

Strategies to Improve Female Student Retention

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE FEMALE STUDENT RETENTION

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Management & Training Corporation (MTC) is an international corporation dedicated to helping people realize their learning potential. MTC creates nurturing environments in which education is encouraged and rehabilitation is recognized. MTC manages and/or operates 24 Job Corps centers/satellite centers for the U.S. Department of Labor, preparing disadvantaged youth for meaningful careers. MTC also operates 20 contracted correctional facilities across the country with approximately 25,000 inmates. In addition, MTC has expanded its education and vocational expertise into the international arena, working in countries such as Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, Tunisia, China and Mongolia. The MTC Institute is the research division of MTC, which is dedicated to promoting innovations and exemplary practices and projecting trends that are relevant to job training and corrections. The work of the Institute is geared toward a broad audience including policy makers, educators, researchers, practitioners, state and federal officials, workforce development entities, correctional agencies, and Job Corps centers. This report is intended for educational and informational purposes.

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INTRODUCTION

Women entering the job market are critical to the ongoing economic vitality of the United States. As it stands, women make up almost half of the workforce at 46.8%¹ and over half of the US population at 50.7%.² Further, women are graduating high school at higher rates than men, and are completing degrees (i.e. Associates, Bachelors, and Masters) in far greater numbers than men.³ This situation makes it even more important for those female students entering Job Corps to understand how vital it is for them to complete the program to ensure they can competitively excel in the workplace.

While many women do find themselves in some form of postsecondary education and training, at-risk young women will usually not find the same path. It is for these female students, entering Job Corps becomes a perfect fit. Although enrollment of women in Job Corps has increased over time, far too many are not taking advantage of this great opportunity.

There were 25,993 female students who enrolled in Job Corps in Program Year (PY) 2009.⁴ Of those female students over 60% graduated from the program.⁵ While this graduation rate is higher than some schools categorized as “dropout factories,” it is still lower than some programs that boast a graduation rate of over 80%.⁶

Distressing is the data that indicates many female students are leaving the program very soon after arrival at the center. Of the 4,639 female students who, during the period from July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010 (PY 2009), had not yet selected a career trade, there were 3,368 females or 72.6% who separated prior to 60 days in Job Corps and another 3.8% or 157 left prior to 90 days.⁷ Of the 5,519 female students who enrolled in Job Corps, but did not successfully complete their academic and/or career technical training programs,⁸ 1,071 separated during the period of 60-89 days. *This culminates in a finding that 47.6% of all non-graduating females leave the program prior to 90 days.*⁹ Ultimately, too many female students are not completing the Job Corps program, but staff especially need to focus on strategies to improve retention during the first 90 days.

Although Job Corps assists tens of thousands of youth every year, many leave prior to completion of the program, putting them at a disadvantage over other workers who have had training. Research has shown and will continue to show that, the more education a

person receives the more financially stable, healthy, and less reliant on public programs they will be in comparison to those who drop out of school.¹⁰ It is Job Corps’ primary goal for students to succeed; therefore, it is imperative that we increase the rate of graduates from the program. This can be done by deploying strategies designed to boost the number of students who are retained in the program.

As the economy recovers, the country will have an increasing need for skilled workers to fill open positions; in fact, the lack of skilled workers is already being felt even though there are many unemployed.¹¹ Job Corps graduates are knowledgeable and have the credentials employers are seeking. They are ready to step into these skilled jobs; women who complete their education and training at a Job Corps center will be able to fill many of these open positions.

“I encourage female Job Corps students to consider a career in a non-traditional field. Making an informed decision is important, so take the time to conduct research about career options to understand the challenges, requirements, and, of course, the rewards.

“I began my professional career in the construction industry. I know first-hand that women can not only find success in non-traditional fields, but also advance to become managers, executives, and business owners. Female students should keep an open mind when considering career technical training options. Go beyond the traditional when aiming for success – you never know where it may lead you!”

Edna Primrose, National Director, Job Corps

This report offers a variety of important concepts and strategies which are designed to help centers improve their outcomes, especially as they seek to exceed retention goals for female students. This research report discusses challenges starting with admissions and pre-enrollment, examining specific practical experiences of successful practitioners who understand what works when it comes to retention and what types of tools, such as assessments, which would prove beneficial. We focus on how to help the student feel welcome, appreciated, remain connected to home and friends. In addition, research contained in this document provides innovative strategies to enhance center and

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dorm culture. There are also methods discussed which help female students become affiliated, engaged and feel good about themselves, boosting their self-esteem. Those reading this report will also learn more about a new research-based approach to supporting young women on center through the application of gender specific training and networking opportunities, as well as female specific activities.

This paper also offers a variety of novel strategies on how to deal with homesickness and how a center can maintain a culture which supports a healthy way of life. Furthermore, there is a discussion on modern partnerships to help address childcare issues. Finally, the paper and appendix is filled with informative data on female Job Corps students (e.g. length of stay, outcomes and comparisons).

Overall, the information, strategies, and practices in this report shed light on the issues facing females in Job Corps and provide a variety of suggestions to staff challenged with the responsibility for recruitment and retention.

are leaving home for the first time. They frequently struggle to acclimate within a group of students which are very ethnically diverse. They must also transition into a group of youth with different values and from many cultures, as well as one with a lot of males. It is overwhelming for many of the female students, with many core life issues needing to be processed; female students often have very little, if any experience, handling the variety of concerns they face when they arrive on center. This situation demands special attention and focus from staff at all points along the continuum of support, but most importantly when the female students arrive on center. This is where gender-specific group meetings, lead by female staff and student leaders, can be of such great support and guidance.

The admissions process is essential for communication of what Job Corps is and the expectations for students within the program. Further, this process should include assessments to gain a better understanding of the student and evaluate the holistic needs of each student. Assessments that shed light on students'

"I have learned the truism of the old adage that when you educate a woman you educate a nation. We must understand how important it is for us to learn and teach. There are no limits on our abilities so don't impose them on ourselves."

June Boswell

(Retired Regional Director, Job Corps)

ADMISSIONS

To effectively retain students in Job Corps, the process of retention must begin during the admissions process. Nationally, the percentage of females enrolling in Job Corps is increasing from 40.5% in PY 2007, to 41% in PY 2008 to 41.7% in PY 2009.¹² However, given the quantity of women joining the workforce, this rate could grow even more in coming years. While the practice of being able to enroll with a friend has been possible for a number of years, staff should be aware of how helpful this is in the efforts to retain female students. If friends are able to enter together, while limited to anecdotal evidence, these students, who are allowed to live together on center reportedly stay longer and have better chances at graduating.

