

**Juvenile Assessment Center  
of Lee County**  
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January 2009

# 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.*

## CALENDAR

### Juvenile Sanctions Team

January 8  
12:00 p.m.  
Joseph P. D'Alessandro  
Office Complex  
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165C

### Lee County Juvenile Justice Council

January 8  
1:30 p.m.  
Joseph P. D'Alessandro  
Office Complex  
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165C

### Prevention Network

January 16  
10:00 a.m.  
Lee County Human Services  
2440 Thompson Street

### Circuit 20 Juvenile Justice Board

January 21  
1:30 p.m.  
Southwest Florida Workforce  
Development Board  
9530 Marketplace Rd., Ste. 104



*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.*

## Preparing for Change

With January comes the tradition of starting with a clean slate, resolving to do better, to start over. Almost as soon as the holiday decorations are packed away follows the tradition of breaking New Year's resolutions. If nothing else, this annual ritual reminds us that making lasting changes in our lives is not always easy. The process of change is particularly relevant to the juvenile justice system which is in the business of change. Its primary goal is to turn around the lives of delinquent and at risk youth. Research on the change process has emerged in the past few years. What the science of change tells us is that some traditional strategies for motivating youth to change their negative behavior – pressuring, lecturing, instructing, using reasoning or logic to persuade youth, being the “experts” with all the solutions – are generally not effective. When youth are



confronted with external pressure to change, their typical response is to become defensive. When youth are told how they should change, their typical response is to find all the

reasons why the suggestions will not work for them. Motivation to change begins from within, with a change in how one thinks, not from external pressure. In fact, too much pushing can make people less likely to change. Parents and others working with youth can be more effective in motivating youth when they use strategies that help youth focus on their own goals and values and to think about their own choices. One of the first steps in a youth becoming motivated to change is that he must begin to see discrepancies between his present behavior and his personal goals or values. He must  
*(Continued page 2)*

## Juvenile Justice Funding Cuts Likely

The Florida legislature is now in a two week special session to fix a \$2.3 billion budget deficit before the end of the fiscal year June 30<sup>th</sup>. Cuts are anticipated in almost every area of the state budget and juvenile justice is no exception. Governor Charlie Crist has proposed \$562 million in spending adjustments to the state budget, which includes nearly \$9.2 million in cuts for juvenile justice. The largest proposed reductions include reducing \$4.8 million from Probation and



Community Corrections and \$3.2 million from Non-Secure Residential Programs. The Senate has proposed \$16.3 million in cuts to the juvenile justice budget while the House has proposed \$18.9 million in cuts. The final vote for the special session is January 16<sup>th</sup>. The legislators will then return in March for the regular session when they will tackle what is expected to be a nearly \$4 billion shortfall for the budget year beginning July 1.

## “Change” (cont.)

begin to consider how the consequences of his behavior are not consistent with his goals and values. Lasting change is more likely to occur when the youth feels he is in charge of his own behavior. He has to be an active participant in setting his own goals and finding his own solutions. The youth also has to believe that he has the personal strengths and resources needed to make changes. Even

after a youth commits to change and begins to act on that decision, he may slip up. For anyone making big changes, relapses are to be expected, especially during the early stages of change. When that happens, it is not the time to give up on a youth. As in the spirit of the new year, that it is the time when a youth needs encouragement to begin again.



*The JAC welcomes Carolyn Woulard as its new Civil Citation Coordinator. Woulard replaces Deputy Scott Thompson who has returned to the West District as a road officer.*

## Hanging Out Preferred Teen Activity

You’ve probably seen it - clusters of adolescents at a mall or outside a movie theater. Hanging out with friends is a favored pastime for adolescents. A recent survey of 691 Lee County youth asked what they enjoy doing with their time. The most frequent answer was that they enjoy hanging out with their friends (34% of those surveyed). The survey asked youth what new programs or services they would create for youth if they were in charge. The most frequent

response was that they would like a place they could go just to hang out with their friends (12% of those surveyed). “Hanging out” may seem aimless and perplexing to many adults, but it makes sense from an adolescent’s perspective. Adolescents have a very strong desire to fit in and to feel connected with their peers. Hanging out with friends allows them to feel that they are part of a group. Their awkward

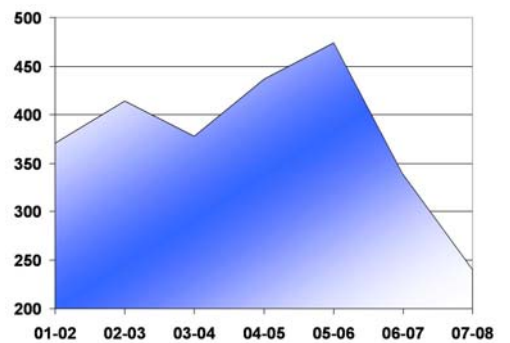
adolescent struggles, questions, and emotions don’t feel quite so overwhelming when they are hanging out with their peers. There is comfort in knowing that they are not the only one who has them. If adolescents don’t have homes or teen centers where they feel comfortable hanging out, they will gravitate to public places. Although it may be annoying or seem pointless to adults, a teen’s desire to hang out with friends is a normal part of adolescent development.

## Progress Continued in Reducing Delinquency Commitments

In 2005-06, the rate at which Lee County youth were sent to state-run residential commitment facilities was one of the highest in the state. That same year, local juvenile justice stakeholders identified that there were very few services available in this community for delinquent youth. Stakeholders advocated to state legislators for more local services. Beginning in 2006-07, four new community-based programs were funded by the state. (Another was funded by the county.)\* From 2005-06, after the point at which these programs were funded, delinquency commitments of Lee County youth decreased by 49% compared to a 20% decrease statewide. After two

years the state funding was eliminated for three of the programs and was reduced for the fourth program. It will be another year before we will be able to access state data to see if these reductions in services are having an impact on Lee County’s use of residential commitment. In the meantime, the long term economics of decisions about what services are kept and what services are cut in this economic climate is worth consideration. The average cost to taxpayers to send a youth to a residential commitment facility is \$34,669 compared to the average cost of \$1,652 per youth/family for the five community-based programs

Lee County Delinquency Referrals Committed



that were funded between 2006-07 and 2007-08. It is estimated that the cost benefit to taxpayers in reducing Lee County’s delinquency commitments by 49% over the two year period that the community-based programs were fully funded was \$6,379,046.\*\*

\*State funded programs included Conditional Release Supervision, Trauma Counseling for Victimized Youth, Domestic Violence Diversion, and Functional Family Therapy. A Substance Abuse Diversion program was funded by Lee County. \*\*Calculated from average cost savings of reduced commitments minus costs of new community-based programs.