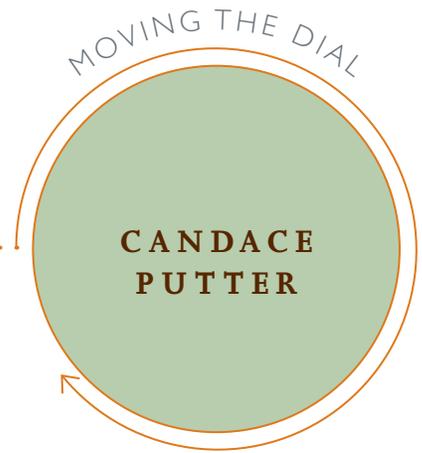


The Pennsylvania Academic and Career/Technical
Training Alliance
September 2013



In July of 2008, Candace Putter was selected as a Stoneleigh Fellow to launch and provide leadership to the Pennsylvania Academic and Career/Technical Training (PACTT) Alliance with the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers (Chiefs). This Alliance proposed to use the combined leverage and skills of Pennsylvania's two largest counties, Philadelphia and Allegheny, to improve the outcomes for delinquent youth sent to out-of-home placement.

Prior to her fellowship, Candace led the Philadelphia Reintegration Initiative to reform the juvenile justice system's aftercare services. Through this work, she saw that education and job training in Pennsylvania juvenile detention facilities were not aligned with either public school curricula or with areas of job growth within the community. Additionally, delinquent youth were not receiving credit at their local public schools for the academic work completed during out-of-home placement and had trouble finding employment with the skills learned there. As a result, these youth often ended up dropping out of school and/or reoffending with little chance of successful life outcomes.



RESEARCH

A 2008 study showed that more than 25 percent of youth who had been in placement were rearrested within six months and about 33 percent were back in placement within a year.¹ Furthermore, it revealed that rearrests of youth following discharge from placement usually occurred quickly – within the first 90 days. The most common form of reoffending involved selling drugs, and experts attributed many of these offenses to the economic motives of youth who see few other practical options.²

The education data on these youth was even more disturbing. A 2006 report on drop-out rates in Philadelphia revealed that 90 percent of juveniles returning to the community from delinquent placement did not graduate from a Philadelphia school.³ Though some of these youth graduated in placement or received a GED, the vast majority simply dropped out. According to one economic analysis, a young person who drops out of high school and becomes involved with criminal activity costs the public an additional \$1.7 to \$2.3 million over a lifetime.⁴ Thus, from both a public safety and financial perspective, the transition of juvenile offenders into educated and work-ready youth needs to be a top priority.



DISCOVERY

Candace identified several structural factors that hampered delinquent youth in Pennsylvania from returning to school and/or securing life-sustaining employment following out-of-home placement:

- A lack of uniform graduation requirements by the state means that standards are interpreted indepen-

dently by each of 501 local school districts in Pennsylvania. This creates a situation in which the curricula at residential facilities do not consistently and effectively align with local school district curricula.

- There is no centralized quality control of the education or job training offered in residential facilities.
- Communication between local school districts and the residential facilities was either infrequent or too often non-existent.
- Career/technical training at residential facilities was generally unplanned or sporadic at best.

Understanding the critical link between academic and career readiness with successful outcomes for youth, Candace convened the Pennsylvania Academic and Career/Technical Training alliance. PACTT's goal was to advance a comprehensive, collaborative, cross-systems and multi-county effort between juvenile justice, education and youth career/technical training systems to improve education and job readiness policies and practices for delinquent youth in out-of-home care.

At initiation, PACTT had three goals:

- Improve the academic and career/technical training provided to youth in delinquent out-of-home placements
- Ensure that the gains youth made in placement translated to credits and industry-recognized credentials in the community.
- Support the development of programs in public schools and communities that would seamlessly continue academic gains and career/technical training achieved during placement.

PACTT planned to focus on Allegheny and Philadelphia counties during the first two years because youth from these counties represented 35–40 percent of the state's private residential placements. It was felt that changing the practices within these influential counties could create a tipping point for statewide reform. Candace also chose these two counties because they had already participated in reform efforts and demonstrated willingness to collaborate with her and one another on further reform.

