

The paper for
professionals who work
with troubled youth



STARR POINTS

Being there: The importance of a continuum of care in the treatment of struggling youth

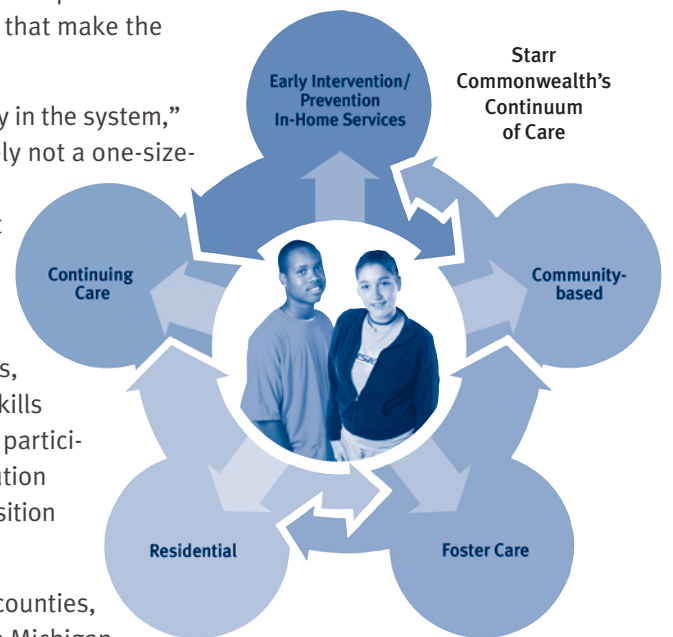
Over the years, Starr Commonwealth has introduced nearly two dozen community-based and residential programs for troubled youth to Michigan and Ohio. You won't find the word "aftercare" in any one of them.

"We don't use that term at Starr Commonwealth," says Dr. Jim Longhurst, the organization's head of case planning and clinical services. "To us, it's a symbol of the partition that's been created between treatment and what comes next. It should all be related."

Longhurst and others throughout the Starr Commonwealth system in Michigan and Ohio look at treatment programs as one fluid blend that can be tapped into at different times depending on circumstances and the needs of the individual child.

"The ultimate goal is to keep children and families together," says Lisa Lambert, Executive Director of Starr Columbus in Ohio. "But the issues are complex and needs can change and evolve." Lambert and Longhurst both say it's Starr's wide range of programs – from residential care for specialized needs to community-based programs – that make the continuum so effective.

"There are multiple points of entry in the system," says Longhurst. "Ours is definitely not a one-size-fits-all program." Consider, for example, a child who is aging-out of the foster care system and may not be ready for the abrupt shift to complete independence. Starr independent living programs, with their focus on practical life skills and responsible school and work participation, can become the right solution for young people making the transition to adulthood.



Longhurst says that many of the counties, courts and CMOs he meets within Michigan appreciate the partnership focus Starr brings to the table. Lambert, who works closely with child welfare professionals in Ohio, agrees. "Working on treatment plans together, right from the start, keeps us all on the same page," says Longhurst. With years of previous experience in case planning, Starr is particularly sensitive to the needs of state and county partners whose job it is to manage the care of troubled youth. "We may have a child in a community-based program who needs a short, residential stay to handle a sudden issue," says Longhurst, adding that Starr's non-secure residential setting allows Michigan courts and counties to tap into Title IV-E funds at no cost to them.

The true test, of course, is how successful kids are over the long-term. "Our programs give young people the foundation for a successful and healthy life and that's how we measure it," says Lambert. Starr follows each individual child for up to a year after they complete the program, collecting 3-, 6- and 12-month data along the way. "A child may be able to keep it together after 3 months or even 6 months," says Lambert. "We look at what's happening a year out of the program and we look at everything." Starr outcomes are based on movement to and maintenance of a less restrictive environment; recidivism; negative court involvement; drug and alcohol involvement; relationship to a caring adult and productivity in school and work.

For more on Starr Commonwealth programs in Michigan and Ohio, including outcome data and the referral process, contact Starr at 800-837-5591 or visit www.starr.org.

STARR MICHIGAN

Children's Home of Detroit now part of the Starr family.

