

# MERRIMAC CENTER

**Middle Peninsula Juvenile Detention Commission**

Caroline  
Charles City  
Essex  
Gloucester  
Hanover  
James City  
King & Queen  
King William  
Lancaster  
Mathews  
Middlesex  
New Kent  
Northumberland  
Poquoson  
Richmond  
Westmoreland  
Williamsburg  
York



## FY 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

**THE MIDDLE PENINSULA JUVENILE DETENTION COMMISSION  
ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COMMISSION  
Fiscal Year 2020**

**Mission Statement**

**Juvenile Detention is the temporary and safe custody of juveniles who are accused of conduct subject to the jurisdiction of the court who require a restricted environment for their own or the community's protection while pending legal action or serving a sentence.**

**Further, juvenile detention provides a wide range of helpful services that support the juvenile's physical, emotional, and social development.**

**Helpful services minimally include education, recreation, counseling, nutrition, medical and health care services, visitation, communication, and continuous supervision. Juvenile detention includes a system of observation that complements the helpful services and reports findings.**

The Middle Peninsula Juvenile Detention Commission was authorized by the General Assembly and formed in 1994. Seventeen counties and two cities joined the goal of building and operating a secure juvenile detention facility. (King George County withdrew from the Commission in December 2000 leaving our current membership at 18). At that time, these localities had no guaranteed access to secure juvenile detention beds. Local law enforcement officials were transporting juveniles to detention facilities and jails throughout the Commonwealth, some as far away as Bristol on the Tennessee border. This created substantial overtime costs and removed scarce law enforcement resources from the local communities. The courts were restricted in the dispensation of their responsibilities when they had no place to hold juveniles in need of confinement, either for public safety or for sanctions. Court staff spent untold hours looking for bed space. Family contact with detained juveniles was limited due to the distance of placements. Construction of a secure juvenile detention facility, the Merrimac Center, began in the summer of 1996. On December 23, 1997, the Merrimac Center admitted its first juvenile offender.

The Center is located on Route 143, five miles south of Williamsburg. The facility is licensed to house forty-eight youth, male and female, ages seven up to 21, who are under detention orders from a court of competent jurisdiction. The Center holds youth who are awaiting hearings in the courts as well as those who have been sentenced to detention as a sanction or for community-based treatment.

There are four housing units in the Center. One unit houses Community Placement Program (CPP) male residents and juveniles sentenced to detention for treatment (Post-dispositional/ "Post-D"), another is for older boys 16 and up, another is for boys 15 and younger, and the fourth unit houses CPP females. Both CPP units have dedicated staff. Pre-dispositional female program in a classroom and sleep on the female CPP unit. Unfortunately, since the global pandemic began

in early 2020, the younger and older boys have had to be combined on a unit in order to maintain a quarantine unit for residents who have arrived within the previous seven days.

### **Licensure:**

The Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) licenses the Center. Licensure is based on standards promulgated by the Department and the Standards for Interagency Regulation of Children's Residential Facilities. These standards address areas of programming, treatment, medical care, education, recreation, security, safety, food service, staffing, and the physical plant.

Following our 3-year licensing audit in September 2019, it was determined that we continue to operate the Center in compliance with standards and regulations as required by the Department of Juvenile Justice. The audit team was very impressed with not only our compliance with standards, but also with our service delivery, treatment program, and progressive approach to detention. The team repeatedly commended us on the respect, dignity, and safety we provided our residents. The Center is fully licensed through February 2023.

### **A Day in Detention: January 15, 2020**

On January 15, 2020, there were 25 juveniles in residence at the Merrimac Center; 17 were boys and eight were girls. Eight of the 18 participating localities had youth placed in the Center. There were five female and eight male DJJ CPP participants. There were two residents sentenced by the courts to the Post-D Program, our 180-day treatment component; in addition, there were three residents sentenced for 30 days or less. Of the 25 youth in residence, 25% were being held pending action by the court. The other 75% had been adjudicated, were awaiting final disposition, awaiting placement, or serving their commitment status.

During the course of the day, there was one transport to court. There were no admissions and one release.

After a full day of activities, including educational study, outside recreation, community meetings, and therapeutic groups on restorative justice, all units participated in bible study.

