

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities
and Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security

July 12, 2007
Hearing on
*"Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act:
Overview and Perspectives"*

Testimony Submitted by:
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Good morning. My name is Shannon Jones, I'm eighteen years old. I'm pleased to have the opportunity today to share my story with you. On January 7, 2007, my life changed for the better because that was the day that I was committed to the Community Intensive Supervision Program (CISP) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Although I will speak from my own experience, I am also here to represent the experiences of the other youth whose lives have been positively impacted through their participation in CISP.

I want to start by describing the program that has changed my life. CISP was started in 1990 and is run by the Juvenile Section of the Family Division of the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County. It serves as both an alternative to institutionalization and an aftercare program for those youth who have been subject to institutional placements. CISP offers programming, including drug screening, in five neighborhood centers during the afternoon and evening, seven days a week. CISP also electronically monitors the youth at night. CISP's staff are traditional probation

department personnel and paraprofessional “Community Monitors” who live in the same neighborhoods where we live.

The CISP Program is designed to reach male juvenile offenders (ages 10-18) from the targeted neighborhoods who are on probation, continue to recidivate and would be institutionalized but for the existence of this alternative. In other words, young men like me. Property offenders make up for the majority of youth placed into the CISP Program but other youth are also eligible. Since the CISP Program is neighborhood based, a youth must live in one of the designated neighborhoods to be placed in CISP. One of the most important parts of the CISP program is that we remain in our own communities, continue to attend our own schools, and are introduced to positive community resources. All the kids who participate in CISP are required to complete community service, which is important because it makes us feel like a positive part of the community.

Today I want to talk about how CISP changed my life. I was committed to CISP in January and I spent six months participating in the program. When I entered CISP, I had a D-average in school and I was at risk of ending up in a juvenile correctional facility. Although I thought about college, it didn’t always seem within reach. Being a part of CISP helped me to bring up my grades high enough that I graduated with honors and I plan to attend the community college of Allegheny county next spring. In the meantime, I’m working with children at a job I got through my volunteer work with CISP.

When I was in CISP, I continued to go to my school everyday. I had to submit regular progress reports from my teachers to CISP, and knowing that my counselors at CISP were going to see my grades pushed me to work harder and do better in class. I

would be picked up right after school everyday and taken to a CISP site. There I had the opportunity to participate in a range of programs, like Maleness to Manhood, Victim Awareness, Thinking Errors, Self-Assessment, and the Drug and Alcohol program. One of the programs that had the most impact on me was the Drug and Alcohol program. I remember that they took us to meet with recovered addicts, and hearing their stories made me think about how my drug use affected not only me and my future but also the people around me. I'm clean now, I no longer use illegal substances, and I plan to stay that way because I've seen what can happen to addicts and I know that I've got a better future ahead of me.

On the last Thursday of every month, CISP also invited our family and friends in to meet with our counselors. This was important because CISP treated the people in our life like they were a part of our rehabilitation, and this means that I have support outside of the program as well as in the program.

CISP not only gave me the opportunity to improve myself, it also made me take a more active role in my community. We spent every weekend doing community service by cleaning up our neighborhoods and local churches. In the six months that I was a part of CISP, I contributed 100 hours of community service. Even today when I walk past the areas that I helped clean, I feel a responsibility to keep those areas clean. My neighborhood feels like a community now, not just the place where I live. I think that this was possible because CISP keeps young people in their neighborhoods instead of sending them somewhere else. Every time I leave my home, I can be reminded of the work I did to improve my community.

CISP also provides jobs for young people through the Workbridge program. Those youth who have restitution to pay can use the money that they earn from these jobs to pay that restitution. I started at the parental stress center as a volunteer, but this became a real job after I graduated from high school. Part of what I like about my job is that I am serving as a mentor to other young people. I like knowing that I'm helping young people just the way the CISP staff helped me.

One of the things that I am always going to remember about CISP is the constant support I got from the staff. Every time I came to the CISP center, I could count on the staff encouraging me to better myself. They didn't put me down or make me feel bad about myself, instead they always pushed me to be a better person and I wanted to be a better person to make them proud. I knew that as long as I was trying to improve, they would support me.

I want to take this time today to encourage you to support other programs like CISP. I'm not the only young person CISP has helped, and I think that similar programs will help other youth as well. I've come a long way in six months and I have a bright future ahead of me. Maybe I would have gotten here without CISP, but I also know that being a part of CISP helped me become a positive force in my community. You have the ability to help other young people like me become more productive members of our communities, and I hope that you take this opportunity to help start and fund other programs like CISP.

I want to thank you for taking the time to listen to me today.