

CPI *Unrestrained* Transcription

Episode 70: Linda Welch

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Host: Terry Vittone

Terry: Hello and welcome to *Unrestrained*, a CPI podcast series. This is your host, Terry Vittone, and today I'm joined by Linda Welch. Hello, and welcome, Linda.

Linda: Hello, Terry. And thank you for inviting me to do this podcast with you.

Terry: You're welcome. Thank you so much for appearing. Let me tell you a little bit about our guest. Linda Welch is a CPI Meritorious Instructor with a powerful and proven commitment to human services. She earned her B.S. in criminal justice from the University of Tennessee at Martin, and her master's in biblical counseling from Friends International Christian University. For the last 33 years, Linda has worked for Youth Villages, a private nonprofit organization dedicated to helping emotionally and behaviorally troubled children and their families live successfully.

According to the Youth Villages website, "From the early days of serving just 80 children a year Youth Villages since has grown to help tens of thousands of children, families, and young people annually with a complete continuum of programs and services across 20 states and 71 and [00:01:00] locations." According to Linda, she believes that she was destined to be at Youth Villages because of her passion for helping people, especially youth.

In our interview today, we'll talk with Linda about her direct work with kids at Dogwood Village campus, and her amazing work as the assistant director of performance improvement, a job that entails an incredible amount of training. All right, let's begin today, Linda, by acquainting our listeners with Youth Villages as an organization. According to your website, Youth Villages has more than 30 years of helping children and families live successfully. Can you start today by telling our listeners about the fundamental purpose and menu of services provided by the organization?

Linda: Yes, I can. We believe in providing the best care and services to children and families. We go above and beyond to do whatever it takes to help our children and families live successfully. We do that through services we offer, which are services such as residential, and [00:02:00] we've got four residential programs here in the city of Memphis. And we have one residential program in Douglasville, Georgia. We have group homes. Four of our

group homes are here in Memphis, and we also have three in Nashville. We have foster care services, Intensive In-Home services, MST services, YVLifeSet services, which is a program that helps children who have aged out of foster care and other services, and to keep them off the streets and give them a future, so to speak. MYPAC is one of our services in Mississippi. Specialized Crisis is our crisis management program. And we also have divergent services in Oregon that does the same things. We have adoptions, mentoring, all these programs, and we serve these children and families through all these programs. So today, we have [00:03:00] services in 20 States, 63 cities, and 71 locations. That's who we are.

Terry: Wow. So, quite a reach that Youth Villages has.

Linda: Oh, yes.

Terry: According to your website, in fact, Youth Villages helps more than 26,000 children and families per year and you guys have a trademarked approach known as Evidentiary Family Restoration. And I wondered if you'd talk about the fundamental components of EFR, or again, Evidentiary Family Restoration?

Linda: Yes, we believe in families, we believe in family preservation. We believe that the best place for the child is in the home, or if not, in the original mom, dad's family, an extension of the family like an aunt, uncle, or grandmother, maybe an older sibling. So it's all about preserving the family or if they already had a home, restoring the family so they can return home. So we look at these five different areas. [00:04:00] The work's very intensive, of course, we're focusing on the child. And then we focus on measuring outcomes. Everything we do is evidence-based. And we like, again, to prepare the child for going back home if they're already out of the home, or keeping the child in-home. So we like to keep the children within the community also—half of them don't understand what community means to them. A lot of our children have had, unfortunately, incidents in the community that involved police.

So we're trying to make sure our kids, when they're in the community, they remain safe. And then we just like to provide accountability to our families and our funders. We have people who come on board to Youth Villages and they support us and they fund some of our programs, so we are accountable to them as well.

Terry: I see. And so, this ties into your slogan or your [00:05:00] model there at Youth Villages, The Force for Families. So that ties in, I guess, to what you just said. What does that mean to you, Linda? And how does it practically apply to some of those outcomes that you mentioned, produced by Youth Villages?