### **Statistics**

Significantly down from last year, the Center admitted 228 juveniles and provided 10,243 childcare days in FY20. The average daily population was 28, as compared to 34 last year, including youth in state programs. The average daily population for the localities was down to 14 from 19 last year and the state juvenile average daily population was also 14, indicating that we are serving an equal amount of state-placed and local youth, making our state programs a very important financial resource for the Center. The average length of stay was 45 days. There were 163 males and 65 females admitted. The population ratio was 60% boys and 40% girls. Forty-four juveniles were sentenced to detention with sentences ranging from one to 30 days while thirteen were sentenced to the Post-D treatment program ranging from 31 to 180 days. The contracted DJJ programs served 18 CPP males and 9 CPP females. CAP assessments were completed on 6 males and 1 female. There were 2 female and 1 male resident served in the Re-Entry Program.

We have received numerous DJJ program youth sentenced as “serious offenders” for up to three years or until the age of 21. This population has changed the dynamics of the direct care of the youth including increasing medical/dental needs, the level of ongoing treatment, staff interventions, and the overall length of stay for the Center. As an ever-changing and maturing population, new challenges and rewards are created. Notably, unlike many other detention centers nationwide, Merrimac does not have a disproportionate minority population.

Charges ranged from murder, rape, arson, assault, robbery, possession of illegal substances, technical probation violations, and other miscellaneous juvenile offenses. The largest general categories of offenses were: 45 burglary/larceny offenses (20%), 43 contempt offenses (19%), and 36 assault offenses (16%).

### **Daily Activities:**

The juveniles’ time in detention should be as productive as possible. Since going to a combination of Cognitive Behavioral Training (CBT) and behavior modification in 2007, we have successfully incorporated this treatment modality while maintaining safety and security. Cognitive Behavior Theory has long been used in residential treatment programs. Evidenced-based research continues to show it to be effective in changing the thinking and behavior of at-risk youth in detention programs. This is a very structured program employing three groups per day plus weekly goals for specific individual problems. This is a positive approach to teaching new skills and behaviors as opposed to a punitive approach.

Group topics include moral decision-making, girls’ growth, anger management, rational behavior training, goal setting, life skills training, restorative justice, risk management, and social skills training. Staff and youth utilize curriculum-based manuals for the majority of groups. The DJJ programs also receive Aggression Replacement Training (ART), an evidence-based program, and Girl’s Circle, a gender-responsive program. LaunchPad Counseling, an agency in Richmond, provides in-house substance abuse group and individual therapy by a licensed therapist for our CPP males. The CPP females receive therapeutic services, including substance abuse group and trauma-informed individual counseling through our in-house CPP Case Manager/Therapist.

The Center does not have television. A Netflix account is maintained where staff and residents may select educational and appropriately rated movies for weekend viewing. For special national events, which are positive cultural experiences, exceptions are sometimes made to allow residents to view these as they occur. They additionally view news sources for current event topics once a week.

The Center works with other agencies, volunteers, and community-based groups to supplement services. Normally, the Good News Jail and Prison Ministries, certified therapy dog program, a therapeutic drumming leader, William & Mary Mentors, Royal Rangers, and other individual volunteers provide a variety of character and skill-building opportunities for the youth. However, since March all outside visitors have been discontinued due the COVID-19 outbreak closing the Center to volunteers. Prior to this, Good News Jail Ministries continued to conduct group religious

services and religious studies twice a week. Royal Rangers provided activity-based group ministry twice a month and also hosted an annual holiday dinner for all residents and staff. Residents may also meet with their individual religious counselors upon request. Resident attendance in faith-based services is always voluntary.

Again, prior to the pandemic, the William & Mary Mentors continued to provide mentorship and structured enrichment activities to all residents in the Center on Saturdays. The Pet Therapy Program provided a guided interaction between the dogs and the residents, which has been linked to positive effects on youth exposed to stress, trauma, mental health disorders, and an increase in empathy. Our therapeutic drumming program not only allows for residents to learn about the African culture and how to play African drums, but also serves as an artistic outlet and promotes unity amongst the residents. We have been fortunate to have a staff member lead this group without the help of the volunteer.

