

CHOICES

for families

Countywide partnership for youth expands

"We don't need to wait to meet kids in court in order to provide the right treatment in the right dose. Intervening at the right time creates the best opportunity to produce the right outcome."

— **Dan Chaney**, director of Juvenile Justice Services, Department of Children and Family Services (CAFS), sums up the philosophy behind Wayne County's newest initiative to intervene before a juvenile enters the justice system.

To Our Readers:

By taking advantage of the computer-assisted JIFF assessment tool (outlined in the previous issue of *Choices*), plus the central intake and assessment capabilities of the JAC and the many available community services, CAFS has developed a unique new partnership with the prosecutor, the Family Division of the Third Circuit Court, the sheriff and various Youth Assistance Programs. The new process of early intervention is known as Correct Course.

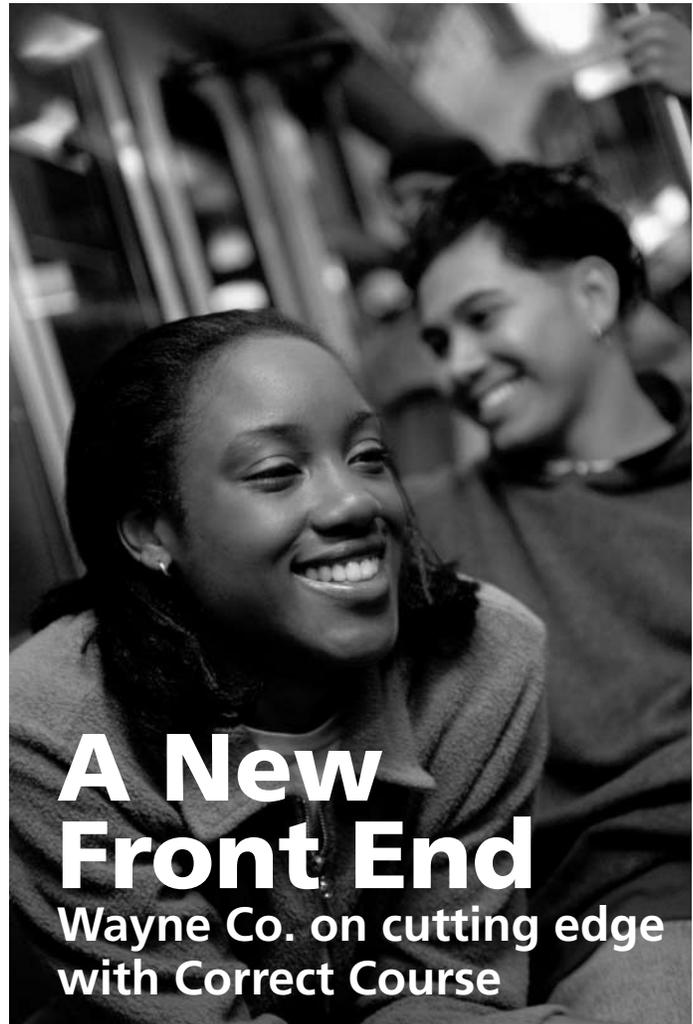
Correct Course takes its cues from the JAC/CMO system, which found that case managers have the greatest opportunity to motivate kids. It offers youth with truancy and status misdemeanors a chance to keep themselves from entering the juvenile justice system by proving they can make better choices for their lives.

Correct Course expands the existing countywide partnership for youth to create a clear outcome — namely, that kids attend school, abide by the law and grow up to be productive citizens.

This issue of *Choices* tells how the new partnership was put together and explains how it is working.

Cynthia J. Smith

Cynthia J. Smith
President/CEO
The Juvenile Assessment Center



A New Front End Wayne Co. on cutting edge with Correct Course

*"The thing about being 'cutting edge' is the fact that you have to continually assess your operation with an eye toward improvement," says Special Counsel **Eric V. Smith**, consultant to the Department of Children and Family Services. "Only then do you have a chance to remain what you claim to be."*

After talking with departmental leadership, a number of jurists and the Wayne County prosecutor, Smith found consensus: No partner in juvenile justice saw value in stigmatizing young people with a juvenile justice label if an alternative was available.