FINDINGS

Concern: Can PACTT improve the educational standards in juvenile justice facilities and provide adequate career training education?

By the end of Candace's fellowship, PACTT had improved the academic and career/technical training in juvenile justice facilities by:

- › The Chiefs of Probation authorizing and implementing a PACTT Affiliation process formalizing expectations and a certification process.
- › Officially affiliating 11 major facilities with another 15 working towards affiliation
- › Ensuring that academic curricula in facilities were aligned with the PDE Standards and strengthening the relationship between the PDE and the residential facility schools.
- › Confirming that schools offered opportunities for youth to retrieve or complete credits, accelerate their work when appropriate, and receive quality remediation in addition to credit-bearing work. For example, in 2011, St. Gabriel's Hall reported that their graduation rate doubled since the inception of PACTT-related programs, with 37 percent of their youth 17 years or older graduating with a diploma or GED and an industry-recognized certification.
- › Improving communication between home schools and placement schools so that school transcripts were sent to the facilities in a timely manner. The rate of academic records never received dropped from 40 percent in 2009 to 11 percent by the end of 2010.
- › Ensuring that all youth in participating facilities had the opportunity to learn basic employability skills, leave placement with an employment portfolio and, when appropriate, leave with entry-level certifications and training in a career track.
- › Demonstrating a successful engagement track record.
 - During the last quarter of 2009, 72 youth were engaged in the culinary arts track and 48 in carpentry. A year later, 207 were in culinary arts programs, and 110 in carpentry.
 - By the end of 2010 over one fourth of discharged students left with a ServSafe, OSHA-10 or Microsoft Certification.
 - During the summer of 2010, about half of all students discharged had authentic, paid work experience.

Concern: Was PACTT able to replicate reforms in facilities outside of the initial counties?

- › The PA Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers afforded Candace a partner that could create an affiliation process for providers of services to youth placed out of home. This resulted in an expansion of the program from nine to 19 facilities by the end of the fellowship. These facilities served about 5,000 youth and meant that in any given year, over three-quarters of the youth in out-of-home placement were at facilities meeting PACTT guidelines.
- › A grant from the PEW Charitable Trusts supported expansion to Chester, Montgomery and Bucks Counties. At the conclusion of the fellowship PACTT was also working closely with Lehigh County Probation.
- › PACCT expanded to include community-based and in-home delinquent services.
- › PACCT became a key component of the state’s Juvenile Justice Systems Enhancement initiative, suggesting that the work would continue to be replicated beyond the fellowship.
- › At the end of the fellowship, there was support for PACTT to expand its work to include providers which serve dependent youth.
- › Unfortunately, privacy issues prevented PACCT from collecting and sharing longitudinal data about the youth on an individual level. We believe this hampered the ability to demonstrate impact and raise the funds needed for expansion and sustainability.

Concern: Can PACCT facilitate the development of programs in public schools and communities that seamlessly continue academic gains and career/technical training achieved during placement?

- › In 2010, PACTT generated over \$500,000 in grant funding for career and technical training and work. Close to 200 subsidized summer-work slots were awarded by the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board for youth in residential facilities.
- › PACCT was able to provide subsidized paid work in the community, through several grants from the Workforce Investment Boards and the Department of Labor and Industry; however, political shifts, the economic downturn and an inadequate infrastructure challenged PACCT’s ability to systematically connect discharged youth to community-based work and thus continue their career/training achievements.



LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FIELD

›› The Importance of a strong partner organization

Candace had a very strong partner organization that could act as a “champion” for PACTT. Her partner —the Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers (Chiefs) — and the advisory board Candace convened were key government officials and staff members whose support and buy-in was essential to the success of the PACTT Alliance.

›› Data sharing agreements need to be established at the front end of multi-system work

It is critical to build data-collection and data-sharing processes from the outset of a project. Neither a rigorous evaluation plan nor a data collection mechanism was built in from the beginning and thus, it became impossible to assess the impact of this work on changing the educational and career trajectories of the youth. As the fellowship progressed, Candace developed a data system capable of collecting aggregate-level data from facilities. However, confidentiality concerns hindered the sharing of individual-level data and this remained unresolved by the end of the fellowship.