This year, the education department collaborated with the King of Glory Bees Sewing Group to teach female residents how to sew. The Glory Bees visited once per week and oversaw various sewing projects to include, pillowcases, cosmetic bags, and cloth face coverings, to name a few. Through the skills acquired and the material donated by the Glory Bees, the female residents were able to provide each staff with a face cloth covering. To date, they have sewn over 100 face coverings to be donated. Fortunately, the girls were able to maintain virtual contact with the women in Glory Bees twice monthly during the pandemic, which allowed them to continue additional sewing projects and stay connected to a supportive group.

As in previous years, local churches continued to provide support throughout the year by providing holiday gifts, games, crafts and needed program supplies. Additionally, this year, Liberty Live Church reached out to the Center to offer support amid the COVID Pandemic. Liberty Live Church members not only provided new games for the residents but worked to create opportunities to boost staff morale through providing incentives and fellowship opportunities. Liberty Live Church catered meals for all staff on three occasions. They continue to reach out monthly to offer their support.

We have been fortunate to have so many dedicated volunteers in the past; we are eager to invite them safely back into the Center when we can ensure their, our staffs', and our residents' health is protected.

Prior to March, visitation for the residents was in-person for three hours per week. However, since the pandemic, face-to-face visitation, like volunteers, has been discontinued. The parents and guardians provided email addresses, so the residents are able to have virtual visitation. They are also allowed extra phone calls to family members to account for less face-to-face time. We are looking forward to welcoming families back to the building and have family engagement events once it is safe to do so.

**Mental Health Services:**

At the point of admission, each juvenile is administered the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument-2 (MAYSI-2), a self-report mental health screening instrument. The MAYSI-2 measures six scales. A “caution” means the resident needs services but is not in a critical state. A “warning” means that services are needed immediately. Many juveniles score a “caution” or “warning” on multiple scales. (The table below represents the percentage of 231 youth that scored within the “caution” or “warning” range for the particular scale upon their admission). 81% of residents were considered a “critical case.” Similar to last year, 72% of youth reported that they are victims or witnesses of traumatic events: domestic violence, murder, beatings, sexual abuse, etc.

| Scale                 | Caution | Warning | Traumatic Experiences |       |
|-----------------------|---------|---------|-----------------------|-------|
|                       | %       | %       | No %                  | Yes % |
| Alcohol/Drug Use      | 15%     | 14%     |                       |       |
| Angry-Irritable       | 28%     | 11%     |                       |       |
| Depressed-Anxious     | 31%     | 10%     |                       |       |
| Somatic Complaints    | 39%     | 11%     |                       |       |
| Suicide Ideation      | 5%      | 14%     |                       |       |
| Thought Disturbance   | 18%     | 16%     |                       |       |
| Traumatic Experiences |         |         | 28%                   | 72%   |

A significant portion of the resident population experience psychiatric problems. These cases require continuous assessment and monitoring. As of June 30, 2019, the case management position employed by Colonial Behavioral Health (CBH) was eliminated by CBH and there is no plan on behalf of CBH to reinstate it. Our assigned CBH mental health therapist continues to provide assessments, crisis counseling, individual, group and family counseling, and case management services to the residents. This position also provides information to the courts and parents and assists the post-dispositional program staff. A board-certified child psychiatrist, also employed by CBH, assesses youth for psychiatric needs and provides medication management weekly through tele-psychiatry.

The mental health clinician assesses residents who have scores on their admission mental health screenings indicating a potential mental health or substance abuse problem, who have been identified in the community as needing mental health services, and those referred by staff who have observed troublesome behavior. The clinician provides individual and group counseling and education, refers residents and families for services in the community, informs the Court of juvenile mental health needs, and works with the courts, family, and mental health system to

obtain emergency hospitalization if needed. In FY20, out of the 20 calls that were made to CBH Emergency Services for pre-screenings for acute mental health hospitalizations, four residents were assessed; however, none were temporarily detained in a psychiatric facility due to CBH's belief that we are able to safely manage their behaviors within the facility. While we were able to do so, detention homes are not the appropriate place to treat these youth. Having the mental health counselors on site for the past thirteen years has contributed to improved management of mental health issues among the youth; however, the loss of the case management position has posed workload challenges.