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Correct Course helps juveniles avoid

He began working with Children and Family Services Director **Sue Hamilton-Smith** and the juvenile justice staff to brainstorm new approaches to diversion. Motivated by the desire to address disproportionate minority contact within the juvenile justice system and a commitment to appropriate levels and lengths of stay, the group focused on maximizing existing collaborations.

“Chief Executive **Robert A. Ficano** is well aware of the innovations of this outstanding department,” says Smith, “and he is willing to invest to keep it cutting edge. Of course, he wants the department to continue its fiscal evaluations and look for any chances at cost savings. But cost effectiveness and solid services frequently go hand in hand. We have proved that with the advent of Correct Course.



Eric V. Smith

“Each entity in this system recognized the importance of providing appropriate interventions,” Smith continues. “Effective diversion from the juvenile justice system is a shared goal of all the parties. Of course it saves money, but it is also better for kids.”

Taking advantage of the “willing linkage” between the parties, Smith built the bridges required to create Correct Course, a unique

new diversion option.

“Children and Family Services (CAFS) has strong linkages with Prosecutor **Kym Worthy** and Sheriff **Warren Evans**,” Smith says. “They work well with the Third Circuit Court, and they are actively engaged with local Youth Assistance Programs and the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC).

With all parties sharing the common concern for ‘right-sizing’ our treatment options, we knew the potential for success was there.”

The door to Correct Course is found in the Prosecutor’s Office, where two prosecutors evaluate young people’s readiness for a second chance. Armed with assessment data

provided by the Juvenile Assessment Center’s staff and knowledge of the presenting offense, the Correct Course prosecutors determine those who fit the requirements for the diversion effort.

Based on each young person’s assessment, he or she is assigned to a nearby Youth Assistance Program for services designed to meet individual and family needs for intervention and support.

To reinforce for the young person the importance of their Correct Course commitment, a special unit of the Wayne County Sheriff’s Office provides spot-check services. The sheriff personnel in this unit check on the youth to make sure the diversionary option is not being taken lightly. Should a Correct Course youngster violate a law or threaten new harm,

“Effective diversion from the juvenile justice system is a shared goal of all parties.”
- Eric V. Smith

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the case would be returned to the Prosecutor’s Office for further legal action. There has been no need to exercise that option as of this date.

With all parties aboard and committed to making Correct Course work, the Third Circuit Court bought into the concept and the process. The court recognizes the approach not only ensures appropriate intervention, but it also diminishes risks to the community. Additionally, by diverting so many

“Correct Course will have a measurable impact on disproportionate minority contact.”

- Sue Hamilton-Smith

youths (491 as of this printing), Correct Course reduces cases the jurists need to hear, freeing their dockets for more serious violations.

“Special Counsel Smith brought fresh eyes to the department,” according to Director Hamilton-Smith. “He maximized our strengths. He reached out to each entity in the juvenile justice continuum and refocused our energies. His targeted questioning allowed us to identify for ourselves how we could retool our efforts and increase opportunities for diversion.”



From left, Eric Reed, director of prevention services; Sue Hamilton-Smith, director of the Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services; and Dan Chaney, director of juvenile justice services.

Hamilton-Smith is confident Correct Course will divert many young people who would have become part of the juvenile justice system.

“We believe Correct Course will have a measurable impact on disproportionate minority contact and that is a shared goal in our county,” she says. “National statistics underscore the fact that children with special education and mental health needs, particularly African-American children, are disproportionately criminalized.

Correct Course intervenes and routes children and their families to supportive services within their home community.”

Hamilton-Smith adds that the program would not have happened so quickly without the guidance of Special Counsel Smith.

“He is insightful, committed to kids and was willing to utilize his expertise, reputation and relationships to bring the necessary parties together and make this happen for our children.”

Value-Shift



JIFF gives parents a voice

Parents arrive at court with their son or daughter with mixed feelings and anxiety about what is going to happen to their family life as a result of a court hearing. Their common complaint, reports **Mary Johnson**, JAC/Correct Course Supervisor, is that “no one is listening to our family.” Johnson’s team is very adept at hearing parents out while introducing them to the JIFF process.