An immediate challenge for recruiters seeking to enroll female students is the fact that these students tend to enter the center/program feeling alone, scared and homesick. Further, many of these young females

characteristics allow center staff to better serve students and focus the appropriate resources as needed. Assessments could and/or should determine at the very least:

- Educational level,
- Career interest,
- Special needs,
- Commitment level,
- Sociability,
- Resiliency level,
- Responsibility, and
- Work discipline.¹³

With these factors known, staff that have been trained on how to use the assessment results can better support and facilitate student success from the moment they arrive on center, thus increasing retention.

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While assessments provide the information needed for a center to best provide services to students, admissions counselors (AC) are at the forefront of providing information about Job Corps to prospective students and are the beginning of the retention process. Students have so many decisions to make, one of which is what trade to choose. This is often difficult due to the limited number of choices which appear more palatable to females. A recent GAO report indicated that the trade offerings at the centers could contain more trades/career options that females wished to pursue.¹⁴

Once a student is enrolled in the program, her relationship with the admission counselor should continue. Some of the strategies which have proven successful in retention include admissions counselors providing the following services to assist the center in retaining students:¹⁵

- Periodically check in personally with students;
- Use common interests as a way to connect (i.e. sports, hobbies, etc);
- Continually remind students that Job Corps is a short term commitment that will pay off for long term goals; and
- When possible, be at the center when students arrive for the first day to relieve anxiety and safety concerns that may present, especially for female students.

A smooth admissions process is critical to student retention. Admissions counselors should maintain relationships with students and center staff throughout students' education and training programs. Prior to the student's arrival on center, there are many processes centers utilize to ensure a smooth transition from home to center life.

PRE-ARRIVAL PROCESS

Pre-arrival activities are just what the name implies – activities that must occur before students arrive at the center. These activities ensure that staff are prepared to welcome and receive new students. Quality pre-arrival activities help to:

- Create a positive first impression with new students through a pre-arrival contact;
- Provide students, as well as parents/guardians, with a point of contact and phone/text number in the event they have center related questions;
- Provide new students with information about

what to expect at the airport, reception spot and/or at the center; and

- Encourage students to look forward to the day they arrive.

Nicole Dekay Graduated 2008

When I came to PIVOT, I had my judgments about it and what kind of place it would be, but they were all wrong. The staff was caring and knowledgeable about what they taught, and they work with you to help you succeed. The students were welcoming and nice. I not only got an education, but I also gained perspective about what I wanted to do in my own life.

(PIVOT Job Corps Center, Success Lasts a Life Time, 2008)

ON CENTER

While the pre-arrival contacts help new students form an initial impression of the center, those impressions are further developed by the reception process they experience upon their arrival. This includes their experiences at the bus station or airport, the center reception area, their dorms, the cafeteria, etc. *Therefore, the entire center must be poised and ready for the arrival of new students.* Arrival activities must be planned, well-organized, and welcoming. MTC believes that quality arrival activities:

- Help students feel like they made the right choice by enrolling in the Job Corps program;
- Get all new students engaged in at least one club, activity, or program;
- Discuss with students the value of their education and training;
- Create excitement about MTC's employability and career development training programs,¹⁶ and
- Encourage students to stay and graduate from the program.

Just as business travelers want to phone home when they reach their destination, the new students want to do the same. All students must be offered the opportunity to make a safe arrival call. This helps alleviate their anxiety and helps in the initial settling process.

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To further relieve anxiety, a welcome lunch or dinner should be arranged. The CPP staff and the student mentors/ambassadors should also participate in this welcome dinner.

Following each new student's arrival at the center, a Parental Support Letter and a Parental Pledge of Support should be mailed (see Appendix B). It is always helpful to allow the student to write a short message at the bottom of the letter. This effort is time well spent, as it engages the parents or legal guardian in the student's performance in the program and provides them with a point of contact. Experience tells us that parents/guardians are a crucial resource in our efforts to improve student retention.¹⁷ To effectively utilize parents/guardians and to create an environment where they have a positive influence on the student, centers should involve them early in the student's enrollment.

As women enter Job Corps, the need for meaningful human connection is extremely important. A commitment to believing that each student can succeed should drive all services. In many ways, the first 60 days represents a time for incoming students either to embrace Job Corps or to disconnect from the program. It is important that center staff work expeditiously to get female students into Career Technical Training (CTT) programs as soon as possible, even if the program is overbooked.

As mentioned above, a regular set of meetings designed to bring newly arrived female students together with female staff and student leaders offers a research-based promise of improving the level of communication, understanding and guidance for the females on center struggling to manage a vast array of personal and professional challenges. In addition, the assignment of mentors upon arrival is of great importance in helping female students assimilate, offering friendship and a safe environment to discuss things that occur with them on center. Residential Advisors should pay close attention to new female students as well, reaching out to them, regularly encouraging them and offering opportunities to become more engaged, as well as supportive of any special needs counselors or mentors may share.

Every effort must be made during the career preparation period to offer exciting and challenging individualized training, rather than a litany of rules and regulations for students to follow. The primary objective should be to offer as much face-to-face, hands-on,

direct contact, and service delivery experiences as center resources permit.

While there are multiple reasons why students leave Job Corps, this report discusses seven top reasons that impact their decisions and strategies which support student retention, including:

- Center culture,
- Dorm culture,
- Affiliation,
- Self-esteem,
- Home and family issues,
- Relationships, and
- Wellness concerns.

As well as discussing each issue, strategies to improve retention will be discussed and also summarized in Appendix C.

Center Culture

The importance of positive center culture cannot be underestimated on its impact on retention. Center Culture also relates to the safety of the student. Many articles have been written about the importance of school safety. In particular, if women don't feel safe, they will leave quickly. Safety is many things:

- Do students feel physically safe in their dorm rooms, and around center? (i.e. so they can focus on studies; alleviate concerns of parents; both of which help address retention).
- Do students feel bullied?
- Do students feel they have a friend on center they can confide in?
- Do all females have a female mentor?
- Does the center have a positive atmosphere?
- Is there an anonymous way for students to report inappropriate behavior, and does the center have a policy to handle such behavior, so that female students feel validated and feel their concern has not only been heard but is being addressed?

These are some of the things center staff must be aware of when evaluating the center's culture. Methods that centers can utilize to ensure that students keep a positive center culture amongst one another include:

Success Story

Anita Anfo

Anita graduated from Clearfield Job Corps as a full program completer on May 22, 2008. She plans on continuing her education and using her scholarship to the best of her ability. Over the next four years she hopes to “achieve everything that I can.”