### **Medical Services:**

A full-time registered nurse provides daily medical services. Many direct care staff are certified as medication agents enabling them to administer medications and first aid when the nurse is off duty. We also employ an on-call registered nurse to provide services and assistance as needed. A contracted physician provides on-site medical services at least twice monthly, or as needed, and provides medical oversight. Local vendors provide emergency medical, dental care, and specialty consultation.

Each juvenile receives a physical screening at the time of admission and a more thorough assessment by the nurse within 72 hours of placement. Sick calls are taken twice a day to address resident medical needs. The most prevalent treatments are for headaches, colds, upper respiratory infections, sexually transmitted diseases, menstrual cramps, and evaluation and monitoring of psychotropic medications.

Additionally, we have been consulting with the Peninsula Health Department ongoingly to obtain specific direction related to COVID-related concerns. We have also been able to contract with Velocity Urgent Care for rapid testing of staff and onsite testing for youth, if deemed necessary. The National Guard is a resource if building-wide testing is needed.

### **Education Program:**

Prior to the pandemic, the daily schedule for the juveniles included five and three-quarters hours of school per day. The Williamsburg James City County School System employs the educational staff. Eight full-time teachers are assigned to the Center with the addition of a guidance counselor this year. The guidance counselor position was added to better serve the changing population and the educational needs of those with longer sentences. These eight teachers, guidance counselor, an administrative assistant, and a principal delivered the educational program for the Center. This comprehensive, accredited educational program includes teaching all subjects and sending reports to the juvenile's home school. A computer lab and Smart Boards support the program.

Juveniles receive credit for their attendance and for the work completed while in the detention center school. Standards of Learning (SOLs) are typically administered at the Center. Preparation and testing for the General Equivalence Diploma (GED) is also a part of the educational program. Merrimac was approved as a GED testing site, so residents do not need to go into the community for this service, and the test can be given at any time. Over the past year,

two residents received their GED and six others received their regular diploma. The GED numbers are lower due to the inability to test since March. However, these continue to be impressive accomplishments for the residents, teachers, and staff.

The education program emphasizes reading skills and provides an extensive reading library. The York County and Williamsburg Regional Libraries, community groups, and citizens contribute books and magazine subscriptions for use by our residents. Education also continues to use WittFitt Stability Balls for one classroom to assist ADHD students with their focus and concentration.

The teachers are normally eleven-month employees, having the month of July off as their summer break. During June and August when regular public school is not in session, they provide an enrichment program to incorporate fun learning experiences into the educational experience. However, this school year in March, the teachers were required to leave the building and cease providing normal educational services. The Center's direct care staff thankfully filled in the role of assisting the residents with the schoolwork that was provided.

The addition of the CPP programs at Merrimac has changed the landscape of our educational needs and offerings. The residents that are being detained locally to serve their commitment status for longer periods of time are typically older, not permitted by the court to leave the premises (as serious offenders), and have completed their high school education/GED requirements. Our career-readiness specialist has been providing educational and vocational training opportunities to our post-secondary students. They are offered personalized educational resources and can pursue certifications, college degrees, and life skills training through online programs offered through Thomas Nelson Community College, Tidewater Community College, Coursera, Penn Foster, ToolingU, and 360Training. Post-Secondary students also work on career assessments, soft skills training, interview skills, and resume writing. College courses completed include Introduction to Business, Business Management, Economics, and English Composition, to name a few. Post-secondary students have earned certifications in OSHA, Serve Safe, and Welding. Post-Secondary students also work on career assessments, soft skills training, interview skills, and resume writing. They are encouraged to search for jobs prior to release, in order to facilitate securing employment after leaving the facility. Furthermore, the career readiness specialist assists post-secondary students with completing college and financial aid applications.

### **Treatment Programs:**

Merrimac Center Programs have accounted for close to 50% of the facility population over the course of the year. We continue to have five programs running simultaneously: Post-D, CPP males, CPP females, DJJ (CAP) Intakes, and the Re-Entry Program. Merrimac's CPP female program was the only CPP program for females in the Commonwealth until July 2019 when Northern Virginia contracted to also offer CPP services exclusively for females.

