

History of The Key Program, Inc.

(February 1, 2018)

The history of Key reflects changes in the Massachusetts juvenile justice, child welfare system, mental health and educational systems over the years.

In the mid 1800's a system of state training schools for children, without viable homes was established. In 1846, the first school of this sort for boys in the U.S. was built in Westboro, MA, the Lyman Reform School. It was followed six years later by the state reform school for girls in Lancaster, MA.

By 1965, several studies exposed brutal and punitive treatment of the young residents of these state facilities. It became apparent that the training schools were becoming "schools of crime" for young offenders who were being exposed to a criminal environment. Seventy-five percent (75%) of youths were returning to the schools and the resulting high costs led to extensive media criticism.

By 1969, Governor Sargent had secured the resignation of the head of the Youth Service Bureau which oversaw the training schools. About the same time, Jerome Miller (a Psychiatric Social Worker) became Commissioner of the new Department of Youth Services (D.Y.S.). In a radical move in 1972, approximately 95% of all the training schools in the state were closed.

Therefore, the idea arose to purchase services from the private sector, thus providing communities with funds to take care of their own youth. Massachusetts became a pioneer in the purchase of services concept of dealing with youthful offenders within the community.

Beginning in the early 1970's, many new private programs were developed in Massachusetts. Key began as one of these new programs, originally named the *Community Advancement Program (C.A.P.)*. *C.A.P.*'s early goals were to provide supportive services to juveniles returning from the now closed training schools, to reorient them to community life and to keep them from committing further offenses through supportive relationships with concerned adults.

In 1974, *C.A.P.* was founded by two brothers, Scott and Bill Wolfe, college students organizing student volunteers in Worcester, MA. As counselors and youth advocates they provided a supportive link between deinstitutionalized youth and communities to which they were returning. After nine months, the Wolfe brothers' idea was successful, and they were asked to formalize it and clinically justify their work with adolescents on a contractual basis.

The initial services were called *Outreach Services* (later called *Outreach & Tracking*) and their first contract was with D.Y.S. for \$36,000. The one year contract was for providing Outreach services to twelve clients for 15-20 hours per client per week.

The initial *C.A.P.* services were provided from a storefront operation on Main Street, Worcester near Clark University where Bill Wolfe was a student. These contracted services were to provide D.Y.S. clients, who had been recently sent home from the Training Schools, with a drop-in center for recreation, informal counseling and support with family issues, employment support, school placement, advocacy and assistance in avoiding further delinquent activities, etc. The program gained a reputation for accepting the most difficult clients and working with them successfully.

The need to find work for clients in the early 1970's led to the establishment of two *C.A.P.* non-profit businesses in Worcester, an ice cream store and a pizza parlor. As needs changed and other work became available, these businesses closed.

Additionally, some of the *Outreach* youth could not live at home, which led to *C.A.P.* contracting with D.Y.S. to provide *Foster Care* services for D.Y.S. clients and eventually for clients of The Department of Social Services (D.S.S.), now known as the Department of Children and Families (D.C.F.).

Key soon began operating both short and long-term *Foster Care Programs* in Worcester, Lawrence, Cambridge and later in Berkshire County. This program recruited and trained Key Foster Parents for the placement of court involved youth in their homes. Program staff provided support, counseling, recreational and advocacy services for the clients and foster parents.

With the success of the *Drop-In Center* model in Worcester, *C.A.P.* opened Regional Offices and storefront *Drop-In Centers* in other regions of the state to include Fitchburg, Lawrence, Cambridge, Revere, Fall River and Holyoke.

The *Outreach & Tracking* Programs for these areas were initially designed for D.Y.S. clients and then expanded to D.S.S. CHINS (Child In Need of Services, i.e.; runaways, truants and stubborn children) clients in each of the above locations. *C.A.P.* also operated a recycling business at the Arsenal in Watertown to provide work experience for D.Y.S. clients. This is where Key's President, William (Bill) Lyttle began his career at Key.

In 1976, the first Key residential program for D.Y.S. girls opened at 5 Cameron Avenue, Somerville, known as "*Cameron House*." This was the first girls' D.Y.S. Secure Treatment program in the state and operated until approximately 1990.

Later in 1977, *C.A.P.* was renamed as "***The Key Program, Inc.***" (*Key*). The organization's name was changed to avoid confusion with the many Community Action Program (*C.A.P.*) agencies in Massachusetts. Over the next few years, Key re-organized its regional offices to include: Pittsfield, Springfield, Worcester, Lawrence, Fall River, and Providence, R.I.

In 1978, Key opened the first boys' *Tracking Plus Program* at 576 State St., Springfield. This was another first-of-its-kind model and consisted of a 5 bed residence in a building that Key purchased. The residence was attached to a 12 slot Intensive *Outreach & Tracking* component. Clients were referred from D.Y.S. secure detention placements (mostly Westfield Detention Center) and were either already presented to or being considered for long term DYS Secure Treatment placements. Clients began their initial stay in the staff-secure residence for 3-6 weeks of very structured counseling, education, life and job readiness skills, etc. and then were transitioned back into the community (home or foster homes) with mandatory school/work placements, curfews and an accountability plan with close staff supervision, etc.