When asked what she thought the best lesson that Job Corps had helped her realize or learn. She summarized the answer with “keeping a positive attitude and respect for those you work and learn with.”

Ms. Anfo wants to share from her experience at Job Corps and let other students know that “it is never too late to make things right, always look forward to your future as the past is in the past and there’s no room for excuses; all you need to do is make an effort to succeed.”

(Clearfield Job Corps Center, Success Lasts a Life Time, 2008)

- Helping students take responsibility for their actions and setting clear and consistent rules and expectations.
- Bringing noteworthy speakers to the center to address pertinent issues students are concerned about and to serve as role models too.
- Teaching all students common respect and proper ways to interact.
- Developing supportive relationships between students and staff that are warm but firm. Listening to one other, describing any violations in a direct, objective, and specific manner. Giving students a chance to answer and keeping an open mind.
- Teaching each student how to communicate what is bothering them in a friendly and non-intimidating way.
- Teaching programs for young men that show the appropriate way to interact with young women.
- Creating a program for female students that provides group support and allows for teaching of appropriate behavior while building self esteem.

- Teaching young women how to handle sexual advances made toward them, how to talk with boys without leading them on, to not be ashamed, and ways to not internalize inappropriate advances.
- Helping females understand they have the power to say “no” and that it is okay to do so.
- Creating positive social norms, along with student involved rule setting activities.

Center culture involves many complex issues connecting to most of the reasons female students leave before finishing the program.

Dorm Culture¹⁸

Students spend a good part of their day in classes and training but the majority of their time is spent in their dorms.

Dorm culture is at the heart of student success in the Job Corps program. If the dorm does not provide a safe, supportive, and positive environment, students will not stay.

What is dorm culture? It is the feeling students get the minute they step foot into a dorm. It is the energy that surrounds the interactions of residential advisors and students. It is the level of cleanliness and order throughout the dorm from the common areas to the

“The culture of your dorm is the most important retention factor. We need to know student needs, shortcomings, anxieties, and have a full understanding of their impatience.”

Dr. Robert L. Marquardt, Chairman Emeritus, Management & Training Corporation

student rooms, to storage and cleaning supply closets. It is the reputation of the dorm. It is the pride students take in telling others what dorm they live in, who their residential advisors (RA) are, and what is happening where they live.

Supported by center administrators, there are a variety of influencing factors that can be created and maintained by residential advisors in order to create conditions which promote the development of positive dorm culture:¹⁹

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- Freedom with structure – A sense of belonging and responsibility for each student, without losing personal identity. This can be as simple as bulletin boards and space within a room, as well as rules that allow for hanging and displaying of personal effects, such as pictures, posters, etc.
- The attitudes and behaviors of RA's – RA's serve as role models that students look up to and respect, and are natural, automatic mentors.
- Student involvement in dorm programs – A sense of accomplishment, pride, and ownership.
- The creation of a positive atmosphere – A fun and exciting learning and living environment.
- Utilizing a variety of teaching styles – RA's promote curiosity and support creativity, and their interactions with students must appeal to a variety of learning styles.
- Viewing differences as resources – A spirit of adventure through healthy risk taking, individual respect, and pride in work.
- Viewing students as assets – Empower students through training and experience in leadership and responsibility, team work, respect, and ownership.
- Utilizing students as resources to maintain the dorm culture – Staff view students capable to take action, promoting increased self-respect and ownership, and developing independent living skills.

In creating a positive dorm culture, both the students and staff accept everyone as individuals, each with rights and responsibilities, and each with goals and needs. With this in mind, both students and staff seek to create a community living environment in which maximum learning and personal growth can take place.

Another part of dorm culture applies to the look of the dorm rooms and common areas, as people tend to internalize their surroundings. The appearance and feel of their living environment will affect students in a variety of ways:²⁰

- Attitude
- Self-esteem
- Ability to learn
- Follow-through

- Organization
- Understanding
- Behavior
- Motivation
- Initiative
- Health and hygiene

Affiliation

Life on center for females can be very challenging, at least at first. Research supports the notion that a center can do more to help improve retention of female students during the first 90 days by having multiple opportunities for young women to come together early during their stay at the center to meet with female student leaders and female staff members to discuss life on center.²¹

A curriculum could be easily assembled to structure a multiple session, gender-specific training program designed to enlighten and educate young women new to the center or those on center who are struggling with a variety of issues (e.g. coping strategies, interaction with other students, working in a male dominated field, self-esteem, self-respect, appropriate uses of personal power, dealing effectively with bullying, etc.).

"Some days I just want to go home, yet other days I love it here. I hope these feelings of being homesick go away."

Anonymous Job Corps Student

Another major issue affecting the ability of females to acclimate to center life is the feeling of home sickness. Home sickness affects everyone no matter the age or length of time one is away from home.

Females who feel homesick may feel isolated, depressed, and physically ill.²² There are many signs of homesickness. A female might have loss of appetite, headaches, stomachaches, and anxiety issues.

Though homesickness is pervasive in all people, there are certain strategies that work to address the early departure of so many female students, thereby assisting in acclimation to Job Corps in such ways as²³:

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- When women first arrive on center make sure there are several all-female meetings hosted by the female members of the student leadership.
- Allow students to call home frequently. A connection to home can create a feeling of peace and belonging.
- Allow students to keep cell phones so that they can keep in contact with friends and others during non-scheduled time.
- Design center visit days where friends and family can see them on campus. Having the student show off their new life can create a connection between the facility and the student. It also helps parents and friends understand the changes in the student's life and can help build a support system.
- Encourage family and friends to send "care" packages with home baked goods or other items from home that can be delivered by loved ones. Knowing someone is thinking about you is a great feeling.
- Set up groups where female students can talk about their feelings and discover that they are not alone in their feelings.

Success Story

Alla Zhuchenya

Alla Zhuchenya successfully became a certified nursing assistant (CNA) in the Springdale Job Corps Center Health Occupations Program in the fall of 2003 and is still working as a CNA at Alterra Wynwood Assisted Living in Gresham.

Alla was a non-resident student who worked 10-15 hours a week to cover extra living expenses while completing the training for her CNA license. She completed the program in nine months, and her advice to new students is "stick to your goals - it's worth it."

Alla now works 40 hours a week with full benefits and has become a Certified Medical Assistant.

(Springdale Job Corps Center, Success Lasts a Life time, 2008)

Young women need to feel a certain connection with the center in order to stay and complete their education and training. Females have a unique mindset about belonging and fitting in. Centers should provide female-specific activities, using student input. Some possibilities include:

- Fashion show night
- Mall visits
- Dances
- Aerobic classes
- Sleep overs
- Make overs
- Proms
- Yoga
- Girl boutiques
- Writing club
- Sports

Staff can place suggestion boxes in dorms. Dorm rooms can vote on what activity they will do the next week. The effect of student input into an activity can be the difference between a successful or unsuccessful activity.

