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**FACILITY REPORT**  
**VICTOR CULLEN CENTER**  
**JANUARY – MARCH, 2008**

**Facility:** Victor Cullen Center  
6000 Cullen Drive  
Sabillasville, MD 21780  
Superintendent: Helen Mercy

**Date(s) of Visit:** March 7 and 21, 2008

**Reported by:** Tim Snyder, Jeff Merson & Moira Lee  
Juvenile Justice Monitors

**Issues Monitored:** Population  
Staff  
Safety/Security  
Education  
Facility Maintenance  
Grievance/Incidents  
Program  
Medical/Health

**Persons Interviewed:** Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent  
Various staff and youth

**Other Agency Involvement:** N/A

**Date of Report:** April, 2008

## INTRODUCTION

The Victor Cullen Center ("VCC") is a State owned and operated secure treatment facility for adjudicated males. It is located in Frederick County, Maryland just north of Sabillasville. The facility is designated to accommodate a total of 48 youth in four cottages.

Currently, VCC has 28 youth enrolled and plans to continue enrolling students until reaching capacity, which is anticipated to occur in July, 2008. Current staffing is insufficient to accommodate 48 youth. Construction and renovation are ongoing.

## KEY FINDINGS

VCC has encountered major start-up challenges that have affected its ability to provide a safe and secure environment for residents and staff and an effective rehabilitative program for youth. At this point, and with the help of Youth Center staff, Victor Cullen is making some progress toward becoming a more functional program, and in more fully implementing its physical and programmatic elements as well as its treatment model. Victor Cullen could best be described as in transition mode. Three start-up issues are most prominent:

- Staffing – many positions remain vacant and the hiring process has been challenging;
- Treatment Model – the treatment model is designed but not yet adequately implemented;
- Vocational Education – limited vocational education opportunities are available.

### 1. Population

As of March 15, eighteen of the 28 youth enrolled came from 10 counties, and 10 of the youth were from Baltimore City. The youth live in two cottages with the 3rd cottage scheduled to open by July and the 4<sup>th</sup> in September.

VCC is designed to enroll youth with the following profiles:

- Poor response to previous interventions and treatment;
- Substance-related issues;
- Poor impulse control/immediate need for gratification;
- History of aggressive behavior;
- Demonstrated poor educational performance/ truancy/ special education;
- Family and relational conflicts; or
- Typical DSM IV diagnosis including: Conduct Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder and/or Learning Disabilities.

VCC's policy is to exclude from admission youth with the following profiles:

- Youth whose mental health issues or intellectual functioning level are the primary focus of treatment; or
- Youth adjudicated of the following crimes of violence:

Murder, Rape, Arson (first degree), Kidnapping, Sexual Offense (first or second degree, Use of a Handgun in the commission of a crime of violence (other violent crimes are assessed on a case by case basis).

While addictions are not supposed to be a primary treatment need of youth admitted into VCC, many youth accepted to VCC are identified as needing substance abuse treatment.

## 2. Staffing

When fully staffed, VCC will have 101 employees. The following positions remain vacant (positions allocated to Prettyman Cottage, not yet open, are not included in this list:

1. Part-time Psychologist
2. Two Advanced Social Workers (a candidate has been selected for one of these positions)
3. Group Life Manager (lead staff on cottage)
4. Second Registered Nurse (a candidate has been selected)
5. Eleven Resident Advisors (candidates have been selected for most of these positions)

Prettyman Cottage, scheduled to open in July, has the following vacancies:

1. Group Life Manager
2. Advanced Social Worker
3. Lead Resident Advisor
4. Seven Resident Advisors (candidates have been selected for most of these positions)

These vacancies highlight two of VCC's most significant challenges:

- Locating qualified candidates for positions, and
- Continued delays in completing the hiring process.

Despite offering higher salaries than at other DJS facilities and providing PIN's (permanent positions with full benefits), the Department has struggled to find qualified candidates to fill positions at VCC. For example, staff reported that when one nursing position was posted, no applications were received. The position requirements were reduced and the title was changed three times before anyone applied for the position.

