

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

May 2009

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 7
1:30 p.m.
Joseph P. D'Alessandro
Office Complex
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165

Prevention Network

May 8
10:00 a.m.
Lee County Human Services
2440 Thompson Street

Circuit 20 Juvenile Justice Board

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

**Law enforcement
should call ahead to**

**344-5161
or 344-5171**

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

No Thrill in Locked Cars

"I never thought it would happen in this neighborhood," is a lament sometimes heard from victims of "car hopping." But, it does happen here. It can happen even in upscale neighborhoods. "Car hopping" is a term that refers to youths wandering through a neighborhood and randomly trying the handles of car doors to see if they are unlocked. When they find one unlocked, they steal whatever is inside. Common items taken include wallets, purses, money, GPS units, CD's, laptop computers, cameras, jewelry, and iPods. Youths tend to go car hopping as a group rather than alone. They tend to go late at night or in the early morning hours, with some youths sneaking out of



the house without their parents' knowledge. While some youths go car hopping for the money that they can get by selling the items they steal, for many youths it is more like a game. They do it for the thrill of it. Car hopping is a crime of opportunity. If a car is locked, youths will usually quickly move on, preferring to keep quiet rather than smashing car windows to get inside. Part of the thrill of car hopping is that most of the time the youths eventually do find cars that are unlocked. So, here is a youth crime prevention strategy that will not take any extra funding to implement and that almost anyone can participate in - lock your car.

Safe Place

Project Safe Place is a national network of voluntary community sites that assist youths who have run away and/or are in crisis to access immediate help and supportive resources. There are Safe Place sites located throughout the community. They include businesses, fire stations, libraries, and public locations that are indicated by the distinctive black and yellow Safe Place sign. When a youth requests help at a Safe Place site, employees at the site assist the youth in accessing resources from the nearest Safe Place Youth Shelter. Safe Place sites provide youths with a safe place to wait until shelter staff can arrive to transport them to the Safe Place youth shelter. Safe Place shelters and community sites are not locked down facilities. A



youth's participation is voluntary. In Southwest Florida the nearest Safe Place shelter is the Oasis Youth Shelter operated by Lutheran Services of Florida. Youth shelters are short term, residential facilities that provide a safe haven for runaway youth and for youth in crisis. Qualified counselors provide individual, family, and group therapy throughout the youth's stay. They assist the youth and their family in resolving the issues that caused the youth to run away or to be in crisis, and also assist the youth in reuniting with their family. The Oasis Youth Shelter is located at 3634 Central Avenue, Fort Myers. The toll free phone number to the Oasis Youth Shelter is 1-800-329-8336. The shelter is funded through the United Way and the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.

Answers to FAQ's Rooted in Federal Statute

“Why aren't runaway youth arrested or detained at the JAC?”

Many of the questions most frequently asked to the JAC are related to the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JDDPA). First enacted in 1974, a major premise of the JDDPA is that youth who exhibit problematic, but non-criminal behavior, are better served by community-based services and that these youth may even be harmed by placement in secure juvenile correctional facilities. A core requirement of the JDDPA prohibits states from holding status offenders or non-offending youth in secure detention or correctional facilities that house delinquent youth, or in adult jails for any length of time.* A status offender is a juvenile who has committed a violation of the law that would not be a crime if committed by an adult. Examples of status offenses include running away, truancy, ungovernability, and curfew violations. None of these are arrestable offenses.

“Why doesn't the JAC use ‘Scared Straight’ programs or jail tours to modify youths' behavior?”

The JAC does not utilize these types of programs because a core requirement of the JDDPA includes the separation of juveniles from adult offenders. It is considered a violation of the JDDPA to require, by public authority, a juvenile to visit an adult jail or correctional facility as a disposition of an offense or as a means of modifying their behavior. However, it is not considered a violation if a high school law education class, for example, tours the JAC and the Juvenile Booking Facility because they are not there as a result of a public order. The JAC does provide these types of student educational tours. Other core requirements of the JDDPA include the removal of juveniles from adult jails and lockups and the reduction of disproportionate minority confinement.



Florida's participation in the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JDDPA) is voluntary. In return for this compliance, Florida annually receives federal funds to support a variety of community-based programs to promote public safety and to reduce juvenile delinquency. Lee County's civil citation program, for example, is one of the local programs that have been supported through this federal funding. Many of the daily practices and procedures of the JAC and the Juvenile Booking Facility are based on the requirements of the JDDPA. Failure to comply with the JDDPA core requirements can result in a loss of federal funding to the state.

* Some exceptions were added to the JDDPA in 1980 for status offenders who subsequently violate a valid court order.

Laws on Sexual Behavior Vary with Age of Teens and Young Adults

The difference between what is lawful and unlawful sexual behavior when there is assent between teens and/or young adults varies with their ages. Here are some distinctions. Sex with a person who is not legally able to give consent is against the law. In Florida a person under the age of 16 is not legally able to consent to a sexual act. (F.S. 800.04) It does not matter how old he or she says they are if they are not old enough to consent. Even if a person lies



and says they are older, and even if it is genuinely believed to be true, this is not a defense under the law. (F.S. 800.04) It is unlawful for a person over the age of 24 to have sexual intercourse with any person under the age of 18. (F.S. 794.05) No matter what a person's age is, it is unlawful to have sex with them without their voluntary consent. (F.S. 794.011) For more information consult the Florida Statutes.



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.