Linda: Well, I think what Youth Villages, and I believe what Youth Villages is doing is we're setting the standard, we're setting the bar high. We want to be the agency where we want people to send their young people, we want to be able to provide these services. And as you can

see, we're all pretty much across the state, the country, sorry, the country. And again, being that force, we're not trying to overpower anybody but we're trying to empower our children and our families. And with that comes along synonyms like strength, power, energy, and impact. My thought is we're trying to shift the mindset of our children and [00:06:00] families from a negative perspective to a positive perspective. And everything we do, like I said, is really outcome-based, is evidence-based. We have a whole department here called outcomes and evaluations that track our youth and families. And they track them up to 6, 12, 18 months, maybe I think also 24 months, to have that data to support what we do. So when we are looking to enter into other states. We have all of that with us to show what we do and what we are doing, does work.

Terry: Linda, what are some of those data points that you would measure at say 6 months to a year, or 18 months?

Linda: Well, I hear them asking questions. I'm not in that department, but sometimes I can hear them talking on the phone. And they wanna know has a child been involved with, you know, again, the police. They wanna know has the child been truant, [00:07:00] and if the child's still in the home, and those kinds of questions. That gives us that information that lets us know that what we did with these youth here in residential worked and then they went home, or what we did with the youth and the family in the home, has worked and does work.

Terry: So really, you're reorienting young people to think of the family unit as something empowering and providing safety rather than something that might threaten them.

Linda: Correct.

Terry: I see.

Linda: You know, it's kind of scary—excuse me, it's kind of scary when children have to be removed from the home and placed in residential. Residential is our most restrictive area. And so it is kind of scary. And then some of them have already been to multiple placements before. So when they get here, a lot of them already have a negative experience and a bad taste, so to speak in their mouth. And so we [00:08:00] want them to know we're not like those other facilities, we're not like those other agencies, we care about you, we wanna help you, we wanna see you get back home, or we wanna see you get back in a less restrictive environment.

Terry: That sounds like—it sounds like from your success that you've had there and from the way you've grown, that your outcomes have been very substantial. And I sense from talking to you that there's an atmosphere at Youth Villages that really telegraphs that positive inclusion as soon as a child gets there.

Linda: Yes.

Terry: In your mission statement, and during our pre-interview, Linda, you spoke about the importance of Youth Villages's mission statement, and I think it really ties us together. It's very concise. It says, "Youth Villages helps children and families live successfully." So could you explain a little bit about what that means to you and how Youth Villages fulfills that mission in practice?

Linda: Yes, you're absolutely right. It is directly to the point. I mean, why beat around the bush? That's what we do. [00:09:00] You know, and we do it with all those services I mentioned earlier. And again, it started here in Tennessee, it started right here in Memphis (Linda Welch note: I should have said Arlington, TN). And from that one program, and then we merged with another residential program, all these other states, and these programs that we have is amazing. I'm still amazed by it. I mean, I've been here 33 years, yes, but I'm still amazed by how the growth has occurred for this organization. So the mission statement is what we use with—well, when I first started here, we didn't have a mission statement, but since we've developed a mission statement, that's what we live by. It guides every decision we make in this organization. And that's one of the first things that we teach new hires. They have to understand the mission statement here, because we want them to know what we're about and along with the mission statement, we have those nine values. So we get everybody to understand [00:10:00] in order for you to be doing what we say we do here at Youth Villages, to have children and families live successfully, you've got to apply those nine values to your daily work.

Terry: So the nine values, could you quickly list those for me? They're on the site, maybe? I'm really—

Linda: They're on the site.

Terry: Okay.

Linda: I mean we live by it. So there's no way you cannot find the values.

Terry: All right, we will put those in the blog post that goes along with this. Now, let's switch, Linda, to a little bit about your career path and your current role and your experience training CPI. I think you mentioned to us just a moment ago that you've been in human services for 33 years. You started back in I think 1986, talk about your career choices and professional development if you would.