›› There is need for significant organizational infrastructure to connect youth to jobs in home communities

While the availability of employment skills and entry-level certification programs were greatly expanded, finding youth jobs out of placement remained challenging. Even for youth who were able to secure jobs while in placement, because of geographic dispersion and the police records that attached to youth, PACTT was unable to connect most youth to employment once they left the residential facilities.

›› Employment opportunities need to be demand driven

Candace discovered the need to develop relationships with specific employers in the fields for which the youth were being trained, as well as the need to nurture those relationships over a period of time. In addition, offering training that specifically met the needs of individual employers provided them an incentive to work with PACTT.



OUTCOMES: MOVING THE DIAL

After Candace’s fellowship ended, PACTT’s work continued to focus on training and providing technical assistance to facility teachers and administrators. This included participating in school reform discussions conducted by the state, offering training to residential facilities on the state PDE Standards Aligned System. Other individualized, on-site training in literacy and learning strategies for teachers and guidance on developing career and technical education programs using industry-aligned standards were also provided.

PACTT developed more detailed standards for the education and career training provided to youth in residential and day-treatment educational programs as well as a soft skills manual.

Requirements for affiliation include:

- A rigorous and relevant academic program aligned with state standards and integrated with career preparation.
- Opportunities for remediation, credit retrieval and acceleration in support of, not instead of, the state-aligned curricula.
- Career/technical training that prepares young people for 21st century job tracks paying family sustaining wages.
- The opportunity to earn basic certifications such as the OSHA-10, ServSafe and Microsoft Certification.
- Training for all students on employability and soft skills, based on the PACTT Employability and Soft Skills Manual.
- Opportunities for students to practice their new skills in authentic job experiences while in placement.

PACTT approved and implemented a cross-system database to collect comprehensive data on the affiliated programs and at the individual level. The cross-system database will accommodate the growth of PACTT and additional variables, and incorporate additional providers, probation departments, and community programs as they affiliate and become involved with PACTT. With time, and given the flexible design, the cross-system database will enable PACTT to begin to identify the impact of an assortment of interventions designed to help youth connect to work and school upon returning to the community.

PACTT’s success has compelled her partners to sustain the work post-fellowship.

Stoneleigh Foundation

The Stoneleigh Fellowship is designed to support researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who have demonstrated leadership in child welfare, juvenile justice, or youth violence prevention. We are particularly interested in individuals whose fellowship proposal work involves work that crosses systems and enhances the coordination of service delivery. For more information, please visit our website at www.stoneleighfoundation.org.

Candace Putter, MSS, LCSW

Candace Putter has spent her career working to improve the lives of troubled teens. She currently serves as the executive director of the PACTT Alliance. The initiative has transformed the way delinquent youth are transitioned back into the community after a juvenile delinquency placement, with a particular focus on improving placement and aftercare services for youth at the six residential placement sites in Pennsylvania with the largest population of Philadelphia youth. Through this initiative, Putter has developed strong relationships with the probation departments in Philadelphia and Allegheny Counties, the Philadelphia School District, the Philadelphia Youth Network and other youth-serving organizations.



WHERE IS THE DIAL NOW?

In 2012, the PACTT Alliance became an independent agency and has grown to over 30 affiliates. Candace continues as its Director. She also remains an active leader in the field and has been invited to help organize and contribute to national conversations for the U.S. Department of Education, which has committed to addressing the educational needs of incarcerated individuals, both juvenile and adult, in order to ensure that they have a second chance to be productive members of our society. The PACTT model has been reviewed and endorsed by numerous states, foundations, the U.S. Department of Justice and the Commonwealth as thought leaders struggle with reforms in the juvenile justice system.

¹ Griffin, Patrick, and Mary Hunninen. (2008). Preparing Youth for Productive Futures. Pennsylvania Progress: A Juvenile Justice Research, Policy, and Practice Series. National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ).

² Ibid.

³ Neild, Ruth Curran and Robert Belfanz. Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia’s Dropout Crisis 2000-2005. Philadelphia Youth Network, The Johns Hopkins University, and University of Pennsylvania. 2006.

⁴ Cohen, Mark A. “The Monetary Value of Saving a High-Risk Youth,” Journal of Quantitative Criminology, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1998.