“Parents discover the JIFF Correct Course is a good thing for them and their child,” she reports. “For the first time they feel someone is on their side and listening to them.”

Once the juvenile and parent complete the JIFF, they are shown their answers in a report. Instead of being angry, they realize they are being heard, are taken seriously and will get the help they want and need.

Correct Course begins and ends for parents in almost the same way. After a youth completes the diversionary program, s/he and a parent take a post-JIFF assessment conducted by **Tanisha King**, one of a number of assessment specialists. The termination report evaluates the results for progress on specific goals

identified months earlier by the initial JIFF. Often enough, the outcome is positive and their improved social behavior frees them from having a juvenile record. The youth and the parent frequently celebrate a “graduation moment.” They can go home as private citizens still welcome to take advantage of the resources that will continue to be available to them.

The professionals who work in the Correct Course network confront the growing problems of truancy and school violence and know they must be addressed forcefully. Johnson also points out that the changes in special education are working against kids with special needs being productive in school. She believes it is one more symptom of a value-shift observed

throughout her career.

“Today the values are different,” Johnson says. “Instead of school being the child’s job, other things are routinely accepted as more important, whether it’s baby-sitting or just skipping out with friends — often nobody in the home seems to care if the child goes to school.”

The partners who created Correct

Course are meeting the consequences of the value shift head-on. Their common cause is to redirect the juvenile, the parent, the teachers and community service network to re-valuing education as “a child’s only job” and demanding that adults help youth finish school in order to have any hope of a productive life as an adult.

“Today the values are different, Instead of school being the child’s job, other things are routinely accepted as more important, whether it’s baby-sitting or just skipping out with friends — often nobody in the home seems to care if the child goes to school.”

-Mary Johnson



Tactics with Teeth

Judge welcomes options to help families find support

“Tactics with teeth” is how Presiding Judge **Judy Hartsfield** describes Correct Course.

“We have to do something differently, because resources are limited,” she says. Hartsfield agreed to participate in new initiatives to deal with such problems by realigning limited resources that will:

- Increase the use of Youth Assistance Programs;
- Support diversionary tactics that are comprehensive and effective;
- Track compliance as well as have more sanctions available.

Hartsfield welcomes the new options for the Third Circuit Court developed in partnership with the county’s department of Child and Family Services, the prosecutor, the sheriff, the JAC and Youth Assistance Programs. She says the new options are important because youth and families “are struggling mightily to deal with bigger societal issues affecting their lives.” Those issues include overstressed school systems, quality education, personal safety, and alcohol and substance abuse in the home.

As a result of the new partnership, the court has three more categories of probation with specific services for first offenders:

1. **Non-reporting probation:** Needs no personal intervention and no weekly contact face-to-face, but is supported by phone contacts and spot checks;
2. **Intensive probation:** Handled by the court with more contact with a probation officer and use of the Clinic for Child Study along with access to Community Mental Health Counseling
3. **Enhanced probation.**

While relieving the busy court docket, Correct Course also allows the judge and fellow jurists to concentrate on other serious cases. Hartsfield welcomes having the JAC at the court

for assessments of strengths and needs as well as having the prosecutor on board because it will make clear to juveniles that “compliance” is their one-time ticket to freedom.

“We want to keep kids off the formal docket because once they hit it, the rate of re-offense and the creation of a juvenile record become real and continuing,” she says. “There are long-term negative consequences against juveniles with records. We are trying to avoid kids being labeled for the rest of their future.”