Formulating effective approaches to ensure affiliation occurs should be a topic of discussion among all center staff. The following approaches have been found effective in developing and sustaining a culture of affiliation on center.

- Student Ownership - Encourage student involvement in room and dorm décor selections.
- Publications and Bulletin Boards - Erect public displays of recognition using newsletters, bulletin boards, or other media that praise student performance.
- Role Models and Mentors - Use student role models as mentors as much as possible, to provide peer support and affiliation.
- Social Activities - Participation in student-generated, staff-facilitated clubs and social activities can be creative, fun experiences.
- Individual Incentives - Reward students for participation using t-shirts, balloons, mugs, and privileges that bestow more liberty.

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Self Esteem

Self esteem is the way one feels and views themselves. Good self esteem is vital in having a successful and happy life. Without good self esteem, depression and feelings of inadequacy can increase and the enjoyment of life starts to deteriorate. Low self esteem affects relationships, happiness, and health. There are many programs and tips to help staff and students better their own and someone else's self esteem.²⁴

- Provide opportunities for females to become leaders. Confidence is built when involvement in planning and decision-making is elicited.
- Be a "listening ear" where females can reminisce about their day and how they feel. Confidence in sharing and communicating will occur when they know someone cares enough to really listen.

addition, research demonstrated that females tend to turn to certain male figures for security from abusive families, and other aggressive students.²⁷

Job Corps may be some young women's first chance at success in life. Relationships prior to enrollment in the program have been found to influence students' beliefs, values, and opportunities. Family dysfunction is sometimes generational and may be "all the student knows" regarding relationships. Dysfunction in relationships is a societal issue which Job Corps staff should be trained to identify and address. All students should be taught the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships and how to deal appropriately with conflict. Centers should offer a variety of groups and workshops for students experiencing relationship issues.

"Seven in ten girls believe they are not good enough or do not measure up in some way, including their looks, performance in school, and relationships with friends and family members."

Dove Real Girls, Real Pressure: A National Report on the State of Self-Esteem Commissioned: June 2008

- Provide a safe place where real issues can be discussed in a confidential environment of trust where they feel emotionally safe to share.
- Provide a variety of activities that are fun and engaging where girls can "just be girls".
- Communicate honestly and positively. Self-image is determined by self-perception and the perception of others.
- Provide groups for strengthening self-esteem to include dealing with body image and diet.
- Invite successful women to motivate females to realize what they are capable of achieving.

Relationships

Some young women tend to throw their entire attention, affection, and emotions into a chance for a relationship. A recent study examined ethnic minority girls' perceptions of risk factors for female gang involvement.²⁵ Thirty-one female students at an alternative school in a high-crime, urban environment were interviewed with regard to their beliefs about why adolescent or young females join in chance relationships. Peer pressure was believed to be the largest influence on female relationship involvement.²⁶ In

Home And Family Issues

One of the most difficult issues for those female students who have children is arranging care for their children. It has been estimated that about 20% of incoming students have dependents (i.e. children).²⁸ For those that decide they want to have their children with them during their stay in Job Corps, the student can choose to go to one of several single parent programs (e.g. Quentin N. Burdick, Flint Hills JCC, etc.).²⁹ Unfortunately, these programs are few in number and size, and for those who do not want to leave where they have been living; this typically means arranging daycare with family members.³⁰

Regrettably, students typically do not have a backup plan and when the family member cannot watch the child. Problems with daycare are a primary source of female student school absences.³¹ In a number of centers, staff and admissions counselors are working to establish linkages with local daycare centers near the center, using in some instances support from the Department of Workforce Services or other similar agency. Where it is possible, students can seek non-residential status. When a student is being considered for non-residential status, they could enroll as a residential student for about 90 days and if they still

want to become a non-residential student, they should be required to sign a contract spelling out the essential guidelines for non-residential student status.³²

Success Story

Allison Madsen

Parent of a PIVOT Graduate

“The transformation of my child into a young woman with confidence is a beautiful thing, and I am very, very grateful to the PIVOT program. The staff truly care that the students achieve their goals and go above and beyond to facilitate their success. Any and every young woman would benefit from the education and life skills taught at PIVOT.”

(Pivot Job Corps Center, Success Lasts a Life Time, 2008)

When talking about home and family issues, there are also differences which exist over the concept of family. For some, family extends beyond the nucleus of the mother, father, siblings to include grandparent, uncles, aunts, and cousins many times over.³³ Obligations to family members is expected and accepted. For instance, Hispanics express strong family attachment and are more likely to underscore the importance of family issues. In addition, they are overwhelmingly positive about the opportunity for advancement.³⁴

Staff may find it useful to explore certain issues with girls who are leaving home for the first time. Susan Daigneault, author of *Legacies and Leaving Home*, suggests that girls may find it beneficial to discuss the distance from home, family cohesiveness, what it means to become a woman and how they may be able to do a better job of coping with life at the center.³⁵ In addition, she advises that staff can help these young women consider their past experiences and what they have which will help them deal with this new future. Hopefully, these new students have brought some things as well as the memories of family legacies which remind them of home to ease them into this transition. Staff can also help by getting the girls to think about how they were successful dealing with change in the past, applying those strategies in this situation. Many girls seem to admire and benefit from role models who are competent, self-sufficient, strong women – in some cases, their mothers or grandmothers.³⁶ Adult women

speakers on campus, who are successful in a wide array of professions, could be very useful.

Engaging students’ families early on to understand the benefits of the program can deter parents/guardians from applying pressure to come home. Retention has been shown to improve when parents/guardians are asked to sign a letter of support which details the length of the program, education and training schedule, and information regarding placement services and expected salary.