Linda: Yes. As I stated before, I started here in 1986, and I'm a native Memphian, [00:11:00] and I've lived here my entire life. My heart has always been toward working with children and families. Initially, I thought I was gonna work in law enforcement. And for some reason, and I'm believing it was God-led, and that's who I am. I just didn't want to go that route, even though I have a degree in criminal justice I didn't want to work with youth on that side. But I felt like I really, really wanted to work with the youth and with families on this

side, versus after they are already incarcerated and things like that. So I saw this, ad in the paper back in the day in 1986, you know, everything was like done in the want ads. We didn't have all this fancy stuff that we have today.

Terry: Sure.

Linda: You can go online, put in applications and things like that. So I saw this organization in the paper, I had no idea where it was. I never heard of it. It's called [00:12:00] Dogwood Village. I set up an interview, I drove out to it, which was like, probably, I don't know, 27 miles from my house. But I got the job that day. And I haven't looked back since then. Enjoyed just working here at Youth Villages, I've learned a lot. Again, I work with eight youth; I worked eight years at Dogwood. I worked with girls at first and then I started working with the boys. And I thoroughly enjoyed my residential training, I call it training, helping children and families. But then the organization began to think about a formal training program, from there, I applied for that position and I got it.

Terry: So how did you first interact with—so you got your degree in criminal justice. It really gave you kind of a unique perspective because you understood that side of the experience for [00:13:00] youth that had maybe gone astray, and you thought, "Well, I understand what happens on that end but I wanna go work with them to help them rather than work in the punitive side to work more on the restorative side." So what was your first involvement with youth back then for those years at Dogwood, did you work directly with the kids then?

Linda: Yes, yes. So when I started at Dogwood there were like five cottages: two cottages for girls and three cottages for boys. So we basically had 8 youth per cottage, 40 kids. We've gone from 40 kids, as you know now and serving 26,000 this year with all these programs. So I was working with the girls, and again, you know, most of them know they need help, but then they don't want help. You know, you go through all that stuff where they're mad at you, for them to curse you and all that kind of stuff. But I stayed because I knew I was supposed to be here. I knew I was supposed to help these young people, whether it was girls or boys. I've worked for both. [00:14:00] And you know, there were times when they would say stuff that—of course, they say stuff to try to make you quit. Say stuff like, "I hate you. I hope you die on the way home." But you know, that only fueled me the more to stay. So it's amazing how children respond to you, but by the end, and what was happening with discharge, they appreciated my firmness, my direct approach with them because I really, really wanted them to make it. I really cared about them. And once they know you care about them, then they can really hear you and listen to you.

Terry: That's a valuable lesson. I know from your resume that you sent me that you are an elder in your church today. And it sounds like even back in those years that you felt very guided and that is was sort of a way of destiny to help these kids.

Linda: Yes. Once I started in the training department and [00:15:00] He was already kind of in me, I just didn't realize I needed to say yes to God, I'll do your will, so to speak concerning becoming an elder. So that's one of the best things that's happened to me as well. I mean, I enjoy being here. I enjoy helping these young people. And again, I see this as a calling. I see this as a mission. I can't get away from it one day, yeah, I'm going to retire. But I will not retire from helping children and families it may be on another level, maybe somewhere else, but I would never do that. Maybe in the church. That's how important it is to me because I see so much, you know. And so much is happening in our country, in our nation, and in our city. So I'm thankful and I'm blessed to be doing what I'm doing.

Terry: Excellent. Now, today, your role as an assistant director of performance improvement there, talk about your primary duties today at Youth Villages, if you would.

Linda: Yes. I oversee [00:16:00] all the new hire orientation for the organization and we have, like, seven orientations that goes on at any given point. I have staff that are overseeing those orientations. We have an orientation in North Carolina, Massachusetts, Knoxville, Nashville, and Memphis, of course, Georgia, and Oregon. So that responsibility falls under me. And I mean I enjoy it. I've been doing it a long time. I like meeting people. I used to travel a lot, I don't travel as much as I did. Again, I'm thankful for what I do. And I love my staff. I love my team. And I think, you know, we've grown a lot. The organization grows a lot. And as the organization has grown, we've had to grow to have more orientations for the new hires.