The Center provides a Post-D Program for juveniles sentenced to 180 days. The program is co-ed and has a licensed capacity for fifteen placements. The treatment program manager works



closely with court staff, residents, and their families, to identify needs and appropriate services to develop and implement individualized treatment plans. Designated program staff provide programming to address areas identified in treatment plans. Resident progress towards treatment goals is reviewed by the treatment team and the court every 30 days. A mental health clinician provides individual and group counseling, in conjunction with the treatment program manager who provides program participants with case management. The program includes opportunities for family engagement and coordinates transition services to help the residents and the families succeed after release. Residents often participate in community activities and home-based services while in the Post-D Program.

Resources, particularly the Post-D teacher position, have been restructured to ensure that a larger portion of our facility residents receive instruction and supervision in-house; however, community interaction and engagement opportunities will continue to be of importance to the Post-D program as population dictates. This teacher continues to assist all Merrimac students in working towards their high school diploma, prepares eligible students for the General Equivalency Diploma (GED), and provides certification programs for various trades and post-secondary educational endeavors.

In place of our previous “Think Pawsitive” dog fostering/ training program, Merrimac adopted two baby Nigerian Dwarf Goats in August of 2019. Like “Think Pawsitive”, the “I’ve Goat This” program has been very successful in teaching the female CPP residents responsibility, empathy, cooperation, discipline, and problem-solving skills. The girls have enjoyed watching the goats grow and develop into adults making them a frequent topic of conversation. By following a “goat care schedule”, the girls clean the goat yard and house daily and provide them with food and water twice daily. They have trained the goats to be very tame, interactive, and loving to humans. Recognizing the value of animals and their therapeutic qualities, we want to continue to offer a unique care component to our programs.

Post-D residents have adapted well to the inclusion of the Re-Entry and CPP programs for youth transitioning home from the DJJ correctional facilities and/or completing their commitment status and mandated treatment locally. While some of their programming overlaps, the Post-D residents also have the added expectation of maintaining positive progress in their phase advancement. Doing so affords them the opportunity to participate in educational and recreational activities, as well as the opportunity to earn weekend home passes.

Both the male and female CPP programs have operated at capacity or above throughout the year. The case manager for the male CPP program has continued to coordinate services (including individual and group substance abuse treatment and therapy offered by our contracted therapist from LaunchPad Counseling), provide Aggression Replacement Training (ART), host a drum circle twice monthly, and offers support and guidance for residents as they prepare to transition back into the community. Likewise, the female CPP program therapist/case manager provides ART, Girl’s Circle (an evidence-based gender-specific program), individual and group substance abuse treatment, trauma-informed care, and transitional services to our female CPP population. The CPP residents, many from surrounding localities not normally served by our Center, have

acclimated very well to the Merrimac culture of cognitive behavior training to change irrational thoughts and beliefs.

In an effort to provide work experiences for the long-term CPP residents, Merrimac has continued having several voluntary work opportunities available for residents. Applications and interviews are required prior to job placement within the facility. The Canteen Manager position has continued, and the Animal-Care Specialist, Library Organizer, Bulletin Board Decorator, Touchpoint Cleaner, Intermittent Painter, and Salad Bar Attendant jobs were created. The Animal-Care Specialist attends to lizards and our goat care program, and the Salad Bar Attendant was trained in ServeSafe; unfortunately, this position had to be temporarily discontinued due to COVID-related precautions.

In the winter of 2018, Merrimac Center partnered with Community of Faith Mission to provide laundering services of bedding used by local churches that provide temporary housing for the homeless population. The churches rotate providing shelter for a week at a time. On Thursday mornings the church brought Merrimac Center the used bedding. A long-term CPP resident used the facility washer and dryer to wash, dry, fold, and bag the clean laundry for pick up on Friday mornings. This partnership continued in FY20 with a new resident host from the CPP program.

#### **Food Service:**

Four full-time staff comprise the food service program. All staff are required to maintain Food Service Manager Certification and/or attend training provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Juvenile Justice. The Department of Juvenile Justice conducts inspections, and the local Health Department, to ensure the menu meets nutritional standards, as well as health and sanitation regulations.

Mandated USDA menu changes required the Center's Kitchen Manager/Senior Cook to seek additional vendor resources and alternative food items. New menus were implemented, and the USDA reporting manual updated. The kitchen staff are required to complete an additional 8 hours of USDA-specific training in a calendar year. This training is being done via webinars to minimize costs. This past year, one cook resigned due to COVID-19-related family matters and her replacement was recruited from the York County school-division

With the Center entering its twenty-third year of operation, some of the heavily used kitchen equipment is starting to require repair. Several repairs have been made to the walk-in refrigerator/freezer. This is an upcoming capital improvement issue.