Starr Commonwealth and Children's Home of Detroit have agreed to continue the Children's Home's 172-year history of serving children and families. The acquisition, effective Friday, February 6, 2009, makes it possible for the Children's Home of Detroit's mission to live on while allowing Starr to expand its presence in southeastern Michigan.

Children's Home of Detroit closed its residential program in November 2008. Its Board of Trustees voted to transfer the organization's Grosse Pointe Woods and Warren campuses to Starr Commonwealth. Starr also acquired and continues to operate The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children (TLC), which offers trauma-informed care training and resources for professionals working with traumatized children.

"In our long-term strategic planning, we had identified Starr Commonwealth as a gold standard provider of services for children and families and a suitable candidate for affiliation to continue to our own tradition of serving children and families," said Bruce Van de Vusse, President of the Board of Trustees for Children's Home of Detroit. "In the challenging and evolving environment now confronting agencies like ours, we look forward to working with Starr Commonwealth to discover and deliver the highest quality and effective services that can be delivered to make a positive impact on children and their families."

Starr currently manages the care of 600 children daily in Wayne County through an existing collaborative partnership organization called StarVista, and operates five sites throughout Michigan and Ohio that provide transformational programs for youth, families, schools and communities.

"We are proud that the Children's Home of Detroit is entrusting Starr Commonwealth with their rich legacy of caring for children and families," said Martin L. Mitchell, Starr Commonwealth President and Chief Executive Officer. "We look forward to continuing their work as we pursue early intervention and prevention services, community-based programming and possibly residential alternatives."



STARR OHIO



Starr Columbus boys are regular volunteers at the Mid-Ohio Food Bank. Service learning is a keystone of the Starr treatment philosophy and is a crucial component of every

program. "It's important for kids to see themselves as part of something bigger than themselves," says Lisa Lambert, Executive Director for the Starr Columbus campus.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS



Roger finds his place at Columbus MyPlace.

For Roger, paying the bills every month feels good. "When I was growing up it wasn't unusual to wake up and the refrigerator was off because no one had paid the electric bill." When the 17-year-old entered MyPlace, Starr's transitional living program, he had no real idea how to care for himself, much less an apartment. It didn't take long to change that. "I learned how to cook good meals and how to shop for the best deals," he says proudly. Starr counselors taught the willing young man other life skills as well: how to budget his money, manage his time, even how to conduct himself

in a job interview. Weekly counseling sessions and on-site support kept him on track. Today, Roger works at a local auto repair shop, is taking community college classes part-time and paying his own bills. "On time," he says with a wide smile.

THE LONG VIEW

Dr. James Longhurst is a licensed psychologist for Starr Commonwealth and is involved in all case planning and clinical services for the organization. Jim is a member of the American Psychological Association and is a charter member of the International Positive Psychology Association. He is a certified lead facilitator and trainer for Starr's Healing of Racism and GlasswingSM facilitator training initiative.



Treatment of youth who sexually offend

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the two most prevalent reactions in our society to youth who sexually offend were “lock ‘em up” because “nothing works.” We at Starr Commonwealth were very curious about the belief that these youth can't change because we indeed had experienced success working with these youth in our treatment programs. And we believed then, as we do now, that all kids can change.

In 1992, a select group of clinicians from Starr visited with practitioners and researchers around the country to get their insights into what indeed was working with these kids. With this information we decided to design a program exclusively for the treatment of youth with histories of sexual offenses.

Starr Outcomes: Sexually Reactive Youth

So, that year we established and trained two treatment teams of people who had expressed a desire to work with these kids. Keep in mind that this was, for the most part, uncharted territory. In the next few years, our residential programs in Michigan and Ohio saw great success in helping youth return successfully to the community – and not re-offending!

Word of these positive results spread and we had grown from two cottages serving 24 youth to ten cottages serving 120 kids. Follow-up data extending a year after completion of the residential program

consistently showed that these kids remained productive, stayed in their community settings, and did not re-offend sexually or in any other way. Starr's pioneering efforts in this field contributed to change the mindsets of policy makers; people now believe that “something works.”

What have we learned about the kids we serve? About our treatment programs? I will highlight a few of our discoveries along the way:

Group Treatment Works: Very early on, we were advised by some practitioners that the nature of sexually acting out youth requires intense individual therapy. We found that while it is true that youth need individual clinical support from adults, working in groups was found to be very effective. Kids learned that they weren't alone facing the challenges of change. In addition to the five group meetings held each week, group members met twice weekly in sessions co-facilitated by the Senior Clinician and the Relapse Prevention Specialist.