Key provided the most intensive *Outreach & Tracking* supervision available at the time in MA, that is; multiple daily in-person visits to ensure accountability, in-person curfew checks, mandatory weekly formal counseling groups at the Tracking Plus residence, and family visits 2-3 times per week to ensure adherence to their treatment plans. If clients had difficulties in the community, i.e.; missed curfew, were unaccountable, etc., Key had the authority to transfer them back into the *Tracking Plus* residence for intensive counseling before qualifying for their return to the community under the program's continued supervision.

Key opened the second D.Y.S. contracted *Tracking Plus Program* in Worcester in 1980 and then two more *Tracking Plus Programs* quickly followed in Lawrence and Fall River. Later in 1988, due a state-wide shortage of detention beds, D.Y.S. requested that Key convert its four Tracking Plus residences to a short-term detention model known as *Transitional Management Programs (T.M.P.)*.

In 1979, Key opened the first-in-the-state, *Key Intake Program* for D.Y.S. in Worcester. This model was the central delivery point for all D.Y.S. clients (committed or held on delinquent bail) from courts and police departments in the Central Region. The program provided written assessments and recommendations for placement for each client referred to D.Y.S. within a few hours of the client's referral. Key staff then transported the clients every evening to their D.Y.S. placements (secure detention, shelter-care, foster care, etc.) across the state from Westfield to Boston, Middleton to Brockton.

Intake also provided back-up services to police on juvenile matters and programs with D.Y.S. placed clients - 24 hours per day. The program served as the primary link between D.Y.S. and its services and clients after hours. The *Intake Program* was later expanded to provide the central intake for non-delinquent C.H.I.N.S. clients placed on bail or referred to D.S.S. by the Juvenile Court. The Central Region *Key Intake Program* successfully assessed, transported and placed approximately 1,000-1,500 children per year for many years.

Over the next 4-5 years, Key opened three more D.Y.S. contracted *Key Intake Programs* in Middleton, Boston and Springfield providing similar assessment and placement services for delinquently committed and bail clients.

Then in 1980, Key opened a Rhode Island regional office consisting of: a co-ed *Independent Living Program* (I.L.P.) in North Providence an *Outreach & Tracking Program* and a Boys Residential *Shelter* on Federal Hill in Providence for Rhode Island's Department of Children and Families (D.C.F) now known as the Department of Children, Youth and Families (D.C.Y.F.).

It was also at this time that Key took over its first MA Department of Mental Health (D.M.H) long term residential program in the Berkshires and expanded *Outreach & Tracking services* to that area of the state as well. These positive service model results lead to Key opening another D.M.H. residential program for young adults and the first *Key Commonworks Assessment Center* for D.S.S. in Pittsfield.

Later in 1981, Key began operating its *Emergency Residential Shelter Program* in Pittsfield. This was the only child and adolescent shelter in Berkshire County, and it was jointly funded by D.S.S., D.M.H., the United Way and the City of Pittsfield. Key operated the *Shelter* until D.S.S. converted all shelters to *STARR* programs in 2006.

The Western Region began taking *school referrals* for Educational Support Services from the Longmeadow, Springfield, Chicopee and Agawam school systems in the 1980's. To meet these service needs, Key opened the *Key Alternative School* at the State Street, Springfield Regional Office.

Throughout the 1980's, Key continued to expand:

Opened its first D.S.S. contracted *Family Reunification Residential Program*, (*The Parkwood Program*), at 20 Parkwood Street, Springfield. This community group home model adapted the initial Key short-term residential placement model (*Tracking Plus*) for delinquent committed boys to boys and girls with non-delinquent status offenses. The *Parkwood Program* prepared clients and families for the client's eventual return home. Intensive *Outreach & Tracking* services were provided once the client returned home. Clients experiencing behavioral difficulties were returned to the residence for supportive services.

Key opened two more *Family Reunification Residential Programs* (280 Lincoln Street, Worcester and 175 Lowell Street, Methuen), and also contracted with D.S.S. to provide similar short-term residential services followed by intensive *Key Outreach & Tracking* services.

In 1986, Key opened the *Grafton Girls' Program* in the former Superintendent's Residence on the grounds of Grafton State Hospital, contracting with D.Y.S. for 8 girls as the first D.Y.S. short-term (60-90 day) intensive staff-secure residential treatment for girls in MA. These D.Y.S. committed girls had been involved with multiple or fairly serious delinquency and could not be placed directly in the community. This program was operated continuously until approximately 2005.

In 1989, having experienced difficulty in obtaining appropriate Community Mental Health Services for often resistant and hard to engage clients/families, Key opened the Department of Public Health licensed *Key Mental Health Clinic* in Springfield, to provide billable Outpatient Mental Health Services to our residential and *Outreach* clients and families. The *Key Clinic* has since expanded these clinical services to Key's other regions and is able to third party bill for the provision of outpatient mental health services.

