from staffing, to classification, to treatment services, to education, to level systems — and he did that while staff conducted interviews and focus groups with girls to get their input in identifying core needs.

The Broad River Road Complex management team, which comprised the leaders of each discipline, was instituted in January 2006 to encourage communication across all disciplines on a weekly basis. This team experienced intensive team-building training from Clemson University's Youth Learning Institute early in 2006, and subsequent to that training, began making fundamental shifts in core operations affecting girls. One issue that clearly reflected the need for a paradigm shift was the type of clothing worn by girls and boys. It was felt that placing males and females in traditional prison jumpsuits did nothing to enhance the juveniles' self-esteem, and encouraged staff to view them as inmates. Using input from girls, and input obtained from other girls facilities in the United States, seasonal clothing

was purchased for the female population that was more normative and fitted for young women (khakis, shorts, polo shirts, tennis shoes, rainwear, pajamas, etc.) New boys clothing also was obtained, and jumpsuits have been reserved only for males and females who are placed in lock-up.

In April 2006, Adger appointed Velvet McGowan as the champion/director for the girls' program, and she worked with facility management to reinterview all staff at the facility to determine which staff members really were interested in working with girls. Staff who did not have a genuine interest in working with females were allowed to transfer to a facility working with males.

Other actions of the management team included: ensuring dedicated staff for each girls dorm (as opposed to rotating security and clinical staff); opening a special unit for girls who exhibit disruptive behavior; decreasing the use of lock-up for girls; realigning staff duties to allow intake screenings for girls to be performed within one hour of their arrival; pairing of the girls school principal with the administrator for girls programming as a functional, oversight team for the girls campus; and establishing a performance-based standards site coordinator who could track agency progress with meeting critical performance standards with respect to girls.

It became clear to the management team that DJJ was going to have to reach out to its community partners for support in transforming its system of care for young female offenders. In the critical area of health services, the female population needed greater access to psychiatric and physician services, and five-day-a-week availability of nurse practitioners was obtained through a partnership with University of South Carolina Specialty Clinics. It also became more expedient for females to access dental services, optometry and subspecialties through DJJ's contract with the university. Support programs and activities for females were obtained from a wide array of community groups, who have played a critical role in developing after-school and weekend activities for females that support their treatment goals.

## The DJJ-Clemson Partnership

One of the pivotal partnerships that has contributed to the development of girls services at DJJ was already in existence with Clemson University. In a unique memorandum of agreement signed in 2003, DJJ and Clemson agreed to pool the resources of the department and of the land-grant



Co-facilitators of Girls Circle meet every week at Willow Lane in their own circle, to discuss their experiences and plan improvements.

## The Journey Toward Gender Equity and Gender Responsive Programming For Girls in South Carolina's Juvenile Justice System

1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Incarcerated females move to an inadequate facility in Greenwood, S.C.; wilderness camp alternative beds for females eliminated in budget crisis.</li> </ul>
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Gov. Mark Sanford taps Bill Byars as chief administrator of South Carolina's juvenile justice system. Byars' mandate: End the lawsuit and the warehousing of children.</li> <li>◆ Byars recognizes gender-equity as an issue in services for girls.</li> </ul>
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Successful negotiations bring an end to 13-year old class action litigation.</li> </ul>
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Greenwood facility closes. Females return to a separate facility in Columbia.</li> <li>◆ DJJ creates 15 alternative beds of committed females through its partnership with Clemson University's Youth Learning Institute.</li> <li>◆ DJJ assumes control of 24 wilderness camp alternative beds for females.</li> <li>◆ DJJ completes the addition of female wings to its three regional evaluation centers.</li> <li>◆ DJJ obtains federal funding to construct transitional housing for females.</li> </ul>
2005-2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ DJJ/Clemson Steering Committee selects "Girls in Confinement" as its major annual initiative, develops an action plan and makes mini-grants available.</li> <li>◆ DJJ deputy director for Rehabilitative Services begins re-examination of the operations of the girls facility (Willow Lane) "from the ground up."</li> <li>◆ Girls housing issues in the Broad River Road Complex become part of a comprehensive plan to replace all residences and redesign grounds/common areas into a "community behind the fence."</li> <li>◆ Key DJJ staff visit model programs in other states to facilitate organizational change in creating a culture to sustain gender-responsive programming.</li> <li>◆ Funding for girls programming and for DJJ housing wins executive/legislative support.</li> <li>◆ DJJ brings in expert technical assistance/training for staff working with girls.</li> <li>◆ Incarcerated females exchange prison jumpsuits for more normative, fitted seasonal clothing.</li> <li>◆ DJJ extends its partnerships to include Columbia College, a private and historically female institution to receive assistance with education for incarcerated females and transition programming needs.</li> <li>◆ Clemson/DJJ announces the re-creation of the Clemson University Center for Girls Advocacy and gender-responsive programs. This center is to act as a clearinghouse for best practices in girls programs, education and training.</li> </ul>
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Fully furnished and staffed Girls Transition Home scheduled to open in the Broad River Road Complex.</li> </ul>