Trade Offerings

An immediate challenge for recruiters and center staff is addressing the options available in the Career Technical Training. For female students, the number and type of career technical trades that are typically considered “female oriented” are somewhat limited. The MTC Institute reviewed the 261 CTT trade options at centers nationwide. Informally polling a number of Job Corps staff, a determination was made that 147 (56.3%) were predominantly male oriented CTT options; 56 (21.5%) perceived to be equally appealing to men and women and 58 (22.2%) predominantly oriented to female students.³⁷ It is suggested that one way Job Corps can address recruitment and ultimately retention is to consider offering more trades that female students prefer and have an interest in attending.³⁸

Wellness Concerns

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, teens are more likely to consume soda and fried foods and exercise less than their global teen counterparts. Chronic diseases associated with obesity, such as diabetes, are now seen in young people. When asked about issues facing today’s young women, Dr. Wanda Jones, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health, said, “The number one issue is girls having respect for their body. Everything from how they treat their body, how they care for it, how they work for it, not poisoning it... all come from having respect for the body.”³⁹

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’, Office on Women’s Health (OWH) is committed to increasing overall health and fitness awareness as well as the development of healthy lifestyles among women and provides interactive Web-based tools such as a ‘Speak Up’ forum in order to engage young women to take proactive steps towards a healthy lifestyle early on in life.⁴⁰

Strategies to Improve Female Student Retention

Job Corps centers should provide valuable information about preventative measures women can take against the onset of various diseases. Center wellness programs promote healthy, positive behaviors in students. MTC provides centers with current, reliable, and useful information on various health issues girls face as they become young women, and tips on handling relationships with family and friends, at school, and at home. (See Appendix D)

CONCLUSION

It is vital to the success of all students that they stay longer in Job Corps so they can acquire necessary education, skills and ultimately a job paying higher wages. While female students are separating in higher numbers than desired from the Job Corps program, especially in the first 90 days, the overall rates are somewhat consistent with their male counterparts. From January 2009 through June 2010, female students accounted for 44.8% of the separating graduates.⁴¹ Even though female students do not equal half of all enrolled Job Corps students their graduation rates are 4.1% higher than all other graduates at 59.8%.⁴² Although female students stay longer or equal to their male counterparts, staff readily acknowledge that retention of female students can and should be improved.

There is an increasingly heated competition for skilled workers in various business sectors. Recognizing the declining number of skilled workers available and the growing number of women participating in the workforce, entering higher education, and completing advanced degrees, Job Corps will continue to help their female students understand that competition and the value of the educational opportunities which the program offers.

The trade offerings within Job Corps continue to change, adapting to the labor market to help student graduates to be successfully placed. The movement by women into the workplace in greater numbers and into the so called 'non-traditional' more male oriented occupations is expanding, even within Job Corps. As the Job Corps program critically evaluates offerings for inclusion, it is important that the rubric include expanding those vocational offerings that may be viewed as 'female oriented.' In fact, a recent GAO report supported the concept, indicating that if these trade types were increased, it probably would serve to entice more females into the program.

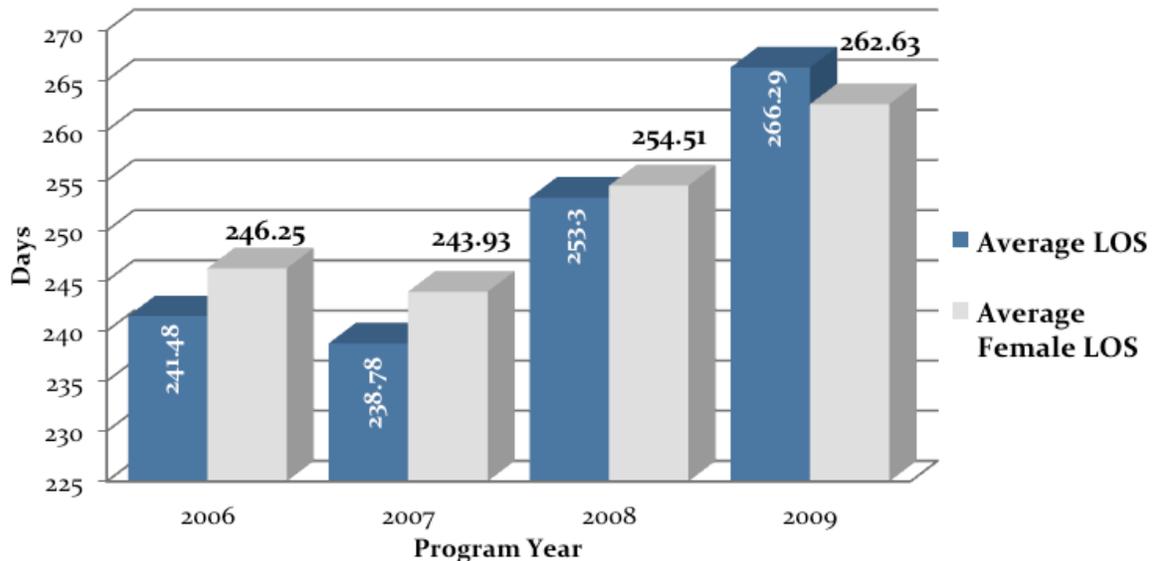
For female students, life on center is challenging for a number of reasons. The professionals that operate the centers know that center culture plays a critical part in student retention and they strive to create an environment that is engaging and supportive. Part of the reason that some female students have difficulty sticking with the program is poor self-esteem. Programs have been established and staff are working with students to improve this factor, as well as dealing with relationships and wellness concerns. Anecdotally, home and family issues probably are the biggest obstacle to retention. These issues strike to the depths of the emotional bonding issues that many young females struggle with most when they leave home to come to a Job Corps center. These factors are prime motivators for the development and installation of a female only (i.e. gender-specific) support group, lead by female staff and student leaders, that would address the multitude of issues female students encounter when they arrive and during their stay at a Job Corps center.

The information and practices in this manuscript provide valuable suggestions and recommendations designed to assist centers and staff to more effectively serve all students, and especially female students.

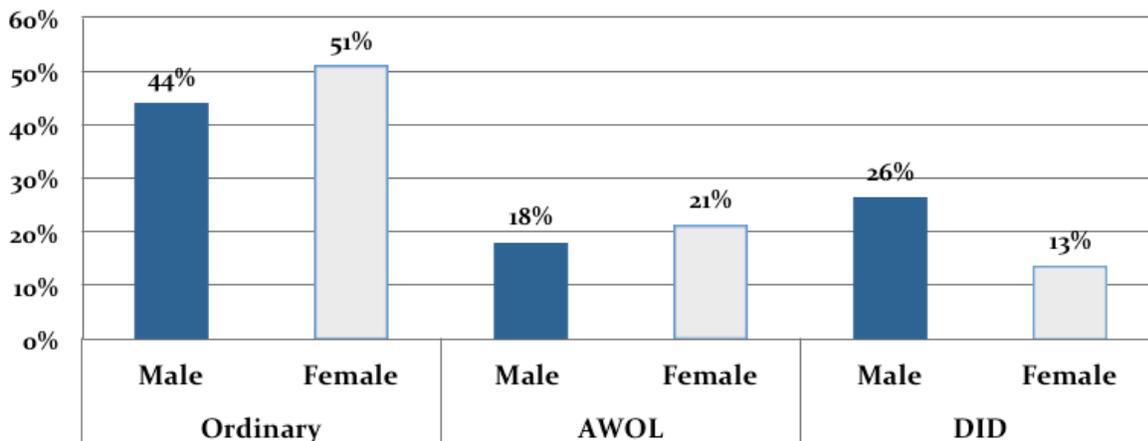
Appendix A: Statistics, Charts and Graphs

