



Girl Connection

For those who serve adolescent females

December 2008

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Iowa Gender-Specific Services Task Force

Transitions

In recent months, I have been in several meetings where the issue of “transitions” has come up with regard to kids involved in the juvenile justice and human service systems. Invariably, these discussions focus on the big picture: Where are they going next? Is their academic credit following them? How do we get them from Point A to Point B? Are they ready to move on? Do we have someplace to move them on to and the money to pay for it?

Transition discussions have been prevalent enough that the Iowa Gender-Specific Services Task Force has decided that it is an apt theme for our annual Whispers & Screams conference (see pg. 2). But what has struck me as I have been thinking about potential workshops for the conference, is that we tend to neglect the practical, day-to-day transition issues that can have a significant impact right along side the big picture items.

I worked in a residential (shelter care) setting for several years immediately after college. Because shelter was a short-term setting, I saw many kids coming and going. One of the seemingly insignificant things that happened during these particular transitions was that kids would often be sent on to their next placement with their personal belongings in garbage bags. The kids rarely had luggage of their own, and the shelter budget was not able to absorb the cost of luggage for every kid that didn't have it. Garbage bags were the answer, though not a real solution. It was apparent that others came to the same conclusion. Kids arrived at our shelter with the unofficial “system kid luggage” all the time. The kids themselves even appeared to be used to it or perhaps they had simply resigned themselves to their circumstances, but it always gnawed at me. What message, however subtly, was being sent to these kids? How many times had they been called or treated as trash by people in their lives? Here we were confirming it without saying a word.

Solutions:

- 1) Luggage and/or duffle bags should be specified on the wish list of every agency/program.
- 2) Solicit donations from companies that specialize in making luggage. They often have “factory seconds” or irregular luggage. Tax write-offs are appealing.
- 3) Partner with local athletic groups to offer money off admission for people who bring in their old luggage. It's good PR for them.
- 4) Partner with non-college, non-professional event organizers where the athletes themselves can get money discounted from their entry fee. Athletes always have extra duffle bags laying around! The event planners may also be willing to donate extras that were purchased for the event itself. A cancelled or low turn out triathlon, for example, can result in a lot of extra duffle bags with no one to claim them!
- 5) Contact companies (local, state or nationwide) that do screenprinting or embroidery of bags and ask them if they would be willing to donate misprinted bags.
- 6) Ask your local athletic department (university, college or even large high school) what they do with their outdated athletic bags. Perhaps they would donate or would be willing to do a service project to collect luggage donations on behalf of your agency.
- 7) Contact your local thrift store. Not everything that is donated to them gets put out for sale and they may be willing to pass on luggage donations to your organization.
- 8) As a last resort, save boxes from other purchases for the purpose of “moving day” for kids.

We are being more and more thoughtful about our transition planning for system kids. Making sure they don't get the impression they are being “set on the curb” should be part of it.

SAVE THE DATE

The Iowa Gender-Specific Services Task Force presents its annual conference for professionals who work with young women involved in or at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Whispers & Screams are hard to hear: Creating an audience for girls' voices

Chapter 13: Transitions

May 4-5, 2009

Gateway Hotel and Conference Center
Ames, Iowa

December 2008 ~ Transitions

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For back issues of *The Girl Connection*, more information about the Gender-Specific Services Task Force,
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