university to benefit South Carolina's at-risk children. By 2006, this partnership had already produced a number of innovative programs, such as the Youth Development Center at Camp Long (30 beds for males, 15 beds for females), juvenile employment-enrichment programs in the community, teen after-school centers, research initiatives and strength-based staff-training initiatives.

After hearing of the needs of girls at the Broad River Road Complex, the co-chairs of the DJJ-Clemson steering committee chose "Girls in Confinement" as its major annual initiative for 2006-2007, establishing a girls task force to develop a plan of action to address these needs. This task force was comprised of DJJ staff, Clemson staff and numerous members of local communities who had an interest in girls' issues. The task force formulated a comprehensive plan to address the needs of girls in confinement across four core domains: health, relationships, physical environment and education. In addition, a mini-grant program was implemented to fund projects and services for girls in confinement, including mentoring programs, arts initiatives, health education, family intervention strategies, redesign of the Willow Lane physical environment using landscape architecture students, and nutrition and fitness programs. The initiatives funded through the mini-grant program must be sustainable beyond the grant period and involve Clemson University students in design or implementation.

DJJ's partnership with Clemson also has been a great asset in developing the "community behind the fence," which embraces the entire Broad River Road Complex. In spring 2004, Clemson University's Institute of Economic and Community Development, with financial support from the Kellog Foundation, sponsored an intensive collaborative process known as a "charette" to develop a plan for revitalization of the 210-acre complex. During a three-day period, architects and planners heard from more than 200 stakeholders before creating a physical master plan to meet the needs of residents and staff within the Broad River Road Complex. Byars used this plan as a basis to pursue funding in fiscal year 2005-2006 to replace two of the department's living units each year with state-of-the-art 30-bed units designed with youths, treatment and security needs in mind. The first two of these units are projected to open in 2008.

In 2006, DJJ received technical assistance from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the National Institute of Corrections to bring in nationally recognized consultants to conduct training and consultation on gender-responsive services. DJJ also has formed a partnership with Columbia College. This institution offers a master's degree in education/divergent learning for individuals working with students who need nontraditional teaching methods if they are to succeed as engaged learners in South Carolina classrooms. As candidates complete their coursework, they have access to a "living laboratory" of DJJ-involved at the Youth Learning Institute's Youth Development Center. These youths tend to have histories of school-related issues, making them prime candidates for divergent learning theory and applications.



Willow Lane girls participate weekly in Girls Circle activities.

Columbia College and the DJJ co-sponsored a girls symposium in September 2006, which focused on best practice programs and strategies for girls. At this conference, DJJ and Clemson University announced the co-creation of a girls advocacy center. The mission of the Clemson University Center for Girls and Advocacy and Gender-Based Programs is to promote an understanding of girls and their needs across five core categories that are critical for their development: health and nutrition, gender identity, economic development, collaborative learning and relationships. This center, which represents an exciting new initiative of the DJJ-Clemson partnership, will ensure that girls' issues remain prioritized in South Carolina, in terms of program development, education and training, development of best practices, and research and evaluation.

## The Future and Its Challenges

DJJ's journey implement services tailored to juvenile female offenders is a story worth telling. Girls are an under-represented minority in the juvenile justice system and their needs have been diminished by service to the majority for too long. They also continue to be an under-represented area of focus in learning environments, higher education and the social services arena. If juvenile justice practitioners really are serious about providing services for youths that are culturally competent and age-appropriate, the reality is that gender differences must be addressed, and not doing so diminishes the opportunity to provide meaningful and rich interventions that can promote successful outcomes for males and females.

Research into gender differences is woefully inadequate. If we are to better understand the developmental pathways that attract girls into at-risk behaviors, juvenile justice practitioners must listen to them, learn more about them, and work with them more effectively to interrupt the quiet intergenerational cycles of trauma, neglect and economic dependence that often characterize their histories. Through its innovative partnerships and commitment to the elevation of girls needs, DJJ hopes to become a national leader toward that end.

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