Below are charts and graphs of female Job Corps student statistics which provide insight into what is taking place in terms of retention and outcomes ⁴³

Average vs. Female Length of Stay by Program Year for 2006-2009



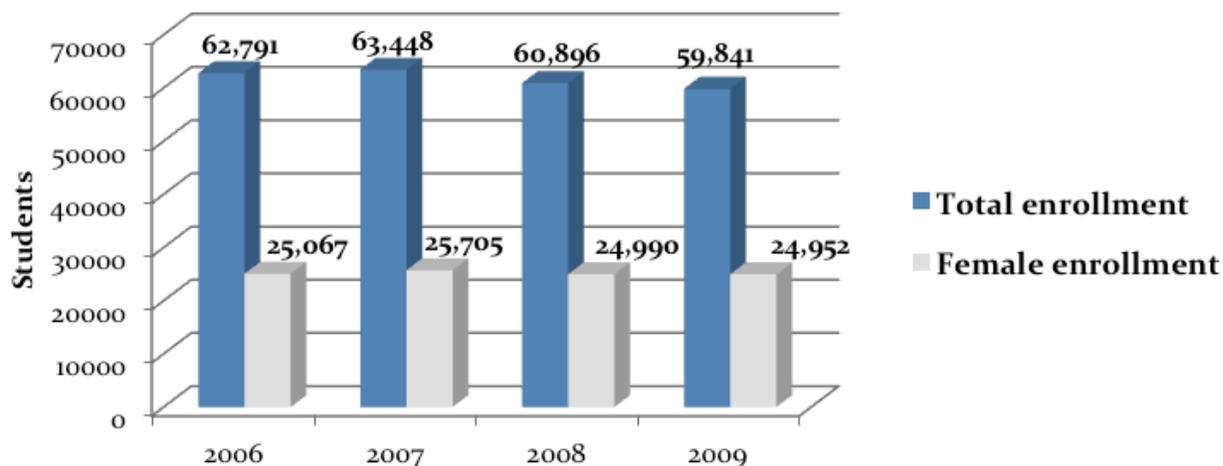
Male vs. Female Separations for PY09



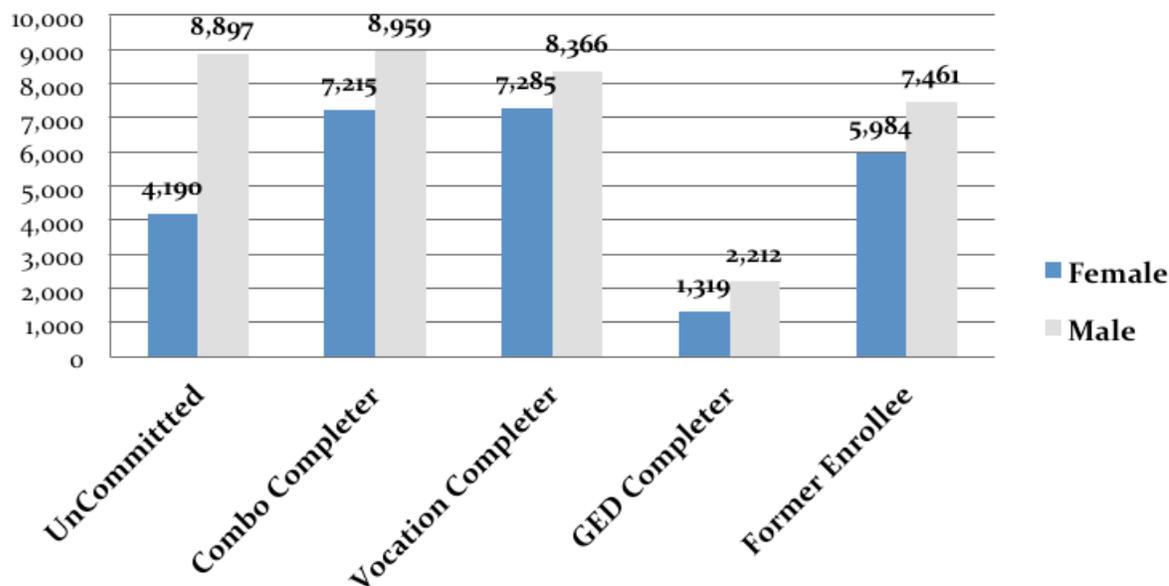
Separation definitions: ⁴⁴

- Orderly (Ordinary) separation – Student has separated as scheduled.
- Absent Without Leave (AWOL) separation – A student is in AWOL status in excess of 6 consecutive training days, or 12 non-consecutive training days in a 6-month period.
- Disciplinary (DID) separation – Student has committed a behavioral infraction or has an accumulation of behavioral infractions of such gravity that it disqualifies him or her from further enrollment in Job Corps.

National and Female Enrollment by Program Year for 2006-2009



Male vs. Female Graduate Status for PY09



Graduate status definitions: ⁴⁵

- Uncommitted Student – one who has remained in Job Corps less than 60 days (regardless of achievement), or who has separated for a serious disciplinary reason (i.e. Zero Tolerance “Level One” infraction).
- Combo-Completer – one who has completed an academic program earning a high school diploma or GED and completed their chosen vocational trade program.
- Vocational Completer – one who has completed their chosen vocational trade program.
- GED Completer – one who has passed the General Educational Development (GED) tests and achieved a certificate denoting achievement of academic skill levels equivalent to those of a high school diploma.

Appendix B: Parent Letter

(The following statements / titles, while not all inclusive, share content excerpted from the pre-printed Parent Letter sent to parents and guardians of newly arrived students of MTC centers)

CONGRATULATIONS

You have helped your student make a life-changing decision!

Job Corps changes lives - IMPROVES LIVES. It's been doing this since 1964. More than two million young men and women have benefited greatly from Job Corps. Now your loved one has the opportunity to join that group. They will be better able to do that with your help and support.

We hope this letter will help you to better understand the terrific, fully-funded opportunity that lies ahead for your loved one and how you can continue to help them. The estimated value for the training they will receive is about \$25,000 each year. While on center they will enjoy free basic medical and dental care - and bi weekly living allowances, as well as money for clothing and graduation bonuses. Then after they receive all the training they need, they will be assisted in landing a great job.

