

# **Evaluation of a Restorative Milieu: CSF Buxmont School/Day Treatment Programs 1999-2001**

## **Executive Summary Evaluation Outcome Technical Report**

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The Community Service Foundation (CSF) and Buxmont Academy operate six school/day treatment programs (abbreviated as “CSF Buxmont schools”) in southeastern Pennsylvania. They are non-secure community treatment settings for adjudicated delinquent and at-risk youth. Additionally, CSF operates three auxiliary programs — the residential, intensive supervision, and home and community programs. Some students attending CSF Buxmont schools participate in multiple programs simultaneously.

All of these programs utilize what is broadly termed “restorative practices.” Restorative practices provide high levels of both control and support to encourage appropriate behavior. The philosophy underlying these practices holds that human beings are happier, more productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things WITH them, rather than TO them or FOR them. This hypothesis maintains that the punitive and authoritarian TO mode and the permissive and paternalistic FOR mode are not as effective as the restorative, participatory, and engaging WITH mode.

CSF Buxmont has developed a culture in which “restorative” characterizes not only staff interaction with youth, but staff-to-staff and student-to-student relationships as well. This researcher has coined the term “restorative milieu” because CSF Buxmont culture is comprised of many restorative techniques and processes and not just isolated restorative interventions.

CSF Buxmont schools have an excellent reputation for empowering youth to make positive changes. However, since their founding in 1977, they have never been formally evaluated. In April 1999 they began using ProDES, an evaluation protocol developed by Temple University’s Crime and Justice Research Center. This performance monitoring system was designed to track delinquent youths for the Philadelphia Juvenile Courts. ProDES collects information at three points: program entry, program discharge, and six months following discharge.

This analysis presents the outcome measures for the 919 youth discharged from CSF Buxmont schools between June 1, 1999 and August 30, 2001. Youth are referred to CSF Buxmont school/day treatment programs from three sources: juvenile probation (56%), school districts (34%), and children and youth agencies (10%).

The restorative milieu produced positive results in three performance measures: program completion rates, youth attitudes, and offending following discharge.

## RESULTS

### *High Program Completion Rates*

- Nearly two-thirds (66%) of the youth who entered the CSF Buxmont schools completed the program successfully.
- Those who were discharged prior to completing the program did not differ by age, gender, race, prior offending, or other risk factors.
- Youth with the lowest social values and self-esteem scores upon entry were retained longer than others and showed the most improvement.

### *Positive Changes in Attitude*

- There was an overall trend toward more positive social values and higher self-esteem the longer youth stayed in the CSF Buxmont schools.
- Social values scores increased an average of 10% after six months of participation.
- Self-esteem scores increased an average of 8% after six months of participation.
- These improvements were independent of referral source, age, gender, race, prior offending, or other risk factors.

### *Lower Offending Rates*

- Offending during the six months following discharge was reduced by 58% for those youth who completed the program successfully with more than three months participation.
- Youth in all risk categories were less likely to offend following discharge, including those discharged unsuccessfully, if they participated in the program for more than three months.
- The greatest reduction in offending occurred among youth with the highest risk factors for offending.

## CONCLUSIONS

These findings present sufficient evidence to conclude that the changes in attitude and behavior of youth were the result of participating in CSF Buxmont's restorative milieu. CSF Buxmont schools showed very high program completion rates. Also, youth attending these school/day treatment programs showed significant improvements in attitude and behavior. The longer they participated, the more they improved.

Very few programs for delinquent and troubled youth can demonstrate similar positive outcomes. These results provide very strong empirical support that restorative practices are effective and that youth in a restorative milieu will become more positive in their social values, develop an improved self-image, and will be less likely to offend in the future.