Terry: Let's move into CPI training now and how it works at Youth Villages. You began—Youth Villages began using [00:17:00] CPI training 32 years ago back in 1987. That's a long way back, but if you could talk about your initial impressions of the training and why it was chosen for Youth Villages.

Linda: Okay. When I started, there was a young man named Leo Coughlin. Leo was very familiar with CPI, and CPI is very familiar with Leo, but he has since retired. He was the director of Dogwood. And at that time, he was the only CPI Certified Instructor. And he taught us the techniques. He taught us CPI, we got certified through him. And for me, we learned a lot about the course, the control dynamics, personal safety techniques, and the Team Control, which is what we use the most and a lot has changed with CPI since then, of course, we have options now. But back then it was [00:18:00] basically the Team Control with our youth, you know, and of course we had the transport. So learning that was very, very helpful, and it also made very, very much sense to me back in the day.

But when I became an Instructor, and when you're learning from an Instructor perspective, then you see why all of these different techniques and especially the verbal stuff is extremely important. You'd rather de-escalate a youth if we can, and sometimes when youth are so out of it verbally that you just kind of have to watch and then wait for them to reach Tension Reduction, but I rather do that than have to restrain, and we teach that to our staff—that the restraint should be last resort.

Terry: In addition to those physical controls, like the team control, the physical restraints that are part of CPI training, that *Crisis Development ModelSM* also made an impression [00:19:00] on you back then.

Linda: Oh, yeah. Because, you know, the thing about that is, you also have to look at yourself. So, we were talking about it and we go on to the Anxiety level and the Defensive level, I put it back on the new hires, and even in refreshers, put it back on them. Because I asked them, when you're experiencing anxiety, how does it manifest? How do you know you're in the Anxiety level? And you know, I'll call on them, and they will talk about it in general, but I will tell them it's about you, because you've got to recognize there's this Integrated Experience.

Okay, and so we talk about that, and we allow them to take time to look within themselves. Then when I get to Defensive level, I'll do the same thing. What happens when you're in the Defensive level? How does it manifest? [00:20:00] And so we talk through all of that, to get them to understand, it's very, very important that you understand your buttons, you understand when things get personal. You understand all of this because you can cause the child to go into crisis.

Terry: So you can be a contributing factor yourself by the way you handle their aggression, or challenging behavior.

Linda: Yeah.

Terry: So let's talk about when you first came to train *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention®*. You're a Meritorious Instructor now, when did you first learn to train the course, Linda?

Linda: I first learned to train the course when I became—let's see, that was 1999, so I think in 19—maybe in 2000 I went through my first certification course in Nashville. Yeah, I worked all day and then did another three hours of work driving, [00:21:00] driving to Nashville. So, yeah, it was 1998, and drove to Nashville to get certified in CPI.

Terry: And now today, I think we talked, you're responsible for providing CPI training to every new hire at Youth Villages, is that correct?

Linda: Yes, my team and I. Those orientations that I mentioned, everyone who goes through orientation gets CPI.

Terry: So everybody. So how many people do you train per month?

Linda: Wow. My thought would be anywhere—I mean, it can be anywhere from 50 to 100, because every orientation is different. The Memphis orientation probably has the largest

number of attendees. But certainly, when you count up all the different orientations that goes on, it can be anywhere from 50 to 100.

Terry: So you might train 1000 people in a year, literally, in CPI?

Linda: Yes.

Terry: Wow. That's a lot [00:22:00] of training. How do you keep it fresh?

Linda: Well, one thing, this training is fun. I mean, to me, it's educational but it's fun. And it's serious. So, you know, we do the activities that we're taught. And again, every orientation class is different too.

Terry: How do they differ?