CHANGE IS NEVER EASY

Many Job Corps students call home soon after arriving at their center, to say:

- I miss you
- Everybody here is strange
- The food isn't as good as yours
- My roommate is different
- Or any one of a million other things

Your encouragement for them to complete the program is CRITICAL! You can take the easy route by telling them to "come on home." Remember though, they will be home to visit during summer and winter breaks. Job Corps will even pay for their transportation.

We hope you will tell them what they really need to hear, like "Give yourself some time to adjust - you'll be grateful after you graduate and enter a career with advancement opportunities and higher salaries."

Even if they don't always show it, your loved one respects your opinion. If you open the door for them to come home quickly, unfortunately they may do so, and miss the opportunities Job Corps can provide.

Job Corps provides your student the skills needed to compete in today's workforce. They will develop their academic skills and most will earn industry-recognized certifications. Your student will benefit by learning how to live independently and will develop lifelong friendships

JOB CORPS OFFERS A SAFE PLACE TO LIVE AND LEARN

EDUCATION AND WORK SKILLS ARE KEY

QUALITY WORK EXPERIENCE

POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

FINAL THOUGHTS

Students, who quit Job Corps because they miss their family and friends, typically end up stuck in a low-wage job with no chance of advancement. Let's work together so this won't happen.

Finally, if your loved one raises concerns about anything at their center, please encourage them to speak with their counselor or someone else on the management team. If that doesn't resolve the issue, we want you to call the center. Our staff is trained to resolve problems quickly and effectively through open communication with you.

Appendix C: Issues / Suggestions Table

| Issues Facing Female Students | Suggestions/Solutions |
|--|---|
| <p>A. Center culture is listed as the number one reason why students stay on center – and the number one reason students leave.</p> <p>Source: Residential Living Training Manual</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continually measure the culture of the center. Listen to each other. Give students the opportunity to answer and keep an open mind. • Create a program for young men to learn how to appropriately talk with and treat female students they become attracted to. • Teach female students how to say ‘no’ and that it is okay to say no. |
| <p>B. More than 78% of female students at Job Corps say they are victims of unwanted sexual advances or are ‘hit on’ by male students during their first three weeks on center.</p> <p>Source: Female Student Survey at a Job Corps Center</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training to all male students regarding appropriate ways to treat female students. • Provide female students with training during their first week on how to handle inappropriate advances. • Provide self-esteem classes for both male and female students upon entry. • Encourage and support a buddy system. |
| <p>C. When female students were surveyed, more than 65% said there weren’t enough female-only activities for them to participate in at their center.</p> <p>Source: Student Survey at a Job Corps Center</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a system where female students determine “girl-only” activities on center. • Make sure there are times for female-only swimming, male-only swimming, and all-swim. • Provide time in the gym for girl-only exercise and aerobic classes. • Provide classes for girls in dealing with stress and anger issues. • Provide group guided intervention, where girls are expected to develop and maintain a positive culture on center. |
| <p>D. Relationships issues are a topic of concern for female students.</p> <p>Source: Training Guide of Positive Culture</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female students should not be assigned in the same dorms as their significant other or partner. • Use community partners and volunteers to be assigned a student to mentor and be connected to so they not only network professionally, but can gain interpersonal skills in developing relationships with people in the workforce. • Develop a female mentoring program with women business owners (NAWBO). |

Appendix C: Issues / Suggestions Table

| Issues Facing Female Students | Suggestions/Solutions |
|---|---|
| <p>E. Female students may feel alone or isolated.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage girls to sign up for Job Corps with a friend or family member. • Build up a two-way communication between OA counselors and the center. Familiarize OA with trades offered, enrollment levels, physical layout of the center, and other relevant information. When possible, have the OA counselors visit the center. • Have each staff member assigned as a mentor to each new student for at least their first 60 days. • Offer a variety of afternoon and evening activities to prevent homesickness and feelings of being alone. |
| <p>F. Only 32% of females graduate from Job Corps with vocation trade of their choice. This can be attributed to females becoming homesick and going AWOL.</p> <p>Source: Executive Information System National - June 2010</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more trades women are interested in and where they can continue with further education. • Allow females to call home frequently. • Provide open houses for friends and family to visit the center and see the students' dorms, training areas, etc. • Design care packages that can be easily delivered to girls during their first six weeks on campus by family / friends. • Set up a 'Skype' account where students can do a weekly video meeting with family. |

Source: Table developed by Lyndsi Maglish with the assistance of Carol Savage.

Appendix D: Helpful Web Sites

There are numerous Web sites with health and wellness-related tips that should be provided to Job Corps staff weekly. By putting this information at their fingertips and sending a health message weekly, we would be able to consistently focus on the health and wellness of our female population in a much more proactive way. Some Web sites include:⁴⁶

An online guide to healthy ways of dieting.

- <http://www.womenfitness.net/10tips.htm>

Information on how to improve the health, safety, and well-being of American women.

- <http://www.girlshealth.gov/>

iEmily provides balanced, respectful information that girls can use to make their own decisions.

- <http://www.iemily.com/aboutus.html>

These are just a few Web sites that can be reviewed to get things started. Also, consider looking up female-friendly Web sites that discuss issues facing young women today. Possibly look into all Web sites that a female might find interesting in order to make a connection or gain ideas in connecting with each individual female student. Some possible Web sites could be:

A list of Web sites pertaining to female interests.

- http://userpages.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/links_girls.html

Resources females can use to improve their education, skills, and job prospects.

- <http://www.soroptimist.org/>

An online community such as Zoey's Room; this Web site encourages creativity through science, technology, engineering, and math.

- <http://www.zoeyroom.com/>

Girl Scouts of the U.S.A is a popular Web site linking to activities and projects just for girls.