The Center participates in the Department of Agriculture's School Food Lunch program. Meals must meet standards for nutritional value, fats, and calories. There were 30,729 meals served last year. The kitchen also prepares after school snack, evening snacks, and accommodates special diets for the residents. Refreshments for special occasions and meetings are prepared, as well.

In January of 2019, we implemented a salad bar for staff and residents. Staff are currently afforded one meal per workday, but the addition of the salad bar has been a healthy benefit for all.

### **Management:**

Financially, since the Commission switched to a five-year averaging payment method, income from the localities remains constant although member locality population was down. The revenue from the CPP and CAP programs increased this year under a two-year contract. Due to serving extra CPP and CAP youth, income from these programs was over the contracted amount by \$115,150. Due to the additional income from the programs, an ongoing shortage of staff, and the ability to garner savings in all areas possible, the member localities were able to be refunded a surplus of funds in the amount of \$518,000 at the end of this fiscal year. At the end of the year, the capital fund totaled \$1,090,438 in addition to the cash reserve fund totaling \$757,019. The cash reserve balance is in compliance with the Service Agreement requirement that there be a 60-day operating reserve maintained.

A Management Plan is written each year to identify short and long-term goals. Five areas are addressed: personnel, programming, quality assurance, public relations, and capital improvements. We are happy to report meeting or making significant progress on all goals outlined in our Management Plan.

The Leadership Team comprised of the director, the deputy director, the operations/quality assurance manager, treatment program manager, supervisors, counselor III's, mental health, education, medical, and information technology leaders meet on a quarterly basis. These are productive planning and review sessions to ensure policy/procedure compliance and to better coordinate services while maintaining safety and security. These meetings also allow for open communication and input regarding various Center issues.

### **Personnel**

Recruitment and retention of full-time staff has proven to be even more challenging in FY20. The primary reasons for resigning include shift work schedules and lack of upward mobility. Full-time staff turnover rate was 27% in FY20, which is down from 31% in FY19. This is in line with averages currently seen across the state. We use a variety of sources to advertise current positions, such as Indeed, Zip Recruiter, local government sites, our website, social media, and signage. We continue to use the 16pf Security Selection Report Tool as a screening instrument designed to assess potential employees' emotional adjustment, integrity/ control, intellectual efficiency, and interpersonal relations. Despite the recent challenges, we have maintained a highly motivated team and finished the year with 48 full time staff. Eleven new staff were hired in FY20.

In terms of staff morale, we have had dedicated employees who have reported to work consistently despite being a high-risk environment for COVID-19 and a congregate care facility. In April, The Families First Coronavirus Response Act was passed, which entitled certain categories of personnel paid leave sick leave related to coronavirus care for themselves and their family members. However, the Department of Labor deemed detention staff as essential

personnel and thus ineligible for the leave benefits under the Act. Despite this, to show appreciation and consideration for the staff at Merrimac, the Commission approved a temporary paid sick leave policy related to staff coronavirus quarantine, diagnosis, self-care, and family-care.

Throughout these trying, stressful, and uncertain times, staff fully realize that they are essential personnel and take their duties to protect and care for the youth very seriously. They have all been compliant with the ever-changing pandemic guidelines from the CDC, which administration has consistently communicated to help ensure that staff feel safe. There has been some turnover as a result of the pandemic, particularly related to child-care issues, but most staff have remained diligent in their responsibilities to provide safety, security, and top-notch services to our residents.

### **Training:**

Despite COVID-19, we were able to meet our training requirements for all staff utilizing a combination of smaller in-person staff trainings as well as self-study courses, and virtual training sessions. Staff received required annual training for Handle with Care, CPR, First Aid, Medication Administration, Behavior Management, Suicide Intervention, Mandatory Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting, Professional Boundaries, Emergency Response, Fire Safety, and Blood Borne Pathogens. All staff additionally received specialized training related to COVID-19 based on guidance from the Virginia Occupational and Safety Program. The self-study courses and online virtual learning allowed us to reduce staffing issues and overtime costs, while maintaining safety during COVID-19. We also certified one additional staff member as a Gang Specialist.