Linda: Well, we have different programs—we have a lot more different programs in our Memphis orientation than we do in other orientations.

Terry: I see.

Linda: But some of my staff only teach the six-hour because all those people need in those orientation is up to the disengagement skills because they're not allowed to restrain.

Terry: I see.

Linda: But in Memphis, Nashville, and Georgia orientations, they are allowed to restrain, even though we will have a mixture of the other people, they'll get the six hours and then we'll do the rest of the training with the residential people in the group home, people who will have to do the [00:23:00] disengagement skills as well as the holding skills.

Terry: So you find the training that easily customizable by the need of the recipient getting the training?

Linda: Yes.

Terry: I see.

Linda: Yes, yes.

Terry: And today, I think we spoke, you oversee a team of 34 advanced physical skills CPI Certified Instructors. Why are those advanced physical skills—I think this is maybe coming down Main Street, but I'm gonna ask it, why are those physical skills so critical to behavior management at Youth Villages?

Linda: Well, and let me say—I have a total of 34 CPI Instructors, but probably about 3 or 4 of those are not advanced skills, because they teach just the 6 hours, but up to disengagement skills, but I do have a lot. We just had six to go through. It's because of the nature of our children and it's mainly going to be in residential, we have two facilities called intensive residential treatment [00:24:00] centers, and those are our most restrictive centers; they're locked facilities and we have some youth in those particular programs. We're glad to be able to serve that population but we also have some in that program who are very, very difficult. And, you know, just recently the leadership here decided that they wanted to have something that we can maintain the child on the floor so when we went through this, you know, we looked at some others but my vote was, why go somewhere else when we are already doing CPI? And CPI does have an answer for that. So that's when I talked to Dawn Strupp about, you know, getting that taken care of with us. And just kind of realized that we needed to go to that next level because we had some kids that we needed to use the technique, the supine on, and so far it works pretty good. [00:25:00]

Terry: So you have to go, ultimately, to a supine restraint sometime because of the extreme behavior of some of the really challenged kids that you serve there.

Linda: Oh, yes. Yes.

Terry: So, boy, so it's a really, I guess, an interesting mixture. I mean, you guys use disengagement and holding skills taught in *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention®* training, and I think that's central at Youth Village. But do you think, Linda, that the verbal de-escalation skills are utilized equally as effectively at Youth Villages? I mean, has it influenced your culture there in all the years that you've been working?

Linda: Well, yes. I mean, I think we probably put more emphasis on the verbal than the physical, you know, it's kind of—you know, and we try to make sure we balance and all that but, again, I would rather a person take the time to engage the child. And again, it's not just the CPI—it's the way the schedules are set up, [00:26:00] and it's the way we ask our counselors and our staff to get to know the youth and families because the better you know them, the better you can see when they're getting anxious or you can address some issues because you've got that rapport. You got a working relationship with this youth or this family.

So, yes, the verbal is—I think the verbal is powerful, to be honest. And you know, we talk about the nonverbals because you can be saying something verbally, but nonverbals can be opposite of what you're saying. So, we try to talk to them about the power of verbal, the nonverbal communication, of course the personal space, and things like that, even if you're sitting. Because again, we are working with these young people and we're establishing the relationships rapport, but there are days [00:27:00] when this young person and some of these families, don't wanna hear you, and they don't wanna have anything to do with you. But we can't help them live successfully if we just walk away. So

we have to hang in there with them, see them through it, talk them through it, support them in any way we can by using those techniques that are taught in CPI, but also being honest and reasonable with them.

Terry: That's kind of like a really great definition of what we call the *Supportive Stance*SM right there.

Linda: Exactly.

Terry: It's really inspiring to hear somebody who is so experienced as yourself and working with so many challenging kids and training a thousand of people in a year that these skills and these concepts are as meaningful to you as they are. What about refresher training? How often do you guys refresh?

