

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

May 2006

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.

Captain Dan Johnson Joins JAC Team

Captain Dan Johnson joined the JAC team in April. Most recently a Watch Commander, Captain Johnson's experience with the Lee County Sheriff's Office includes serving as head of Planning and Research and as a Community Policing Officer. He served as a School Resource Officer with a former agency. Says Johnson of his new role, "I hope to come in with enthusiasm and new ideas on how to expand JAC initiatives and partnerships. I'm passionate about

preventing our juveniles from becoming adult offenders." Welcome aboard, Captain Johnson!



Captain Dan Johnson

CALENDAR

Lee County Juvenile Justice Council

May 1

12:00 p.m.

Lee County Justice Center
1700 Monroe St.,
Hearing Room 1, 4th Floor

Juvenile Sanctions Team

May 4

12:00 p.m.

Lee JAC

Jail Tour

May 6

Call 533-7947

Lee County Juvenile Justice Council

June 5

12:00 p.m.

Lee County Justice Center
1700 Monroe St.,
Hearing Room 1, 4th Floor

The JAC celebrates its third anniversary in May. A ribbon cutting ceremony was held for the JAC on May 22, 2003.

When Minutes Count

One of the goals of the JAC is to save time for law enforcement officers in dealing with arrested youth. Prior to the JAC's opening, law enforcement officers were responsible for supervising an arrested, non-detained youth until they could transfer them to the custody of their parents. That sometimes took hours. The average time that a law enforcement officer now spends dropping off an arrested youth at the JAC and getting back on the road is six minutes. For the process to work efficiently, **the officer must call ahead to 344-5161 or 344-5171.** According to Chari Noyes, Detention Screening Supervisor for the Department of Juvenile Justice, calling ahead allows screening staff to check for past records, to begin



the paperwork, and to alert the officer of any other issues. If DJJ staff determine that the youth is on probation, they can alert the officer that Violation of Probation paperwork will also need to be completed. Officers are asked to leave a message if there is no answer as DJJ staff may be in court, in juvenile booking, or releasing a youth to their parents. DJJ staff frequently check for messages. Officers who don't call ahead typically spend ten to twenty minutes dropping off an arrested youth at the JAC.

Law enforcement should call ahead to

344-5161 or 344-5171

when bringing an arrested youth to the JAC.

“Non-Judicial Action” May Not Be the Same As Doing Nothing

When arrested youth are brought to the JAC, Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) staff screen the youth to see if they are eligible for secure detention placement. They also screen for substance abuse and/or mental health problems and determine if a youth may potentially qualify for one of the community’s court diversion programs. Court diversion is an option typically utilized for first-time misdemeanor charges and first-time non-violent offenses. DJJ makes a recommendation to the Office of the State Attorney to consider youth who may qualify for a court diversion option. The State Attorney’s Office decides whether to accept the recommendation for a diversion program or to petition the court for adjudication. In some instances the State Attorney may decline the petition due to insufficient evidence or because the victim has decided to drop the

charges. Since youth sent to diversion programs do not go before a judge, this option is considered a “non-judicial action”.

Why are court diversion programs utilized?

Diversion programs are designed to provide a timely and effective response which holds juvenile offenders accountable while reducing court workloads and effectively allocating scarce resources.

Are diversion programs “just a slap on the hand”?

In all diversion programs the youth is held accountable for the crime he or she has committed. Each program works a little differently, but for all the programs a youth has to be willing to admit to the charges. Diversion case plans may include working community service hours, writing letters of apology, paying restitution, attending counseling or classes, and/or any



number of other assignments or consequences related to the charge. If a youth fails to complete his/her case plan, the case is returned for judicial action.

What diversion programs are available in Lee County?

The primary diversion programs utilized locally are Juvenile Arbitration, Neighborhood Accountability Boards, Teen Court, Intensive Delinquency Diversion Services, Spring Break Diversion, and Juvenile Deferred Prosecution. Watch for more details on Lee County’s diversion programs in future editions of *The JAC Perspective*.



Jeffrey Shicks, Director of The Bridge, (right) presented a Certificate of Appreciation for the JAC to Bill Naylor, JAC Director (left)

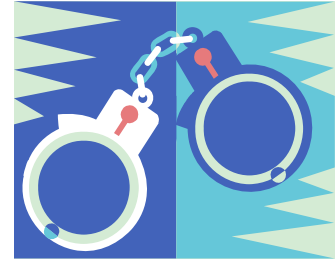
The Bridge Youth Program Thanks the JAC

The Bridge youth center presented a plaque to the JAC on March 29th in appreciation of the JAC’s involvement in sponsoring youth programs and for promoting The Bridge. The Bridge provides a safe, drop-in center for youth ages 11 to 18. Activities available at The Bridge include an arcade room, pool table, a weight room, a snack area, tutoring, life skills training, and GED preparation. The Bridge program has been a great partner of the JAC, participating on the Pilot Re-Entry Board and offering its programs to the youth who come to the JAC. The Bridge is located at 2128 Cleveland Avenue in Fort Myers. For information, call 337-3798.

Readers Make a Point: Delinquency Numbers Increasing

The April edition of *The JAC Perspective* reported that in fiscal year 2004 - 05, the local rate of youth referred for delinquency was the lowest it has been in many years. The focus of the article was that youth are not worse today than they were in past years. That article concerned some readers. A point that concerned readers want to make sure does not get lost is that the *number* of juvenile delinquency referrals in Lee County has been increasing over time. Since “rate” is a measurement that reflects the incidence *per population*, it should be clarified that the rate reflects that **proportionally** there are no more delinquent youth today than there have been in past years. Lee County’s youth population has grown by 25% in the past five years, so it

would be expected that the incidence of delinquency referrals would also increase. However, the number of delinquency referrals has not grown as quickly as the population, so the rate, or the proportion of delinquency referrals to population, has been in decline. This declining rate does not reflect many other issues that impact the juvenile justice system. For example, resources to address juvenile delinquency have not grown in proportion to increases in referrals. A recent article from *The Charlotte Sun-Herald* reported that in the past 12 years, while inflation has driven up costs for providing juvenile justice services by at least 38%, state funding for juvenile

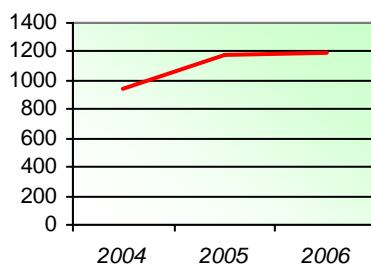


justice services has remained nearly the same. A similar situation is found in almost all entities that make up the juvenile justice system. Add Lee County’s population increase to the mix and one finds a juvenile justice system in Lee County that is, in many respects, overwhelmed, to say the least. That is the point that some readers did not want to get lost in the discussion.

JAC Looks at Trends

When the JAC first opened it was anticipated that there would be increases in the number of arrested youth brought to the JAC as services were phased in, followed by a leveling off once the JAC reached full utilization. According to Bill Naylor, JAC Director, “It appears that we are now approaching that point of leveling off and working toward full utilization. Once we reach that point, the JAC can establish a baseline to better track trends in the future.”

During the first quarter of 2006, 1198 arrested youth came through the JAC.



First Quarter Comparison of Arrested Youth at the JAC

Prevention Services

The FAIR program, offered by SWFAS at the JAC, provides prevention services for non-arrested youth ages 10–17. Services include assessments with drug screens and individual and family therapy. To schedule an appointment or for the current walk-in schedule, call Jeff Sundberg at 344-5115.



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.