In the early 1990's, Key took over two additional R.I. residential programs which were contracted with R.I. D.C.Y.F. from another non-profit organization, *Tri-Cap*. These two programs provided girls' shelter services in Providence and a boys' residential group home in West Kingston, R.I.

In 1993, the Worcester *Key Intake Program*, previously closed by D.Y.S. during budget cuts a few years earlier, was reopened as an 8 bed, federally funded *Alternative Lock-up Program (A.L.P.)* accepting all Central MA juvenile overnight arrested and held children for about 85 Police Departments. Key's *A.L.P.* services operated effectively for over 24 years while forming extremely positive partnerships with all police departments and the courts.

In January 2010, Key was awarded the state-wide D.Y.S. *A.L.P. Lead Agency* Contract to coordinate all D.Y.S. *A.L.P.* services in 4 Regions while continuing to operate Key's Central and Northeast Region's *A.L.P.* units. These programs provided juvenile overnight arrest services to the entire state. Key's own ALP's serviced approximately 150 Central and Northeast police departments. D.Y.S. closed the state-wide *A.L.P.* programs on June 30, 2017 and attached fewer overnight arrest beds to their detention programs.

In 1995, Key began operating, *Our House* in Greenfield, MA (another original D.Y.S. program dating back to the closing of the MA Training Schools) and it still operates as *Key Our House*, a 12 bed boys D.Y.S. contracted short-term residential program.

Also during the late 1990's, Key functioned as the D.S.S. Commonworks *Lead Agency*, a new model of "*Wraparound Care*", initiated by D.S.S. in the Western and Northeast regions. This service model operated very closely with D.S.S. Area Offices to oversee assessment and client placements for some of these region's most difficult clients. Key later began operating as the *Family Based Service Lead Agency* in Fall River, New Bedford, Lawrence, Holyoke, Springfield and Van Wart coordinating in-home services, when the Commonworks initiative was closed by D.S.S.

In 2000, in an effort to expand its clinical capacity, Key merged with *Children's Charter Trauma Clinic*, a division of Key, located in Waltham. Children's Charter continues to provide assessment, long term treatment and other clinical services to children and adults that have been victims of trauma.

Over the years, Key has continued to refine its service models to meet the changing needs of the funders, clients and their families.

In 2006, Key successfully opened 5 Short-term Assessment and Rapid Reintegration (*STARR*) residential programs in Pittsfield, Springfield, Worcester, Methuen and Fall River for the Department of Children and Families. In 2014, Key added a sixth D.C.F. *STARR* program in Greenfield for 15 youth.

In 2008, the Western Region developed a new combined Residential Respite program to provide short-term respite services for D.C.F. community clients known as *Key Unbundled Services*. This service model utilizes Key's existing residential capacity as temporary respite for clients and their families in need of support. This service has since been expanded across Key's other regions.

In 2017, Key trained a large number of Clinical and Outreach staff in the Evidence Based '*Triple P*,' *Positive Parenting Program*' model. This service was added to enhance Key's ability to provide non-residential parent support services. This service includes "simple and practical strategies to help parents build strong, healthy relationships with their child and to confidently manage their children's behavior and prevent problems from developing."

In summary, Key presently operates:

- 19 Residential Programs with a capacity of 221 beds
Western/Berkshire Region: Pittsfield - 3, Greenfield - 2, Springfield - 4
Central Region: 4,
Northeast Region: 2
Southeast Region: 2
Rhode Island Region: 2
- 4 D.Y.S. Community Offices (Pittsfield, Taunton, New Bedford and Fall River)
- Outreach Programs in all regions servicing approximately 450-500 youth and families.
- 2 Mental Health Clinics – The *Key Clinic* and *Children's Charter* which service approximately 891 children and families in Fiscal Year 2015
- D.C.F. *Family Networks Lead Agency* in Springfield, Robert Van Wart, Holyoke, Lawrence, Fall River and New Bedford which serviced approximately 3,700 youth and families in Fiscal Year 2017
- Maintains national *CARF Accreditation* for its Rhode Island Programs.

Key presently maintains a workforce of approximately 500 employees including; administrators and supervisors, clinicians and psychologists, direct care and clerical staff that annually provide successful services to approximately 3,500 to 4,000 youth and families.

The Key Program, Inc., throughout its history and in its successful operation of forty programs is regarded as '*the placement of choice by many referring state agencies*', by many schools, social workers/case workers, probation officers, judges and juvenile police officers for some of MA and RI's most difficult children.

After 43 years of successful program operation and through the hard work of many dedicated staff and Board Members, there are literally thousands of former *Key* clients and family members who have been helped through some very difficult times.

Key is also proud of its expanding and varied pool of staff alumni, a large percentage of whom are still involved with human services; that is school systems, police and probation departments, *Key's* referring agencies and other non-profit agencies.