

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

April 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

April 2  
1:30 p.m.  
Southwest Florida Workforce Development Board  
9530 Marketplace Rd., Ste. 104

### Juvenile Sanctions Team

April 3  
12:00 p.m.  
Joseph P. D'Alessandro  
Office Complex  
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165

### Lee County Juvenile Justice Council

April 3  
1:30 p.m.  
Joseph P. D'Alessandro  
Office Complex  
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165

### Prevention Network

April 11  
10:00 a.m.  
Lee County Human Services  
2440 Thompson Street

### Committee on Youth Gun Violence

April 25  
11:30 a.m.  
The Bridge  
2128 Cleveland Avenue

**Law enforcement should call ahead to**

**344-5161**  
**when bringing an arrested youth to the JAC.**

## Signs of Spring : Youth and Alcohol

"Florida doesn't have seasons," is a comment sometimes heard from those used to a northern climate. The JAC begs to differ. Tabebuia trees in bloom and roads becoming less crowded as snowbirds head north are just a couple of the signs that spring has arrived in Southwest Florida.

However, not all of the local signs of spring "make you go *ahhhh*." The spring break season and the prom/graduation season is a time to party for many teens. This is the season when teens may be exposed to a number of high risk activities, including the use of alcohol. The JAC has begun to see an upswing in youth coming to the JAC with alcohol related arrests. Although national surveys of youth behavior indicate that the proportion of youth who use alcohol has been steadily declining for the past few years, alcohol



continues to be the number one drug of choice for teens. Alcohol affects self control, so teens who do drink alcohol are more likely to engage in other risky behaviors, such as getting into a fight or engaging in other illegal behavior. Teen alcohol use also increases the risk of teens being involved in alcohol related driving accidents. Teens are more at risk of being involved in car crashes than adults who use alcohol and drive, even at lower blood alcohol levels. The reality

is that young people get mixed messages from adults and communities about alcohol. Some adults minimize the issue and convey that alcohol use by teens is a rite of passage. On the other hand, exaggerating the problem of youth  
*(continued page 2)*

## Statewide Cuts in JAC's Proposed

The buzz lately in the juvenile justice world is "budget cuts." The Florida Legislature is in session. With the declining economy, state agencies have been asked to reduce budgets for next year by as much as 10%. This comes on the heels of mid-year reductions during the current fiscal year. State funding of juvenile assessment centers is on the list of potential cuts. One proposal is to cut state funding of "low and medium volume" assessment centers, a \$3.7 million reduction. A second proposal is to cut "high volume"



JAC's, a \$3.3 million reduction. The proposal to cut low and medium volume JAC's appears to have some support in the Senate. This could affect as many as twelve JAC's across the state, many of which could close if the proposed cuts are approved by the legislature. The JAC in Lee County receives no state funding, so it would not be directly impacted by the legislature's decision. Other service cuts to the local area are still possible.

## Signs of Spring (cont.)

using alcohol can backfire by leading youth to believe that “most teens use alcohol” so the teen concludes “I should too.” A better message to send to youth is that *most teens don’t use alcohol*. The majority of high school and middle school youth surveyed in Lee County, or 63.5%, reported that they had *not* used alcohol in the past thirty days.\* Prevention research is finding that teens usually overestimate how many teens use alcohol. When youth discover that other youth don’t

drink as much as they incorrectly believed, they feel empowered to avoid alcohol use. Parents and adults in the community can also play an important role in keeping teens safe simply by limiting access to alcohol products. How accessible is alcohol to youth? When a national survey asked how easy it is to get liquor, 45% of high school seniors indicated it is “very easy” and 26% answered that it is “fairly easy.”\*\* Surveys of youth also indicate that one of the most common ways teens acquire

alcohol is from home, from their own parents’ liquor cabinet. Parents know to protect young children by locking away cleaning supplies and other harmful substances, but often do not think to lock up and monitor liquor at home to help keep older children safe.

*The average age that Lee County youth start using alcohol (more than a sip) is 12.6.\**

## Preparing Youth for Adulthood - Teaching Life Skills

For youth to grow up to be productive, crime-free citizens, they need to have a wide range of life skills: social relationship skills, communication skills, work and study skills, goal setting, career planning, understanding legal consequences, housing and money management, and so on. Although there are some life skills programs, often the teaching of life skills happens informally when youth are

surrounded by caring adults who use teachable moments to help them learn new skills. Unfortunately, not all youth have this advantage. The Casey Life Skills web site provides a life skills self assessment for youth ages eight to adult. It also provides customized learning plans and a wide array of free resources for anyone who is involved in teaching youth life skills or who coaches



parents on teaching life skills to their children. The web site is available at: [ww.caseylifeskills.org](http://ww.caseylifeskills.org).

## Former Intern Receives AP Award for JAC Story

Tyrone Martin, a graduate of Florida Gulf Coast University and former student intern at the JAC, has received the Florida Associated Press Broadcasters 2008 College Award for a story he wrote and reported on for WGCU radio while

working at the JAC. Martin’s story, “Drug Kits,” was about youth substance abuse and about the JAC distributing free drug test kits to parents of non-arrested youth as a drug prevention strategy. Martin was named a first-place

winner in the AP awards for Best Long Hard News. He shares the honor with WGCU News Director, Amy Tardiff. Martin is now interning with National Public Radio in Washington DC.

## Drug House Odyssey 2008

*A dramatization about the consequences for choices youth make about substance use*

April 1, 2, 3

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

2110 Chiquita Blvd. S.

Cape Coral

The JAC will distribute free drug test kits to parents at Drug House Odyssey from 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Parents will receive information on how to use the drug test kits as a drug prevention tool. Look for JAC staff under the big tent.



*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.*