There has been considerable staff turnover at Victor Cullen. The Administration recognizes the need for ongoing training of both new and more senior staff members in behavior management in implementing the treatment model. Regular teambuilding and training meetings are being held. DJS Youth Center trainers are conducting Intensive training in Positive Peer Culture (PPC) in conjunction with the recently hired Training Coordinator at VCC.

**a. Hiring Delays**

Delays in completing the hiring process continue to hamper VCC's ability to become fully operational. While waiting for final approval, some selected candidates have found other jobs, further delaying filling vacant positions because the posting/interviewing/clearance cycle must begin again. As reported by administrative staff, three major factors contribute to this delay:

1. Fingerprinting delays - fingerprints are often returned as "unreadable." Sometimes candidates have had their fingerprints done 3-4 times.
2. Pre-screening scheduling delays - The new coordinated pre-screening schedule reduces the number of times candidates must travel to complete different requirements of the hiring process, but difficulties coordinating schedules of DJS staff have led to delays of several weeks.
3. Recruiting - the main form of recruiting is through local newspapers and the DJS web-site.

In one case a candidate was interviewed and the administration decided to hire the candidate. Paperwork was submitted to DJS headquarters the day following the interview (December 17, 2007). The candidate was not sent to pre-screening until February 20, 2008 and as of mid-March had not received clearance to begin work. Staff reported that three month delays between interviewing and clearance are typical.

Some possible solutions recommended by VCC staff include:

- i. Using the electronic fingerprinting apparatus currently owned by DJS;
- ii. Scheduling two standard pre-screening dates each month for all staff system-wide;
- iii. Begin recruiting online (e.g., monster.com, idealist.org) and local colleges and job fairs. Most recruiting is through local newspapers and the DJS website.
- iv. Allow new hires to begin working with supervision prior to completion of their pre-screening, without waivers, on the contingency that if they do not pass their pre-screening they will immediately be released.

**b. Coverage**

Direct care coverage of the groups has been adequate in terms of numbers of staff and the administration continues to recruit and hire new employees in an effort to be fully staffed by July, 2008. DJS has stated that a minimum of a 1 to 6 staff/youth ratio will be maintained. A Masters level therapist will be provided for each group. Currently, a Clinical Director and a Social Worker are on board and are sharing the responsibility of providing services to all of the youth. The Clinical Director is also acting in the capacity of Admissions Director. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed

with Catocin Summit to provide an Addiction Counselor to VCC.

### **Applicable Standards**

**Md. Standards for Juvenile Detention Facilities 4.3.2.1.** *The Department shall be responsible for acquiring, either directly or by agreement or contract with a public mental health agency, the necessary mental health care and services for youth...The mental health professional at each facility shall provide short term focused psychological services for those individuals who have been identified as needing such services. As appropriate, family involvement with such services shall be highly encouraged...Crisis intervention services shall be provided to any youth who shows signs of acute behavioral and emotional distress as identified by facility staff... Mental health professionals shall provide consultation services to other facility health care professionals and facility staff as required, including consultation and involvement in physical restraint and de-escalation procedures.*

### **3. Safety/Security**

#### **a. Youth Accountability**

Staff interviewed this quarter said that the high percentage of inexperienced staff and lack of direction in implementing the program have given the program a “loose” operating style with too little structure for youth. Some staff members have been fearful of youth and thus unable to maintain structure. Staff have not held youth effectively accountable for their actions, and have sometimes “bought off” youth with promises of being sent home.

#### **b. Construction**

Overall the physical plant appears to be reasonably safe and secure, although the ongoing construction necessitates constant vigilance to maintain both safety and security. Shift Commanders do make random checks of the construction areas to help ensure that safety and security is maintained. At one point there were piles of construction debris, including metal and broken wood located directly in front of the building used as the school. That area has since been fenced off from youth.

#### **c. Control Room**

There is no announce box at the pedestrian gate. If there is a question as to the person requesting entrance, a staff member must go to the gate to verify that the request for entrance to the facility is legitimate. An intercom system has been installed as part of the upgraded fence security system. The new phone system is now in place and each cottage has phone access.

