

Spotlight on Pupil Personnel Workers



Sue Meyers (Photo, A. Alston)



Paul Stack (Photo, A. Alston)

Pupil personnel workers (PPW) are natural partners for the Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) Truancy Court Program (TCP), because they are charged by the state's school systems with getting children to come to school all day, every day, on time. Two of the resourceful PPWs who work with TCP are Anne Arundel County's Paul Stack and Sue Meyers.

Stack and Meyers deal with the entire range of truants, from the "soft truants," with 5 to 20 absences or tardies in the prior two marking periods, to the "chronic truants" who miss much more. Sometimes, they say, the problem only needs a quick fix - connecting a family to resources, such as a washing machine when children lack clean clothes. For the "soft" or early truants, they have found that "the faster you get in, the easier it is to undo" the underlying problem causing truant behavior. Because resources are often spent for intensive interventions that target the more serious truants, however, Stack and Meyers are not always able to give these early or soft truants the attention they need. That is why they appreciate the TCP so much; it is a turn-key 10-week approach that fits the niche beautifully.

Meyers and Stack are very pleased with the implementation of the TCP. They are so confident about the program's effectiveness that they intend to continue running it even after CFCC's direct involvement ends. Meyers says Anne Arundel teachers are great fans of the program, too, even though it means more paperwork. In fact, she says, teachers send notes and give a "heads up" about how the students are doing whenever they get new information they believe can be useful to the TCP team.

The PPWs praise CFCC staff generously. After-school basketball? TCP Mentor Arion Alston has done it with PPW Paul Stack. Cell phone numbers for Arion and TCP Coordinator Jessica Stowell are programmed into Sue Meyers' phone, and "I now consider them my friends," she says.

The results are heartening.

Meyers notes that her group had two "hard truants" with many more than the 5-20 unexcused absences and/or tardies in the prior two marking periods. Both of them have "taken off... [and] turned their attendance around." In fact, both students even came back on the very first day after the week-and-a-half of snow cancellations, while many of the students who had good attendance did not return to school promptly. Stack also describes a group of children who have recruited each other - the first students being so sold on the program that they have grabbed others to join them -

and the whole group has done very well. Both PPWs note that the students form a bond throughout the program and become a support group for one another.

At Brooklyn Park Middle, 10 of the 13 students graduated from the program, meaning they had at least a 75% decrease in truancy and showed improved behavior and academics. At Meade Middle, 12 out of 15 students graduated, and two of the three who did not graduate still showed significant progress.

"We're very impressed and enthusiastic," said Meyers.