



Southwest Indiana Regional Youth Village

A Success Story With Many Winners

In the corrections industry, we are constantly reminded of how people's lives are affected by circumstances and fate. And not just the residents.

Charlotte Nesbitt is the founder and long-time Executive Director of the Southwest Indiana Regional Youth Village (SIRYU), a contemporary youth-at-risk residential facility with a unique and interesting story...one almost as unusual as Nesbitt's own.

Nesbitt established the SIRYV with her husband 10 years ago, right after undergoing some dramatic life-altering experiences.

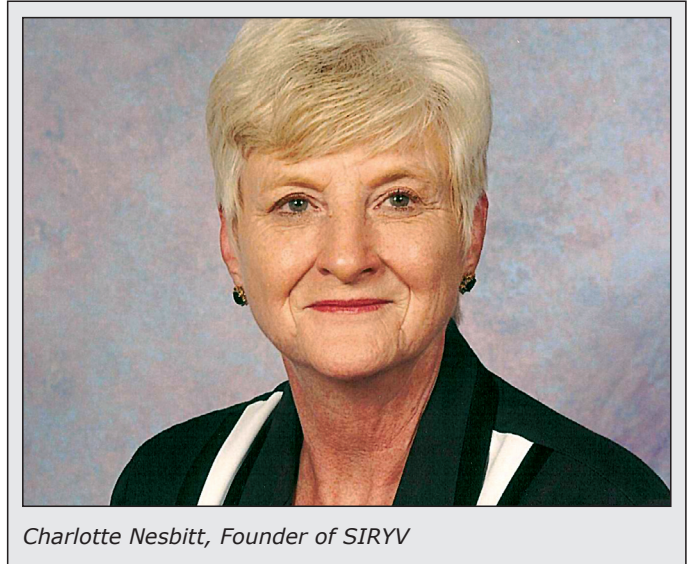
"We had both been in this field a long time, and then my husband had a heart attack," Nesbitt explains. "The doctors told him to get away from the prison setting and do something else."

Needing a change of pace in their lifestyle, the Nesbitts seized the opportunity and decided to cruise the Atlantic in a 45-foot sailboat. They stayed at sea for the next two years. But in September of 1989, things changed again.

"We were sailing in the Virgin Islands and got caught in a direct hit of Hurricane Hugo," she recalls. "We battled that hurricane for 18 hours, and didn't think we would live through it. At one point, we literally hugged each other and said our good-byes."

The boat and the couple survived, but the Nesbitts spent the new few weeks in a hospital ship. While recovering, they reflected on their situation and thought about what to do with the next chapter of their lives.

"We had these long talks, and felt that we needed to



Charlotte Nesbitt, Founder of SIRYV

come back to the U.S. and do something meaningful," she says. Drawing from their professional insights and experiences, they formulated an ambitious plan.

"We started dreaming of a not-for-profit, comprehensive facility for kids," she continues. "By the time we got back to Florida, we had it all drawn out on the flip side of a navigation chart."

The Dream Becomes Real

They had come up with an exciting concept. They envisioned a facility offering a full spectrum of services to promote behavioral change among at-risk youths and to lead them to more promising, more responsible lives.

"The dream of the youth village was to develop the best diversion program that we could," Nesbitt says. "By that I mean our goal is to help kids go back to their own communities, without a continued path into the juvenile or criminal justice system."

With a clear-cut plan and obvious enthusiasm, the Nesbitts proposed their ideas to various agencies and sponsors. The reactions were totally positive. American Express agreed to initial funding to build the facility, and many other supporters followed.

“It was amazing,” Nesbitt says. “We just kept finding people who believed in this, and wanted to do something great. Judges, mayors, people everywhere stepped up to help. Anyone I asked gave the youth village unanimous approval. It was wonderful.”

Soon construction began on an 80-acre site near Vincennes, Indiana for a facility that looked exactly how the Nesbitts had designed it on their sailboat.

A Model Operation

Today the Southwest Indiana Regional Youth Village is a 188-bed, full-service residential care facility for at-risk youth, male and female, ages 9 to 18. Licensed by the State of Indiana, the Village includes an on-site accredited junior and senior High School, short and long-term secure housing, independent group homes, substance-abuse programming, community-service platoon, aftercare services, a detention facility and much more.

“We are a full continuum, which means we provide all services for any youth placed at the facility on any legal status or need basis,” Nesbitt adds. “In fact, I know of no other facility that provides so many different programs to meet the kids’ needs. In our 10 years, we’ve had more than 12,500 youths placed at this facility. I’m quite proud of that.”