#### **d. Fencing**

Fencing construction is incomplete. Perimeter lighting is lacking, and will require the installation of poles around the entire facility because the fence will not carry the added weight. The security system including cameras and sensors will not be in service until the Verizon contract is completed. As of the writing of this report, no date has been

given for completion of this contract.

**e. Memorandum of Understanding with Maryland State Police and Frederick County Sherriff's Office**

The Maryland State Police, Frederick Barracks is primarily responsible for providing law enforcement services to Victor Cullen. The Frederick County Sheriff's Office will provide ancillary services as requested by MSP.

A siren has been installed at the facility and a community call down list developed in case of an AWOL or other emergency. The on site administrator will call the Advisory Board members about emergencies.

**f. Head Count & Night Security**

As a secure treatment facility, Victor Cullen conducts a head count via the radio every 30 minutes, sometimes randomly. The dorm cottages are locked at night, and the control room is secured. Bed checks are reportedly made every ten minutes at night.

**g. Fire Safety**

Victor Cullen has received approval from the Fire Marshall for all of the buildings that are being used including the second dorm. When renovation of the other two dorms is completed, Administration will seek approval for their occupation.

**Applicable Standards**

**Md. Standards for Juvenile Detention Facilities 5.1.2.2.** *Safety and security refers to the provision of staff and resident safety and to the prevention of escape from the facility. Security shall also include measures to prevent persons from entering the facility or ground illegally. Means to ensure security shall consist of physical features of the building and grounds, policy and procedures and staffing arrangements.*

**4. Incidents**

Incidents have not been entered into the incident database in a timely manner. On March 20, no incidents had been entered into the database since February 21, 2008. Administrators were reportedly too busy training staff and attempting to maintain safety and security to enter incidents in a timely manner. One staff member has been trained to enter incidents into the database and reportedly the staff member's name was submitted to DJS Headquarters for approval approximately 1 month ago, but Headquarters has still not approved the employee to enter information into the database.

A review of all Incident Reports (total of 8) submitted between March 2 and 9, 2008 showed numerous problems:

- Only 1 of 4 restraint incident reports had the required nurse's report of examination (body sheet) attached.
- Only 1 of the 8 incidents indicated the required notification of the youth's

- probation officer.
- Four of the 8 incidents involved restraints - the required debriefing form was not completed for any of the 4 incidents.

**All Reported Incidents at VCC January 1 – March 31, 2008**

The table below captures incident information by including the reporting category and the number of restraints, and/or injuries that resulted from the initial event. Gang involvement may mean that the incident was gang related, or that the youth or youths are gang members.

<b>Type of Incident and Associated Involvement</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Restraint</b>	<b>Injury</b>	<b>Gang Involvement</b>
Alleged Inappropriate Conduct or Comments by Staff	1		1	1
Alleged Inappropriate Conduct or Comments by Youth	25	15		6
Alleged Sexual Contact/Abuse (D, custody/supervision)	1			1
Alleged Youth on Staff Physical Assault	2			2
Physical Assault Youth on Youth	9	8	2	4
Contraband	4			
Suicide Ideation, Gesture, Attempt, or Behavior	1		1	
Destruction of Property	3			1
Youth Requiring On-Grounds Medical Care (Sports or Non-Incident Related Injury)	1		1	
Physical Plant Problem	1			
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>15</b>

At times staff members who have not been trained in restraint techniques have been involved in restraining youth. These staff may have received provisional certification, which means that the background check has been completed, but have not completed

either Crisis Prevention Management (CPM) or Entry Level Training (ELT). On at least four occasions uncertified staff members have been involved in restraints. This practice puts both youth and staff at risk.

## **5. Education**

The education program at Victor Cullen is operated by the Maryland State Department of Education. The program includes 6 hours of instruction per day. Some of the youth are working in secondary education classes and others are working toward taking the GED. A new modular school building will be placed on campus this spring. Observation of school indicated that there is good interaction between the teachers and the youth. A second special education teacher has been hired. Two additional traditional teachers are needed - a science teacher, and a math teacher. In addition, a computer instructor, a guidance counselor, a special education instructor and a librarian are needed. Several youth have been taken off grounds to take the SAT.

