

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

March 2007

The JAC Perspective



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

CALENDAR

Lee County Juvenile Justice Council

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

Juvenile Sanctions Team

March 8
1:30 p.m.
Lee JAC

Prevention Committee

March 14
10:00 a.m.
Lee JAC

Circuit 20 Juvenile Justice Board

March 20
11:00 a.m.
Joseph P. D'Alessandro
Office Complex (formerly known as
Regional Service Center)
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165

Civil Citation Workshop

March 20
1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Joseph P. D'Alessandro
Office Complex (formerly known as
Regional Service Center)
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165

**Law enforcement should call
ahead to**

344-5161 or 344-5171

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

Youth Gangs



“What do you have to do to join a gang?” One might expect this question coming from a hardened juvenile delinquent – the 16 or 17 year old male who has already been arrested several times. Recently, this question was asked in a note passed in class. What may be eye opening to some is that the question was asked by a girl in middle school. More concerning is that the answer, provided in more graphic detail than appropriate for this publication, also came from a thirteen year old girl in middle school. School officials later found that the girl who was knowledgeable about gangs was in possession of marijuana and gang paraphernalia. She was arrested. While the

existence of gangs used to be associated with highly urban areas, in recent years, gangs have spread to all areas of the US. In a survey of cities with populations over 100,000, 90% reported having gang activity. No community is immune to gangs. Lee County is no exception. Studies on youth gang involvement suggest that gang membership increases the likelihood and frequency that members will commit serious and violent crimes compared to juveniles who are at-risk, but not involved in gangs. Gang members are much more likely than nongang peers to possess highly lethal weapons and to use them. Researchers found that the median age at which youth began hanging out with gangs was 13 years old. The median age for joining a gang was 14 years old, with the peak age of joining at 15. The age at first arrest mirrored the age for joining a gang. Research fails to (continued p. 2)

JAC Information Is Now a Click Away

The Juvenile Assessment Center of Lee County now has a web site at www.swfjac.org. Information about the JAC's services, answers to frequently asked questions, and frequently requested documents can be found there. The web site also includes information about the juvenile justice system, the Circuit 20 Juvenile Justice Board and County Councils, community resources, and links to juvenile justice resources.



Alcohol Most Prevalent Drug Among Lee High School Students

With prevalence rates of 72.2% for lifetime use and 46.0% for past 30-day use, alcohol is the most commonly used drug among Lee County high school students. These are the findings reported in the recently released 2006 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey. In comparison, prevalence rates for Florida high school students for lifetime use of alcohol is 68.4% and past 30-day use is 41.8%. After alcohol, Lee County high school students re-

ported marijuana (19.4% 30-day use) and cigarettes (18.7% 30-day use) as the most commonly used drugs. Prevalence rates for other drugs are much lower. Prevalence for past 30-day use for prescription pain relievers for Lee County high school students is 6.6% compared to 4% statewide. The 2006 FYSAS Reports are available at: www.dcf.state.fl.us/mentalhealth/publications/fysas/



Drug House Odyssey

March 21, 22, & 23

Open to the Public

6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Cape Christian Fellowship

2110 Chiquita Blvd. S., Cape Coral

Call 541-9003 for Information

Youth Gangs (cont.)

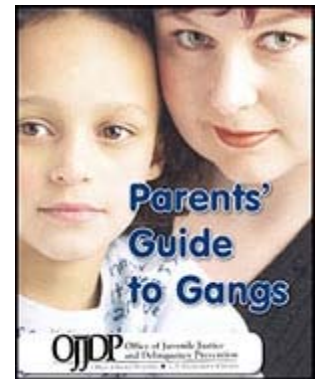
support the common view that most youth in gangs were actively recruited to join by older members. The main reasons youth join gangs are to be around friends already in a gang or for the protection they presume the gang will provide. However, youth are more likely to be violently victimized while in a gang than when they are not. Gang members' criminal careers tended to begin with property crimes and escalated quickly to drug-related and violent crimes. Risk factors that could be identified at ages 10 to 12 increased the odds of whether a youth would join a gang between ages 13 and 18. In communities where gangs are not highly structured, most youth report being in a gang less than one year. Researchers concluded that identification of early precursors to joining a gang offer the potential for communities to prevent youth gang membership, to combat juvenile crime, and for aggressive intervention during the early years of gang involvement. Research recommends that prevention should start early, should target youth exposed to multiple risk fac-

tors, and should address all facets of youth's lives. The research stresses that anyone – a parent, sibling, teacher, friend, or member of the community – can find ways to reduce the chances that a youth will become a gang member.

Risks For Youth Gang Involvement

- *Early involvement in delinquency, especially violence and alcohol or drug use
- *Poor family management
- *Problematic parent-child relations
- *Low school achievement
- *Low attachment to school
- *Association with aggressive peers
- *Peers who engage in delinquency
- *Neighborhoods in which large numbers of youth are in trouble
- *Neighborhoods in which drugs and firearms are readily available

The accumulation of risk factors greatly increases the likelihood of gang involvement.



Parents can play a pivotal role in keeping youth out of gangs. "Parent's Guide to Gangs" is a booklet for parents on recognizing and preventing gang involvement. It can be ordered in both English and Spanish from the National Youth Gang Center at www.iir.com/nygc.



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.