Helping Others is a Cornerstone of Treatment: Group members play an important role in the lives of each other. Empowering a group to help is to ask them to use their own experiences and insight to show care for each other – to do what best meets a fellow group member's needs. Throughout each day, under the clinical direction of the treatment team, kids are taught, coached, supported, and reinforced for their efforts at helping others – not only by the staff but by responsible and socially interested group members. The ultimate goal of helping others? Simply stated, to create in each youth a foundation of Social Interest – a lifetime value of showing care and concern for others.

Relapse Prevention is Key: The task of preparing a youth to be successful in his/her family and community begins on the first day of treatment. Starr's Relapse Prevention Specialists work with youth while in group treatment but also work with the families right from the beginning. They gain a unique perspective of working directly with youth in care and by helping families prepare for the youth's return. But these specialists are also responsible for assessing both the youth's and family's ability to keep everyone safe. When it is determined that safety concerns remain, alternative continued services including relative placement, foster home, and supervised independent living are options. Starr's commitment is to continue to work for up to one year with each youth and family.

Relationships are Primary: A misunderstanding about group treatment is that individual therapy and support do not exist. In fact, treatment team members play integral roles in establishing relationships with each group member. Let me share with you something I heard yesterday (March 2009) from Martha Dobbins, now our Director of Training Initiatives but back in 1992 she was our first Clinician working with these kids. Martha states:

“Last week I received a call from a youth with whom I worked in the mid-nineties. He basically wanted to get some support from me. His grandfather, who had abused him when he was young, was dying and the youth did not want to “let him go without talking to him.” This youth had not had any contact with either his grandfather OR his dad, who had failed to protect him from the grandfather. He just needed to “touch base” with me to let me know of his plan and to let me know he was doing well. I think he might have needed just a little bit of reassurance as well.”

Imagine the impact of this relationship on this youth! (and on Martha, too). Here it is about 13 years later, and this young man who is now nearing 30 years of age checks in with someone whom he can rely.

Adapting to Change: Starr continually adopts proven methods to its treatment model. In the late '90s we began to provide loss and grief counseling to youth who had these needs. Later, in the early 2000s we officially changed the name to “Sexually Reactive Youth.” It is our experience that a great majority of the youth we serve had been physically and/or sexually abused themselves. By the fall of 2009, all Starr's Clinicians working with these kids will be trained in administering the evidence-based, empirically guided Estimate of Risk of Adolescent Sexual Offense Recidivism (The “ERASOR”) Version 2.0. We believe that this will aid us in identifying risk factors, guiding treatment planning, and assessing progress for return to the community.

Starr Points is a quarterly newsletter published by Starr Commonwealth, an internationally recognized leader in transformational programs for children, families, schools and communities. Founded in 1913, Starr's treatment philosophy is rooted in seeing something good in every child, which serves as the guiding principle in its strength-based approach. Starr offers a full spectrum of community-based early intervention and prevention services along with specialized residential programs. Through the Starr Institute of Training, parents, clinicians, educators and childcare professionals now have access to Starr's highly successful and innovative techniques aimed at bringing out the best in every child. For more information, visit www.starr.org.

Starr Commonwealth Programs

Albion, Michigan

Juvenile Justice (residential)
Sexually Reactive Youth (SRY residential)
Abuse/Neglect (residential)
Alternatives (substance abuse, residential)

Battle Creek, Michigan

Day Treatment
Intensive In-Home
Starr Life Skills
(supervised independent living)
Foster Care

Columbus, Ohio

Sexually Reactive Youth (SRY residential)
Transitions (supervised transitional living)
MyPlace Transitional Living
Ohio Families First
Treatment Foster Care

Detroit, Michigan

Alternatives
(substance abuse, community-based)
New Boundaries (residential transition and reintegration support)
Starr Life Skills
(supervised independent living)
Transitions (supervised transitional living)
Foster Care

Van Wert, Ohio

Traditional Delinquent for Boys
Traditional Residential for Girls

For Michigan referrals, please call toll-free 800-837-5591 or e-mail michintake@starr.org

For Ohio referrals, please call toll-free 866-289-9201 or e-mail ohiointake@starr.org

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