

Juvenile Assessment Center
of Lee County
2117 Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
Fort Myers, FL 33901
(239) 344-5100
www.swfjac.org

December 2009

The JAC Perspective

Happy Holidays from the JAC Staff



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

Lee County Juvenile Justice Council

December 3
1:30 p.m.
Justice Center Annex
Sixth Floor, Courtroom A
Fort Myers

Prevention Network

(No meeting in December)
January 8
10:00 a.m.
Fort Myers Police Training Facility
1803 Golf View Avenue
Fort Myers

Circuit 20 Juvenile Justice Board

January 20
1:30 p.m.
Southwest Florida Workforce
Development Board
9530 Marketplace Rd., Ste. 104
Fort Myers

**Law enforcement
should call ahead to**

**344-5161
or 344-5171**

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

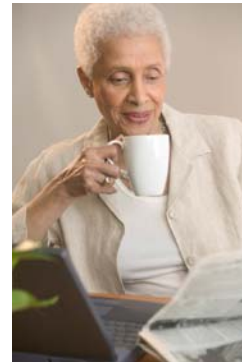
Perceptions: Based on Facts or Hype?

This month "The JAC Perspective" focuses on perceptions and misperceptions about youth and youth crime.

For Lee County youth, are the following statements true or false?

1. Youth crime has gone up in the past year compared to the year before.
2. In an anonymous survey of students, 64% said they had not had alcohol in the past 30 days.
3. Youth violent crime has gone down in the past year compared to the year before.
4. In an anonymous survey of high school students, 92% reported that they typically drink something other than alcohol when they hang out with their friends.
5. Youth property crime has gone up this year compared to last year.
6. In an anonymous survey of students, 76% said they had not used marijuana in the past 30 days.

(Answers on page 2)



"I'd like to get the JAC's numbers showing that kids are going crazy with crime these days, with the bad economy and all," a citizen recently requested of the JAC. It took some convincing from

the JAC manager that the numbers did not support the citizen's perceptions. Hardly a day goes by that the JAC does not deal with community misperceptions about youth, youth crime, or how the juvenile justice system works. Where does the public get its information about youth and youth crime? A recent study by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency* concluded that the public receives much of its information about youth and youth crime from the media. The study also concluded that the information the public receives from the media about youth and youth crime is often distorted and misleading. In (Continued on page 2)

No Magic in Turning 18 Years Old

A common misperception is that juvenile criminal records go away at age 18. Actually, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement keeps a youth's criminal record until the individual turns 24 years old, or if the youth was ever classified as a serious habitual offender or was ever committed to a juvenile residential correctional facility, until the



individual turns 26 years old. Also, any juvenile offenses that were received within five years of any adult felony offense are added to the adult offender's sentencing score. The severity and length of the sentence that the adult offender receives is based on his or her sentencing score. In other words, a person's juvenile record can effect whether or not they are sentenced to prison as an adult.

Perceptions (cont.)

the three-city review of media reports about youth, the study concluded that media coverage did not reflect a sufficiently thorough or accurate understanding of youth or youth crime. It found most media stories depicted youth as troubled or as trouble for society, leaving the public with a distorted view about youth and their role in crime. Stories about youth typically associated them with violence, with emphasis on the infrequent, but most sensational cases, and then often without any context. The study concluded that positive stories about youth were hard to

find. It found that in the few positive stories about youth, they were often characterized as exceptions to the norm. Media reports of crime trends also tended to be distorted. According to the study, while it is usual for crime rates to fluctuate, news reports as a whole emphasized and often exaggerated rises in crime, while decreases in crime were often deemphasized or ignored by the media. While it is not clear whether the findings from the study can be generalized to local media coverage of youth issues, the findings do serve as a

cautionary tale for all communities. Public perceptions of youth and youth crime impact the entire juvenile justice system, from funding for new programs to community engagement in youth issues to the attitudes and behaviors of adults toward youth in the community. How a community develops its perceptions about youth and youth crime, and to what extent those perceptions are well-informed, are essential questions for informing any community's juvenile justice prevention and intervention efforts.

Most Youth Saying “No” to Substance Use

Lee County's Safe and Drug-Free Schools (SDFS) program reports that a Lee County 2009 Teen Norms Survey indicates that most Lee County teens are alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana free. The anonymous survey was administered in September in six Lee County schools. Of those surveyed, 97% of the middle school students and 92% of the high school students reported that they typically drink something other than alcohol when they hang out with their friends. Students reported that in the past 30 days :

- 79% had not had a cigarette,
- 64% had not had alcohol, and
- 76% had not had marijuana.

Students' perceptions of how much other students used substances highly overestimated the students' reports of actual use. Although students perceived that 86% of other students used cigarettes in the past 30 days, only 21% of students reported they had used



cigarettes. While students perceived that 90% of other students used alcohol in the past 30 days, only 36% of students reported they had used alcohol.

While students perceived that 85% of other students had used marijuana, in the past 30 days, only 24% of students reported they had used marijuana. According to SDFS, students' perceptions that most of the other students are using illicit

substances is a problem the community needs to work on. Such misperceptions can create false norms which can add to peer pressure for students to use substances. It is important to get the message out to students that the *majority of students do not use illicit substances*. Who do students listen to the most? Students reported that their most reliable sources of information on illicit substances are parents, law enforcement, medical professionals, and teachers.

Arrest Trends

In the past year:

- Overall juvenile arrests at the JAC decreased 9%,
- Property crimes decreased 3%,
- Violent crimes decreased 30%.

Comparison is for twelve months, from Nov. 2007 through Oct. 2008 and Nov. 2008 through Oct. 2009. Property crimes includes Burglary, Larceny, and Motor Vehicle Theft. Violent crimes includes Aggravated Assault, Armed Robbery, Homicide, Felony Sex, Sex Battery, and Other Robbery.

Answers from page 1 : 1 - F, 2 - T, 3 - T, 4 - T, 5 - F, 6 - T



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.