


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 28, 2011

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A GRANT APPLICATION BY THE COURT SERVICE UNIT TO THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES TO ESTABLISH A CRIME PREVENTION PROGRAM FOR COURT-INVOLVED LATINA GIRLS

ISSUE: Consideration of an application by the Court Service Unit for grant funds from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) to establish a crime prevention program for court-involved juvenile Latina girls.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Authorize the submission of a grant application (due April 28, 2011), not to exceed \$75,000; and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute all necessary documents.

BACKGROUND: In recent years, there has been an increase in juvenile girls on probation in Alexandria and 47% of them are Latina. Court Services probation officers in the City, utilizing the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument, a researched-based measurement tool sanctioned by the U.S. Department of Juvenile Justice, found the following risk factors among Alexandria's juvenile court-involved Latina girls:

- 100% have school problems

Risk factors associated with school problems include truancy and limited academic investment;

- 80% have family problems

Family-oriented risk factors include single parent households; minimal parental supervision; differences in cultural norms, values and beliefs between parents and children; abandonment and reunification issues; and, runaway behavior;

- 80% have community problems

Community problems include lack of positive adult role models, gang involvement, inappropriate sexual relationships, sexual promiscuity and prostitution; and

- 60% have been identified with mental health issues, including trauma resulting from histories of sexual abuse.

Although City services have been offered and utilized by the girls and their families, the behavior is often so difficult that the services have not been successful, and the girls get into added trouble in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. By implementing this program, the Court Service Unit is attempting a holistic approach to engage the girls. An informal survey of court-involved Latina girls discovered that the girls had interests in health, nutrition, fitness, dance and art but were not exposed to a structured program that would address these interests.

DISCUSSION: The Criminal Justice grant funding will allow the Court Service Unit to implement a program called Familia, Respeto, Educación y Exito or Program FREE (Family, Respect, Education and Success). This is an intensive intervention program for high risk Latina girls on probation which provides a combination of recreation, mental health, academic and mentor services. Specific services would include trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy and home-based services, one-on-one mentors, and pro-social health, recreational, tutoring and community service activities.

The proposed program will serve eight to ten medium to high risk Latina teenaged girls with weekly four-hour group meetings at the Nannie J. Lee Memorial Recreation Center. Additionally, participants will receive weekly home-based family services, trauma-focused cognitive and behavioral therapy, and two hours per week one-on-one contact with mentors. The curriculum will be designed based on client needs and interests. It will include evidence-based life skills instruction that will address health, nutrition, problem-solving, anger management and development of healthy relationships. Since the program will run during the dinner hour, state regulations require that meals be provided to the girls. As part of the program, the girls will learn healthy cooking and kitchen hygiene as they prepare the meals each week. The girls' family members will be invited to dinner every other month to help bond the relationships. It is anticipated that the recreation component will include Zumba dance and yoga classes which will be provided to promote health and fitness. Participants will also engage in arts and crafts activities. Items created by the girls will be donated to individuals through non-profit organizations that serve low-income families and the elderly.

Along with the Recreation Department, this program includes two other important partners: the Alexandria Community Services Board and the Alexandria City Public Schools. The Alexandria's Community Services Board will provide weekly evidence-based cognitive behavioral therapy and home-based services in Spanish. The mentor component will be developed by the Court Service Unit and based on best practice guidelines of the National Mentoring Partnership. Mentors will be trained by Court Service staff and work one-on-one with girls to promote healthy lifestyles, problem solving abilities, school success and new opportunities. Girls will receive incentives that promote attendance and participation.

Alexandria Public Schools is another community partner that has agreed to provide school social workers to assist with the girls during the school day and work with Court Service Unit staff in the evening program.

The Court Service Unit also will work in collaboration with the research division of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice to develop program outcome measurements, based on grant requirements. It is anticipated that 75% of participants will demonstrate decreases in risk factors and increases in protective factors, 75% will maintain mentoring relationships for at least one year, 75% will report program satisfaction of 80% or above, and 75% will have no new criminal convictions within one year of program completion.

The Court Service Unit submitted a concept paper to the DCJS describing the program design. The concept paper was accepted by DCJS with the provision that the City proceed with a formal application for grant funding.

FISCAL IMPACT: The program budget is up to \$75,000 for the first year and no matching funds are required. The grant is renewable for three consecutive years and gradually reduced by 25%, 50% and 75%, respectively. Funding will be used for two part-time temporary staff and related costs. It is anticipated that the program will successfully operate during a second year of funding with \$56,250 by reducing staff hours. If the program produces successful outcomes in the first two years, the Court Service Unit will solicit other grant or private funds for the third and fourth year of the program.

All staff positions will be terminated when grant funding is no longer available and any staff hired from grant funds will be notified. It is anticipated that the program can be sustained beyond the term of the grant by community partners who are part of the program.

If awarded the grant, the program will begin July, 1, 2011.

STAFF:

Lillian Brooks, Director, Court Service Unit
Linda Odell, CSU Director of Alternative Programs
Kendel Taylor, Assistant Director, OMB