

Juvenile Assessment Center
of Lee County
2117 Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
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(239) 344-5100

January 2007

The JAC Perspective



The Juvenile Assessment Center of Lee County ... assisting youth and their families to seek the treatment and programs they need to lead productive, crime free lives.

What's the Harm in Graffiti?



If you drive around Lee County, chances are you've seen graffiti somewhere. Graffiti vandals believe their actions harm no one. Yet, it costs more than \$8 billion per year in the U.S. to clean up graffiti. Figures from a variety of cities across the U.S. suggest that graffiti cleanup alone costs taxpayers about \$3-\$5 per person per year. Graffiti decreases residents' feelings of safety in a community. Neighborhoods with graffiti see a decrease in property values and loss of business growth and

tourism. Graffiti sends the message that no one cares, leaving neighborhoods with graffiti vulnerable to other forms of crime. In other words, graffiti hurts everyone.

Graffiti vandals represent every social, ethnic and economic background. It is a common misperception that most graffiti is done by gangs, but the National Council to Prevent Delinquency estimates that gangs are responsible for less than 10% of graffiti nationwide. Besides gang graffiti, other types of graffiti include tagging, satanic/hate, and generic graffiti. A "tag" is the graffiti (Cont. page 2)

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CALENDAR

Lee County Juvenile Justice Council

January 4
1:30 p.m.
Joseph P. D'Alessandro
Office Complex (formerly known as
Regional Service Center)
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165

Juvenile Sanctions Team

January 11
1:30 p.m.
Lee JAC

Circuit 20 Juvenile Justice Board

January 17
1:30 p.m.
Southwest Florida Workforce
Development Board

**Law enforcement should
call ahead to**

344-5161

or

344-5171

**when bringing an
arrested youth
to the JAC.**

Civil Citation/Equal Justice Grant Awarded

The Circuit 20 Office of the State Attorney (serving Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades, and Hendry Counties) was recently awarded a Civil Citation/Equal Justice Project grant by the Department of Juvenile Justice. This funding will support circuit partners in implementing projects to reduce the number of referrals to the juvenile justice system by utilizing alternatives to arrest for minor crimes. Civil citation is a process that serves as an alternative to arrest while ensuring swift and appropriate conse-

quences. Youth given a civil citation are required to perform community service hours as a sanction. A specialized focus for the grant funding is the reduction of school related referrals and disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system. The Lee County Sheriff's Office has partnered with the Office of the State Attorney on this project and will pilot civil citation in middle schools and high schools that utilize LCSO School Resource Officers.

Solitary Substance Users At Higher Risk for Problems

Eighth graders who use alcohol, cigarettes or marijuana while alone are more likely to have behavioral problems in adolescence than their peers who use these substances only in social settings. These were the findings of a new study by the RAND Corporation that tracked the functioning of solitary substance users and social only substance users over ten years. Researchers concluded that solitary use is a warning sign that youth will be less productive and have more problems as a young adult – even more problems than others who use substances during childhood. Researchers found that solitary users were more at risk for a variety of

problem behaviors, including acting out in school and delinquent behavior. Solitary users were less engaged in school, had lower grades, and spent less time on homework and school activities. Despite their solitary use of substances, these youth were not lonely, socially isolated teens. Solitary users spent significantly more time going to parties and dating than other substance using youth. They were less likely than social-only users to think that substance use impaired functioning or was harmful. They typically felt that substance use had positive effects on their behavior including helping them to relax, to have more fun, and to escape from



their problems. By age 23 the solitary users were less likely to graduate from college, were more likely to have substance use problems, and tended to have poorer physical health.

Graffiti Harm (cont.)

vandal's moniker applied quickly and repetitively. Hate graffiti is any racial, religious, or cultural slur. Generic graffiti includes social commentary, profanity, and non threatening messages like "Bobby loves Suzy" or "Class of 2007". "Pieces," short for "masterpieces," are large, detailed drawings that may use multiple colors and take an hour or more to complete. In contrast, gang graffiti is not artwork. It is a form of communication that publicizes a gang's power, status, and territory. It may warn rival gangs or promote the sale of illegal drugs or contraband.

What should one do if they are the victim of graffiti vandalism? The Florida Gang Investigator's Association suggests remembering the four R's...Read It, Record It, Report It, and Remove It. Gang graffiti that is left up can result in a

dangerous situation. Graffiti can represent a threat against a rival gang or a specific individual. The graffiti should be well documented and photographed. Then, a police report should be made for tracking purposes. Graffiti should be quickly removed to reduce the likelihood of violence or reoccurrence of graffiti. Studies show that removal within 24 to 48 hours results in a nearly zero rate of reoccurrence.

The Graffiti Hurts website at www.graffitihurts.org provides tips for businesses, tips for homeowners, things one can do as an individual to help prevent graffiti, best practices in community graffiti prevention, and lesson plans to teach youth about the harm of graffiti. There is even a page for graffiti artists on how to channel their talents into more constructive activities.



The JAC welcomes Katie LaPlante, new counselor for the Transformations program at the JAC.



The JAC of Lee County is operated by the Lee County Sheriff's Office in partnership with the Lee County Board of County Commissioners and the Department of Juvenile Justice.