A random review of two Individual Education Plans (IEP) for students with special needs indicated that regular meetings were being held and students with special needs had current IEP's.

It was reported that education staff no longer have access to the Internet, which limits their ability to communicate with family members and other members of the education community during work hours. Education staff also does not have access to the ASSIST database, which includes youth educational records.

Staff reported that there are currently 12-13 youth per class, but there should only be 6-7. The staff stated that the reason for the overcrowding is lack of space and insufficient number of teachers.

### **a. Job Skills/Career Development**

Victor Cullen does not have a vocational program as of yet, and staff report it may take up to a year for the needed space to be renovated and vocational training to be implemented.

There will be four new educational opportunities for youth at VCC this spring:

- i. College courses - on-line courses for credit are available through Hagerstown Community College;
- ii. College prep courses - the Administration is working with Hagerstown Community College to offer courses to youth who do not pass the college entrance exam and are therefore ineligible to take on-line college courses. These courses would be offered at VCC, but not for credit.
- iii. Pre-apprenticeship Program in Construction- youth who are at least 18 years old and have their high school diploma or GED can participate in this program. Youth who complete the program will be transferred to a community apprenticeship once they leave VCC.

- iv. Building Maintenance Program - youth who are ineligible for the pre-apprenticeship program will be able to participate in this program, which involves working, for pay, at VCC.

### **Applicable Standards**

**Md. Standards for Juvenile Detention Facilities 4.1.** *The Department shall ensure that educational services provided within detention facilities are consistent with State and Federal requirements and meet the individual needs of the youth. Educational services shall be provided on an individual or small group basis...A comprehensive educational program that addresses individual learning styles and special education needs shall be provided to every youth admitted to a detention facility.*

**COMAR 14.31.06.12 A (1) (c).** *(Licensees shall) ensure that each child above the mandatory school age who has not received a secondary school diploma or certificate of completion under COMAR 13A.03.02.02 participates in...(d)developmentally appropriate vocational skills training.*

## **6. Programming**

### **a. Treatment Model**

The treatment model, which has yet to be fully implemented, is based on Positive Peer Culture/EQUIP, a program in which youth develop traits of cooperation and caring within the context of a group structure. Some research supports PPC in terms of improving youth behavior and self-perception, but research findings are mixed on whether it reduces recidivism.

PPC has been the mainstay of the programming at all four Youth Centers for the past five years. EQUIP is the skills training portion of PPC, and although implemented at the Youth Centers, it has not yet been implemented at VCC. As of this writing, all staff were scheduled to have completed PPC training, and administrators hope to begin training staff on the EQUIP program in May.

Aggression Replacement Therapy (ART) was to be a second component of the Victor Cullen program, and evidence does support its use with youth at high risk of reoffending. To date, the ART curriculum has not been implemented.

Ten Youth Center staff (5 on every 2nd shift throughout the week) are assisting at Victor Cullen, providing both coverage and PPC modeling. Youth Center staff are also providing training on the PPC model. Regular teambuilding and training meetings are being held, and a Training Coordinator has been hired.

One of the important ways in which Victor Cullen has sought to lay the foundation for developing an effective group process is having face to face interviews with prospective youth as part of the admission process. This is very important because much more information about a youth can be gained by a skilled interviewer than review of records alone. The specific make up of a group and the personality dynamics within that group are key factors affecting treatment. Administrators at Victor Cullen have expressed concern that this important part of the process might be discontinued. As

Victor Cullen Center is now under the direction of Region III, the process of holding face to face interviews has been discontinued, and youth are being screened on the basis of paper review alone.

The PPC model works with groups of 9 participants, but the PPC groups at Victor Cullen include 12 residents. Larger groups are necessitated by staff shortages and the design of the dorms, each of which contains 12 beds. Although the PPC model allows expansion of groups to 12 in limited circumstances, none of those circumstances exist at Victor Cullen (e.g., expanding to 12 for a brief period, strict youth selection criteria, very experienced staff). Having 12 youth in a group has contributed to the problems at Victor Cullen, and there is a possibility that program quality will continue to be compromised by the large groups. DJS Administrators should make every effort to reduce the PPC groups to 9 youth each.

