

Juvenile Assessment Center  
of Lee County  
2117 Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.  
Fort Myers, FL 33901  
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www.swfjac.org

October 2008

# 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

### Circuit 20 Juvenile Justice Executive Board

October 1  
1:30 p.m.

Southwest Florida Workforce Development Board  
9530 Marketplace Rd., Ste. 104

### Juvenile Sanctions Team

October 2  
12:00 p.m.

Joseph P. D'Alessandro  
Office Complex  
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165

### Lee County Juvenile Justice Council

October 2  
1:30 p.m.

Joseph P. D'Alessandro  
Office Complex  
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165

### Prevention Network

October 10  
10:00 a.m.

Lee County Human Services  
2440 Thompson Street

**Law enforcement should call ahead to**

**344-5161  
or 344-5171**

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

## Parents to Blame for Juvenile Crime?

After reading community comments that follow local media reports of juvenile crime, it appears that it is widely believed that parents are to blame for juvenile crime. Research does support that parent and family issues can contribute to a youth being at risk for delinquency. Parent and family risks include a history of criminal behavior in the family, lack of nurturance or caring, lack of family connectedness, poor parental supervision and discipline practices, and/or abuse and neglect. However, it is not as simple as saying that parents are to blame for juvenile crime. There is no one single cause of juvenile crime. There are factors other than having bad



parents that pose even greater risks that a youth will become delinquent. These include having antisocial attitudes, having antisocial friends, and personal characteristics, such as, impulsivity, egocentrism, below average intelligence, a taste for risk, poor problem solving skills, and poor self control. To a lesser degree, other risks for delinquency include low levels of school achievement, poor (Continued page 2)

For Lee County youth placed on juvenile probation, 49% had good parent supervision and 51% had poor parent supervision.\*

## Not My Child!

"My child is an honor roll student. I don't think I have to worry," said a mother when JAC staff offered her a free drug test kit as a prevention tool at a community event. A lot of other parents at the event gave similar responses. It is true that most youth don't get into trouble. What was striking was how the parents at the community event sounded similar to many parents who arrive at the JAC to pick up their arrested youth for the first time. "I can't believe it. He's an honor roll student." "I didn't think I had to worry about her. She's never gotten into trouble before." Most parents are

not prepared when their youth is first arrested. Denial is a common first reaction. Some parents may have been in denial for some time about some of the early signs that their youth might be headed for trouble – changes in friends, lying, deception, a drop in grades, etc. While many parents do quickly move past denial when they face the fact that their child has been arrested, others continue to stay in denial.



*On average, it takes two years for parents to discover that their child has a drug problem.*

Parents who continue to deny that their child has a problem do so for (Continued page 2)

## Parents to Blame for Juvenile Crime? (cont.)

use of free time, and substance abuse. Sometimes being a good parent is not enough to protect youth from engaging in risky behavior when there are many other risks present. Even youth who come from happy, functional, and disciplined homes sometimes

engage in risky behavior. Some are arrested. Are parents to blame for juvenile crime? Yes and no. This is one reason why, when it comes to solving the issue of juvenile crime, there is not a “one size fits all” solution.

The number of low cost parent education programs in Lee County for parents with justice involved youth: 0.

## Violent Outcomes for Some Youth in System

Recent news that a man in his early 20’s was shot and killed in Fort Myers gave the JAC staff pause. He was someone known to JAC staff as he had previously been involved in the juvenile justice system.



The JAC last saw him during a time when he was getting his life in order and was motivated to turn his life around. He was making good choices and making progress in overcoming a drug addiction. Whether he continued to choose a positive path or had gone back on a negative path is unclear. His violent death was a reminder of other youth who have died while involved with the juvenile justice system. We

wondered, does it just seem like there are more justice involved youth who have seen a violent death over the past few years or do the facts bear this out? We went back to January of 2006 and looked at how many Lee County youth had

died since then while in the juvenile justice system. There were 14 juveniles, all males. *(This does not include any who were already out of the juvenile justice system.)* Of the 14, four died of gunshot wounds, one of which was accidentally self inflicted. One youth was

murdered by other means. One died by suicide. Five were killed in car crashes. For three youth the cause of death was not available. According to Kids Count, in Florida in 2006, the teen violent death\* rate was 5.5 per 10,000 population ages 15 – 19. While the local numbers are too small to make conclusions, they do support our sense that justice involved youth, at least males, seem to be at greater risk for violent outcomes than other youth. Since 2006, for juvenile males in Lee County who were in the juvenile justice system, the rate of violent death was 12.3 per 10,000, or more than double that of the general population of Florida youth in the same age range.

\*Violent death includes homicides, suicides, and accidents.

## Not My Child! (cont.)

various reasons. Most parents want to believe their child. Some parents don’t realize that their child is an expert at manipulating them. Denial allows parents to blame others rather than facing the alternative – that they and/or their child have a problem. Parent denial makes matters worse because it prevents parents from recognizing that there is a problem and finding out what the problem is, allowing the problem to grow and get worse. Getting past denial is one of the first steps toward parents helping to prevent, intervene early, and

resolve problems related to their child. After all, youth problem behavior can occur in even the best of families.

Drug test kits are available at the JAC at no charge to parents to use as a drug prevention tool. Having one at home provides youth with a believable excuse for saying “no” to their friends if asked to try drugs.

*A study that looked at the personal economics of joining a gang found that active gang members had around a 25% chance of dying over a four year period.\*\**



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.

\*\* Cited in “Florida Gang Reduction Strategy 2008-2012,” Office of the Florida Attorney General