

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

May 2007

# 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

### Lee County Juvenile Justice Council

May 3  
1:30 p.m.  
Joseph P. D'Alessandro  
Office Complex (formerly known as  
Regional Service Center)  
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165

### Diversion Committee

May 7  
11:00 a.m.  
Lee JAC

### Prevention Network

May 8  
11:00 a.m.  
Lee JAC

### Juvenile Sanctions Team

May 10  
1:30 p.m.  
Lee JAC

### Circuit 20 Juvenile Justice Board

May 16  
1:30 p.m.  
Southwest Florida Workforce  
Development Board

**Law enforcement  
should call ahead to**

**344-5161  
or 344-5171**

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

## Promote Youth Driver Safety

The designation of May as National Youth Traffic Safety month serves as a sobering reminder that automobile crashes are the leading cause of death and injury for youth. The first 1000 hours after receiving a permanent license are considered the most dangerous. The primary reasons that new drivers crash is by not paying enough attention and not taking enough notice of their surroundings. Even though it may seem that teens ignore their parent's behavior and advice, parents have the greatest influence over their child's driving skills, behaviors, and habits – even more so than teens taking a drivers education class. Teens learn by watching their parents, so it is important for parents to model the driving behavior they would like to



see in their teens. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, teens whose parents have three or more crashes on their records are 22% more likely to crash at least once in comparison to teenagers whose parents have had no automobile accidents. Parents should establish limits on high risk driving for young drivers including the number of passengers allowed, allowable purposes for driving, weather, nighttime restrictions, and road conditions. Parents can access helpful information to promote safe teen driving at [www.safeteendiving.org](http://www.safeteendiving.org). Also, the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles has a new free service that allows parents and guardians to access the driving history of children under age 18 at [www.hsmv.state.fl.us](http://www.hsmv.state.fl.us).

## Teenage Brain Slow to Mature

It is commonly assumed that youth are developmentally ready to handle the risks and responsibilities of driving at age 16, besides other expectations for acting maturely. Recent research suggests maybe not. New technology allowing scientists to study brain development reveals that teen's neural, physiological, and psychological development lags behind their physical development. The prefrontal cortex, which is the area of the brain that manages judgment and the ability to organize multiple tasks and sensory input, all needed for safe driving and making good choices, is not as developed in teens as in adults. Some nerve connections in the brain that

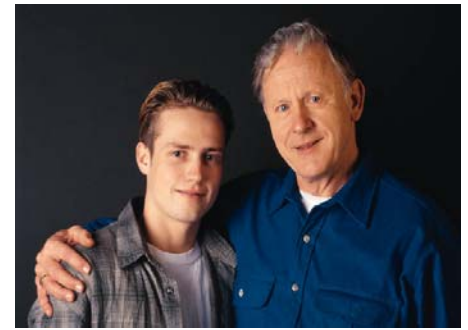


regulate judgment and impulse control do not fully mature until the early 20's.

## Adults Who Connect With Youth Can Have Profound Impact

According to a *Teens Today* study, youth who have a natural mentor in their life are significantly more likely to take positive risks than youth who do not have a mentor in their life. Positive risks include joining an athletic team or volunteering in the community. Youth with no mentors are more likely to avoid positive risks. Natural mentoring occurs outside of a formal mentoring program that may match teens with a dedicated mentor. Natural mentors can include parents and other family members, teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, neighbors, and

clergy – people who have opportunity for frequent interaction with a youth. Youth who report having natural mentors feel more positive about their own identity, their growing independence, and their relationships with peers than teens with no mentors. They are less susceptible to peer pressure when making choices. They are more likely to avoid alcohol or drugs and other risky behaviors. Teens with mentors are significantly more likely than those without mentors to report frequently feeling happy and less likely to report feeling de-

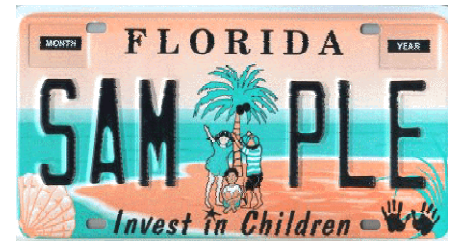


pressed or bored. The number of mentors teens have and the range of topics a youth can discuss with a mentor significantly influences whether youth take positive risks and avoid negative risks.

## Investing in Children

You've probably seen them – the Invest in Children license tags – one among scores of specialty license tags in Florida. As with all specialty tags, there is an annual user fee that goes toward a specific cause. While the fees for some specialty tags go to statewide causes, the proceeds from the Invest in Children license tags that are sold in Lee County come back to the county for juvenile crime prevention and early intervention initiatives. For the

state fiscal year 2005-06, that represented \$22,420 coming back to Lee County. Invest in Children license tag proceeds are combined with other prevention grant funding. The county juvenile justice council reviews local grant applications and recommends to the Department of Juvenile Justice how the grant funds should be utilized within the county. During the past year, the Invest in Children license tag proceeds have helped provide anger management



classes, parent/adolescent substance abuse intervention groups, and individual and family counseling for Lee County youth and families.

## Talk to Kids About School Pranks

With the end of the school year just days away, chances are that some kids are thinking about and talking about school pranks. Every year it happens that a few of those kids actually try some of the pranks and we see them at the JAC. The JAC suggests that adults make opportunities to talk to kids about school pranks. When watching movies that show school pranks, talk to kids about what consequences might happen in real life. Ask kids if their friends ever talk about doing pranks at school. Discuss possible real-life

consequences. Let them know that there is little tolerance for school pranks and the consequence could be an arrest. Discuss with them that a false bomb threat, for example, is not a prank and will be dealt with seriously. The Court TV "Choices" web site provides a curriculum for teachers to use about a real court case that resulted from a high school prank turned deadly ([www.courtstv.com/choices/curriculum/Pranks/](http://www.courtstv.com/choices/curriculum/Pranks/)). The web site also offers materials for parents that can be used for generating a

variety of meaningful conversations with youth about choices.



*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.*