We continue to facilitate two evidence-based programs, Girl's Circle and Aggression Replacement Training (ART), for our CPP residents. Six additional staff were trained in ART. Additionally, six staff attended training in the Boy's Council Program, which will be implemented with the CPP male population in the near future.

### **Prison Rape Elimination Act Policy:**

It is the policy of the Merrimac Center to fully comply with the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) of 2003 and the national standards promulgated by the United States Department of Justice to prevent, detect, and respond to prison rape under PREA, and to provide a safe, humane, and secure environment for all residents free of sexual abuse and sexual harassment.

PREA is a federal law established to support the elimination and prevention of sexual assault and sexual misconduct in correctional systems, including juvenile facilities. PREA addresses both resident-to-resident sexual assault and staff-to-resident sexual assault. Merrimac Center maintains a zero-tolerance policy for resident-on resident sexual assault, staff sexual misconduct and sexual harassment towards residents. Every allegation of sexual assault, misconduct, and harassment is thoroughly investigated, and all reports of sexual assault are referred to the James City County Police Department for criminal investigation.

When a resident first enters our intake area, a comprehensive educational process is started to provide initial and ongoing education explaining their rights to be free from sexual abuse and harassment. An assessment is conducted on all residents at the time of intake to determine their individual risk of victimization or predation using an objective measurement tool based on specific risk factors.

Merrimac Center was audited in July 2019 on over 250 standards and the subsections of the law. Our PREA program quickly achieved full compliance. The next scheduled audit will be July 2022. The most recent PREA Annual Report is located on the facility website and posted in the lobby. We are very fortunate to have a Department of Justice certified PREA auditor on the administrative team to continually monitor compliance.

### **Transportation:**

The Commission provides all transportation once the juvenile is admitted to the detention facility. We are the only detention center of 24 facilities statewide to provide all transportation. Staffed by on-call employees, transportation is provided to court hearings, medical and counseling appointments, placement interviews, and to other residential placements. Although transports ceased in March of 2020 due to the pandemic, the transportation staff safely performed over 281 transports to Commission jurisdictions and an additional 8 non-member jurisdictions that place our CPP youth. There were 40 medical and 24 dental transports completed; fifty-four of those were for CPP youth. Approximately 15,000 miles were covered with an average of 55 miles per transport.

### **Facility Improvements:**

In FY20, with the Commission's approval, ABM Building Services, L.L.C., an energy savings company (ESCO), was chosen to perform the energy savings improvements as well as other necessary building upgrades. As of the end of FY20 the project costing \$1,031,919 was completed. The areas of improvement included a boiler plant upgrade, chiller, building automation system, and HVAC, and LED lighting upgrades, as well as outdoor air reduction via cold plasma ionization. It was discovered that the cold plasma ionization system improves the air quality, thus mitigating the spread of COVID-19. Construction began in January 2020 and was completed September 1, 2020.

### **Safety, Security, and Technology:**

The introduction of COVID-19 into everyone's daily lives this year has necessitated countless policy changes in the Center to ensure residents' and staffs' health safety and minimize the introduction of the disease. A COVID-19 response plan was initially developed in March of 2020 and then revised in July. The plans both incorporate quarantining residents for the first seven days of admission and mandatory mask-wearing for the first 14 days. Temperature checks and COVID screening of all new intakes and staff are ongoing. Social distancing is in place whenever feasible, and staff are required to wear masks in the secure area and when unable to social distance. The residents are not allowed to intermingle for any activity reason, school was discontinued in March, staff are required to stay home if they experience any symptoms of COVID-19, and testing is strongly encouraged.

Also, this year, as a result of the pandemic, the Center purchased a Clorox 360 cleaning sprayer. This system allows for disinfection on surfaces which may be overlooked by routine cleaning such as interior doors, under tables and chairs, and other difficult-to-reach areas. It also cuts cleaning time in half while providing increased effectiveness against germs. The Center custodian and trusted volunteer residents continue to do additional routine cleaning of high-touch areas at least twice per day.

There were no significant safety and security issues this past year. During the physical restraints of youth, there were a few staff injuries this year. These incidents included back strains, elbow, and knee injuries. Injuries to youth included sprains, minor cuts, and scrapes, generally because of recreational activities.