Linda: So for those who go through just the [00:28:00] CPI up to the disengagement skills, those people who are outside of residential programs, they refresh every year. Because, you know, we don't want anybody to go past a year. And so they'll come back to us, and we'll walk through trainings with them. And there are residential and group home programs where they are retraining every six months, and there we require them to practice. Because you can go through orientation, learn this, be certified of course, and then get over to your programs and never have to restrain for three months. So that's why we ask them to practice. Plus, you got a new person joining your team. And y'all haven't work together yet as far as on the skills of restraining or even intervening verbally, we tell them to practice. So we expect a lot to be going on post-orientation over in the program.
[00:29:00]

Terry: So you really want this to be very present in the mind of your staff. And to do that you really refresh often. Linda, with so many locations, how do you coordinate refreshing all those people?

Linda: Well, again, my staff who are responsible for those staff in the orientation, they take care of every state in their location. We document everything. We upload it on our site. And really, we're held accountable by our auditors, you know, the people who pay for us to take these children. So we have to make sure we stay up to date with CPR, CPI, and those things and some other ongoing trainings that the state requires us to take. So they document it, my staff here documents it, and if we allow one of the site instructors, that's what we call the CPI instructors who came on board with us to partner with us at the locations, and they know what they're responsible for doing to get to us so we can keep everything documented and in line for an audit.

Terry: Well, let's wrap up today with a couple questions. We'll bring some celebrity into this that always seems to grab people's attention. You have something there called Janie's Fund, which was a division created—or I guess funded—by the rock musician Steven Tyler, could you explain that? Talk about that?

Linda: Yeah, I think we all were excited when we heard about this. It started back in 2015, when we first started hearing about Steven, Steven Tyler coming on board to support us. And so we were excited about that. And then lo and behold, it happened. So this is the partnership between the CEO, Patrick Lawler, and the chief development officer, Richard Shaw, and they were able to establish this whole thing with [00:31:00] Steven. You know, it's based on his song, Janie's Fund—Janie's Fund is based on his song, "Janie's Got a Gun." Sorry. And, you know, Janie's Fund has raised awareness to help provide trauma-informed care and experiential care, things like that to the girls. But this is his funded program for our ladies here at Youth Villages. He's partnering with us. And we have two Janie's Fund houses right now. One is in the Inner Harbor down in Georgia, and the other is here on the Bartlett campus. So since 2017, both of these houses Steven worked diligently with us to get these houses for these girls.

Terry: That's a great contribution.

Linda: Yes, it is. Yes, it is.

Terry: So, and Linda, and your [00:32:00] contribution, I mean, after all these years, I mean, 33 years, talk about, if you would, what keeps you going?

Linda: Well, I will say, again, I really, really believe in my very core of who I am, that I'm supposed to be here. I think this is my purpose, this is my mission. And even with being here, and just enduring some things, I stay, because I know I'm supposed to be here. I've actually had a couple of brain tumors while I've been here, and even with that I've been blessed to still be alive. The second brain tumor was actually cancerous. I am a cancer survivor. I thank God for that. I want my life, [00:33:00] my tenure here at Youth Villages, my life with the challenges that I've had to be a testimony to the people that come through. I don't mind sharing and talking about it because I know I'm here for a reason. So I'm thankful to be at Youth Villages doing what I do to help children and families. And a lot of staff, I help staff as well. If you think about it, I've spent more than half of my life here at Youth Villages, 33 years. Started here when I was 25 so if you count the math, I am 58 years old, 33 years of my life. So I'm blessed. I thank God for putting me here, basically. That little ad in the paper, 33 years ago.

Terry: That's a great story. It's a powerful and a beautiful message, Linda. And thank you for sharing that with us today. [00:34:00] My guest on *Unrestrained* today has been Linda Welch, she is a CPI Meritorious Instructor. She is also an assistant director of performance improvement at Youth Villages. Thank you so much for talking with us today, Linda.

Linda: You're welcome, and I appreciate it. Thank you.

Terry: Thank you for listening.