**b. Focus Areas**

Within the treatment framework, youth are expected to complete three Focus Areas. Progress and the privileges and responsibilities associated with progress are evaluated by the youth's ability to effectively and honestly engage in the treatment process. Youth are held accountable for positive participation in the program and for completing various treatment assignments and expectations contained within the three Focus Areas. These Focus areas are: Accountability, Skill Development, and Community Safety.

**c. Additional Activities**

VCC administrative staff are developing and implementing the following activities to aid in bringing in bringing the facility fully on-line:

1. A new handbook is being created;
2. A Student Council has been established which meets every week;
3. There is a new weight room (to open soon);
4. A staff member had the piano repaired out of her own funds and now gives piano lessons;
5. A partnership with the Boys and Girls Club has been established. Youth are mentors to children in the after school program;
6. A partnership with the Hagerstown Housing Authority has been developed. On March 1, six youth participated in painting a community building and installing a walkway railing;
7. A mural contest is underway. The winner's mural design will be painted on a wall in one of the community rooms;
8. A dog training and grooming program, operated by a former police dog trainer and former teacher, has been proposed.

9. A greenhouse program, to be led by a facility nurse and the Blue Ridge Garden Club, has been proposed.

**d. Family Involvement**

Staff reports that typically fifty percent of the families regularly visit on family visitation days. Some youth's families are too far away to make the trip. Victor Cullen has arranged for some youth to visit their family members at home.

At VCC's opening, staff demonstrated a video conferencing system that would allow youth to be in touch with families more frequently. It has been on only one occasion.

**7. Health/Medical**

VCC has a Memorandum of Understanding with two hospitals. For emergency needs youth will be taken to Waynesboro Hospital in Pennsylvania. For non-emergency hospital needs youth will be taken to Washington County Hospital in Hagerstown Maryland. VCC has an agreement with Dentrust Mobile to provide dental services on an as-needed basis and visit the campus at least one time each month. On grounds, VCC has a fully furnished clinic, a full time RN, and a Nurse Practitioner. A physician visits the campus one time a week and is available on an as-needed basis.

Currently, VCC has a Clinical Director and one therapist. VCC has an agreement with a psychiatrist who comes to the campus one day each week and is currently seeing 4 to 6 youth per visit. Additionally, a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor is on site 3-4 times per week. The Clinical Director just received a telephone for his office 1 month ago and does not have a computer.

A review of two random mental health files revealed only 1 treatment plan. This treatment plan was only signed by the youth. The case manager, therapist, and parent did not sign the treatment plan. Five additional files, provided by the Clinical Director appeared very comprehensive and focused on the needs of the individual youth. However, the signature pages on each youth were blank. Lack of sufficient staff was given as the major reason that treatment plans are not being signed. The limited clinical staff spends their time meeting with youth and developing the clinical program.

**9. Advocacy/Investigations/Monitoring**

Administrators reported that Miyshi Muhammed, the child advocate, visits the facility two times per week and no reported problems with the process.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Staffing - The process of advertising, interviewing, hiring, screening, and training to fill open positions should be completed expeditiously.
2. Safety and Security

- a. Until the program is stabilized, DJS should maintain a contingent of staff at Victor Cullen who are experienced in all aspects of providing safety, security, and programming.
  - b. Construction areas should be secured and frequent checks made to ensure that there is no breach of safety and security.
  - c. The facility perimeter lighting should be completed.
  - d. Fire drills must be held as required.
  - e. A call box should be installed at the front gate.
3. Education - Vocational instruction should be provided as per the original plan for Victor Cullen.
  4. Programming
    - a. Group size should be limited to no more than 10 youth.
    - b. A young fathers program should be developed.
  5. Facility Maintenance - The modular school building should be acquired and installed on grounds as soon as possible.
  6. Standards - DJS should develop Commitment Care Standards.