The private, not-for-profit SIRYV has many placements from Indiana county and state agencies, along with youths placed from Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and other states. Delaware sent a delegation to evaluate facilities for placements from their state, and they chose the Village.

The SIRYV has twice achieved a perfect score on the American Corrections Association Accreditation process,

meeting or exceeding all 474 of its standards. It also earned perfect scores for state-accreditation audits for seven years in a row.

The facility’s comprehensive services, along with its tremendous successes and accomplishments, have made the Village a model for the industry. Representatives from institutions across the country regularly visit the site to observe its processes.

“This is definitely a model that has lasted over time,” Nesbitt adds. “I say that with humility, because so many others have helped me, but this concept has certainly been tested.”



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Positive Differences

The uniqueness of the SIRYV Village is evident right away, and throughout the site. The attractive design of the facility is based on open space with a lot of natural light coming into the buildings. It’s a pleasant, non-threatening environment that seems more like a nice private school.

“I believe positive change comes when you have a positive environment,” says Nesbitt, “and then they’re more apt to get involved in the opportunities that are offered.”

Residents are segmented and housed according to their

legal status (e.g., detention, delinquent, pre-delinquent, children in need, etc.), and then they work with the staff in small groups only. The various separated groups take turns using a single dining room, a single auditorium or gym, or outdoor activity areas. That way, through creative scheduling and carefully planned clustering of buildings, the SIRYV is able to share services and spaces more efficiently.

The unconventional grouping of residents also improves interpersonal dynamics and promotes a better sense of self among the residents.

“If you talk to our youth, they don’t say things like ‘We’re in a kiddy prison,’ they say, ‘I’m in a youth village, and I’m going to work my program, and I’ll be able to make better decisions when I leave.’ That’s a success we’ve achieved,” says Nesbitt.

“Being positive with a lot of enthusiasm aids in that process,” she continues. “I believe in that old adage, ‘Catch them doing it right and let them know it.’ When our youth do things well here, it’s a celebration. We recognize it, we appreciate it, and most definitely celebrate it on many, many occasions.”

A Fence With A Positive Attitude

A noteworthy feature of the SIRYV facility is the unique fencing. Given its goal of creating a more open, less threatening environment, the Village chose a MICRONET™ MicroPoint™ Cable fence-mounted cable perimeter security system, developed by Southwest Microwave of Tempe, Arizona.

The next-generation MICRONET™ system is designed for fast, accurate detection of any cutting or climbing of the fence, while ignoring vibrations from wind, rain or vehicles. Using microwave technology, MICRONET™ precisely identifies the site of a perimeter disturbance to within 10 feet of the event, and then transmits its location to security officers via a personal computer interface.



MICRONET™ MicroPoint™ Cable fence-mounted perimeter security system

A sensitive and responsive MICRONET™ detection system works effectively on a shorter, less intimidating fence, so it eliminates the need for high walls or razor wire.

“It doesn’t have that harsh appearance,” says Nesbitt. “It’s much more friendly and humanitarian, and allows for a more positive setting within the facility. The kids call it ‘the candy cane fence,’ and many have told me they forget it’s even there.”

Another big advantage of the MICRONET™ perimeter system is that it greatly reduces the need for extra guards.

“I like to say that we don’t watch our youth here, we interact with them,” Nesbitt says. “Because that fence has a motion detector right there, we don’t have to operate with a lot of interior security. The fence has never been climbed. Never been climbed in 10 years.”

Certain parts of the Village don’t have fences at all. The facility includes a number of group homes dedicated for independent transitional living for residents who qualify.

“We don’t feel the need for perimeter security there,” says Nesbitt, “but for our programs where placing agencies have determined that kids need a secure setting,

then we do have that very secure perimeter (with the MICRONET™ system). We prefer for the kids to go to the least restrictive environment they can succeed in.”

A Job Well Done

After guiding the SIRYV since its inception, Nesbitt recently resigned her position there and is now serving as a consultant in the corrections industry—working with investors, advising other care facilities and developing potential new projects. But she is confident that the Village and its residents are in excellent hands.

“Our team will continue to advance,” she says. “You know, we ask our kids to change their behavior, and we likewise ask ourselves to change. Yes, we’re doing good, but we can do better to help these kids.”

From its birth on a sailboat, sketched on a map, the Southwest Indiana Regional Youth Village has come to be a model facility that’s redefining success in juvenile rehabilitation.

“The most important part, I think,” concludes Nesbitt, “is that this facility as it is today is so much better than the dream.”

For more information about the MICRONET™ MicroPoint™ Cable
fence-mounted perimeter security system, visit
www.southwestmicrowave.com



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