- <http://www.girlscouts.org/>

- ¹ Department Labor of Women’s Bureau. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/main.htm>
- ² United States Census Bureau. Retrieved November 8, 2010 from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-qr_name=ACS_2009_1YR_G00_DP5&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=&-_lang=en
- ³ National Bureau of Economic Research. 10 July 2010 <http://www.nber.org>. National Center for Educational Statistics (2007). Projections of educational statistics to 2016. Retrieved December 19, 2007 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pro-grams/projections/projections2016/sec4b.asp>.
- ⁴ Job Corps Data Center – Executive Information System. Female Graduates. Retrieved on July 7, 2010.
- ⁵ Job Corps Data Center – Executive Information System. Female Graduates. Retrieved on July 7, 2010.
- ⁶ Jobs For the Future. Accessed 1/14/2011 from http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/college_success_for_all_0.pdf
- ⁷ Job Corps Student Database Report MPO35. Retrieved July, 6, 2010.
- ⁸ Former Enrollees or students who enrolled in Job Corps, but did not successfully complete their academic and/or career technical training programs.
- ⁹ Job Corps Student Database Report MPO35. Retrieved July, 6, 2010.
- ¹⁰ Contains, The Resource Library. Alliance for Excellent Education. 2005. 29 June 2010.
- ¹¹ Wall Street Journal. Accessed 8/12/2010 from http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704895004575395491314812452.html?mod=WSJ_hpp_sections_careerjournal
- ¹² Job Corps Data Center – Executive Information System.
- ¹³ Many assessments exist that can give insight into the list given. However, it is rare that there is one assessment that can be used. Therefore it is important that the proper assessment is used and that what is actually being assessed will help a student succeed in Job Corps.
- ¹⁴ US Government Accounting Office (2009). Job Corps: Better Targeted Career Training and Improved Preenrollment Information Could Enhance Female Residential Student Recruitment and Retention. (GAO-09-470 June 2, 2009). Retrieved from <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-470> The report stated: “Three key factors affect Job Corps’ ability to recruit and retain residential students, particularly female residential students--availability of career training options, complete and accurate preenrollment information, and quality of center life. The selection and availability of career training offerings in occupations of interest to students play a major role in Job Corps’ ability to recruit students, particularly female residential students, according to officials...”
- ¹⁵ Chad Davis, Admissions Counselor, Utah/ Montana OA/CTS, personal interview.
- ¹⁶ The MTC Career Readiness 360 program focuses on career readiness from the admissions process through the separation process, not just the last sixty days of enrollment. This holistic program requires all staff to be responsible for assisting students in developing and honing the soft skills (e.g. interviewing, appearance, resume, etc.), required to obtain and keep a good job.
- ¹⁷ Robert Marquardt, personal interview.
- ¹⁸ Institute, MTC. “Road Map to Retention.” 2002.
- ¹⁹ “Residential Living Training Manual”, Salt Lake City: Management & Training Corporation, August 2003.
- ²⁰ “Residential Living Training Manual”, Salt Lake City: Management & Training Corporation, August 2003.
- ²¹ Sax, L. (2007). Why gender matters. Retrieved from <http://www.whygendermatters.com/> Tannen , D. (1994). Talking from 9 to 5: How women’s and men’s conversation styles affect who gets heard, who gets credit, and what gets done at work. New York, NY: W. Morrow and Co. inc. p. 120. Bostock, S. J. & Wu Lizhi (2005). Gender in Student Online Discussions, IETI 42 (1) 73-86 (.pdf file). Retrieved on from <http://www.keele.ac.uk/depts/aa/landt/lt/docs/bostock%20and%20lizhi%20RIIE420107.pdf>. Bostock, S.J., R.V. Seifert & J. McArdle 1987. The effects of learning environment and gender on the attainment of computer literacy. Studies in the education of adults 19, 37-45. Personal Interview with Stephen Bostock via email March 27, 2008.M., Stroebe, et al. “Homesickness among students in two cultures: Antecedents and consequences.” British Journal of Psychology, Volume 93, Number 2 (May 2002): 147-168.
- ²² M., Stroebe, et al. “Homesickness among students in two cultures: Antecedents and consequences.” British Journal of Psychology, Volume 93, Number 2 (May 2002): 147-168.

Endnotes

²³ MTC believes in using innovative ways to assist in center acclimation and retention. At present, an initiative is underway to encourage the National Office of Job Corps to expand bandwidth and allow limited access to social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, Myspace, etc.). In addition, it has been suggested that students be able to set up 'Skype' accounts to enable video meetings with family members and friends.

²⁴ Dove Self-Esteem. "Real Girls, Real Pressure: A National Report on the State of Self Esteem." 2008

²⁵ Perceptions Of Risk Factors For Female Gang Involvement Among African And Hispanic Women. 2001.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Robyn Wright, personal interview November 29, 2010.

²⁹ Quentin Burdick JCC. Retrieved from <http://quentinnburdick.jobcorps.gov/benefits.aspx>. Students in the Solo Parent Program have their own dormitory with room for 24 parents and up to two children per parent. Children must be between six months and school age to live in this dormitory. While the parents are in training during the day, the children are cared for in a day care center which is attached to the Solo Parent dormitory. The day care center is staffed by teachers who are trained to work with young children, and is operated by ABC Childcare.

³⁰ Some students have money put into a Job Corps childcare allotment wherein Job Corps will add five times what the student deposits. These funds can then go to the daycare provider.

³¹ Denise Huff, Dean Helps and Sharon Smauldon, personal interview November 29, 2010.

³² Denise Huff personal interview November 29, 2010 and email of nonresidential student contract terms.

³³ MTC Institute (2005). Job Corps: Promoting Success for Hispanic Youth. Management & Training Corporation.

³⁴ Pew Hispanic Center /Kaiser Family Foundation. (2002). National Survey of Latinos. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

³⁵ Daigneault, S. D. (1999). Legacies and leaving home. Professional School Counseling, Oct99, Vol. 3 Issue 1, p65, 9p.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Analysis of Job Corps trade offerings by MTC Institute.

³⁸ US Government Accounting Office (2009). Job Corps: Better Targeted Career Training and Improved Preenrollment Information Could Enhance Female Residential Student Recruitment and Retention. (GAO-09-470 June 2, 2009). Retrieved from <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-470>

³⁹ Services, U.S. Department of Health & Human. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services HHS.gov. 1 July 2010.

⁴⁰ Health, Office on Womens. www.girlshealth.gov . 1 July 2010

⁴¹ Because Job Corps is an open entry open exit program some students leave before completing their training. Students who leave without completing training and academic coursework are "separating students." While students who complete either technical training or gain a GED or high school diploma or both are classified as a "separating graduate."

⁴² Job Corps Data Center – Executive Information System. Female Graduates. Retrieved on July 7, 2010.

⁴³ Statistics from the Job Corps Data Center Executive Information System.

⁴⁴ Policy and Requirements Handbook (PRH): Job Corps publication containing regulations governing the operations of all aspects of the Job Corps program. PRH Chapter 6: Administrative Support Page 6.4-4.

⁴⁵ Policy and Requirements Handbook (PRH).

⁴⁶ Besides the sites listed here, MTC staff have access to a guide to keep female students healthy in all aspects of their lives - <http://inside.mtctrains.com/jobcorps/Wellness/Wellness.php>

Strategies to Improve Female Student Retention

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