All incidents involving use of physical force, injury, or unusual circumstances are documented and reviewed by administrative staff. Incidents are reviewed with the staff involved to improve response, prevent future incidents, or to validate proper procedures. Physical restraints typically occur with the same 10% of the residents who have significant mental health issues that have not or cannot be treated by the mental health system due to limited community resources. In the past year five residents accounted for almost 50% of the restraints.

A surveillance system monitors activity inside and outside the building. Forty-four cameras are recording around the clock. Intercom systems throughout the building allow continuous communication. Radios for designated staff are issued. Transportation staff utilizes individual cell phones. Audio/video recording systems are installed in transportation vehicles to protect juveniles and staff. A camera was added this year to our break room to monitor the employee locker area. We also added an additional camera to the intake area to better monitor graduate students working with the Career Readiness Specialist. A new POE (power over ethernet) network switch was added to our video surveillance network.

#### **Financial Matters:**

With the approval of the energy performance savings project, the Commission approved financing the project through a local bank with payments beginning in 2020. It is anticipated that some of the expense of the loan repayment will come from the capital reserve account at some future point, as well as from expense reductions.

Local contributions for FY20 were \$1,256,648. Participating localities are billed quarterly. This year the Commission received state reimbursement funds of \$1,277,639 for operations and \$58,108 from the USDA School Food Lunch program. Also, received was \$2,200 from the Department of Juvenile Justice for state wards, \$1,505,690 for community placement, \$18,800 for re-entry and \$37,275 for DJJ CAP assessments.

#### **Grants:**

In coordination with our education program, the Commission participated in the Schools and Libraries Universal Services Fund program. Through this program, we were able to receive a 90%

discount on high-speed internet access. We also received an 85% discount on the purchase of a new network switch for the facility.

A Virginia Municipal League Grant was also received to enhance physical security measures in the rear entrance to the administrative area of the building. This included the purchase of new security doors and additional bullet-resistant side panel glass.

**Public Relations:**

Tours for the public, professional and civic groups, service agencies, schools, and governmental entities are conducted year-round. The York/Poquoson Citizen’s Academy and LEAD Greater Williamsburg continue to be involved with visits to the Center; however, were canceled this year due to COVID-19. Merrimac Center did successfully host a “Cupcakes and Canvas” family engagement event for CPP residents. The volunteer program also serves to make the Center a part of the community. Working relationships with the DJJ, the courts, collateral service agencies, and other juvenile facilities have been positive and productive. Management and staff continued leadership roles in statewide advocacy organizations including the Virginia Juvenile Detention Association (VJDA) and the Virginia Detention Association of Post-Dispositional Programs (VDAPP).

In an effort to display the innovation, progress, and successes of our program, staff, and residents, our Facebook page continues to be in operation. This allows us to share events, stories, and needs with the public.

Merrimac also has a positive working relationship with Virginia Peninsula Regional Jail which provides lawn care for the Center.

**SUMMARY:**

The Center has fulfilled its mission this past year in providing a safe, secure environment for juveniles placed here by the courts. Education requirements and basic needs have been met, despite the current pandemic. Intensive, structured, and evidenced-based programming is the strength of the Center, as well as providing opportunities for the juveniles to learn life skills, pro-social behavior, self-discipline, better decision-making, and personal responsibility. Our CBT and trauma-informed components continue to be strengthened, enabling staff to respond appropriately to the most difficult residents. Juveniles have presented a variety of issues including violent and self-destructive behaviors, substance abuse and mental health challenges, medical and dental needs, and special education needs.

The Merrimac Center is regarded as a model program. The Center frequently conducts tours and shares material and ideas with other detention facilities and state agencies. The Center has a reputation as a good place to work, and it is a desirable placement for college internships and volunteer opportunities.

We are an integral part of the juvenile justice community and active at the local and state levels. Merrimac continues to be a leader in working to improve mental health and substance abuse

services, to improve operating standards, to identify new best-practice treatment programs, and to develop/implement effective staff training.

The Commission members continue to be active throughout the year in their efforts to provide financial support, guidance, and encouragement to improve services to our youth. We look forward to another year of providing quality services and care to our residents and to the communities we serve.