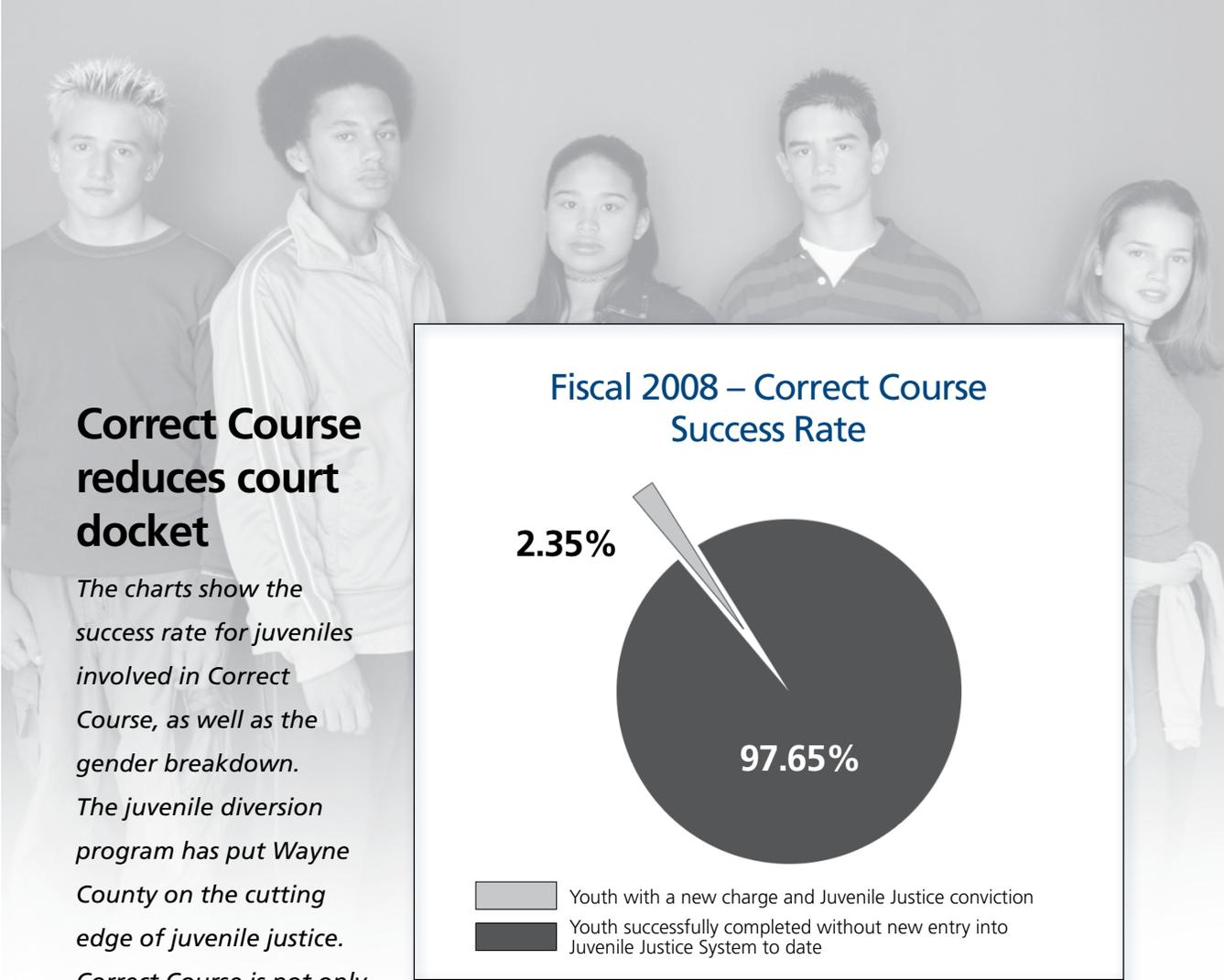
Asked if a lot of juveniles are reappearing in her court, she reported that while it is too early to have exact data, anecdotally, she’s excited by the fact that six months into the pilot, she is not yet seeing repeat offenders.

Working together with other county and community agencies, the goal remains clear: By keeping kids in the community while also maintaining public safety, the gateway into the juvenile justice system is narrowed. The ongoing partnership for the court, the prosecutor and community stakeholders is committed to improving the services given to children and families.

“Correct Course is win-win in a lot of ways,” says **Robert Heimbuch**, juvenile division chief for the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office. “From the prosecutor’s perspective, it provides us a new tool to deal with specific, low-end property crimes, assaults and school fights, and status offenses. These are ‘gateway’ crimes, precursors of more serious delinquent behavior. We have an opportunity to address them with consequences.”

Judge Hartsfield also wants to see a bigger role for more mentors, teachers, tutors, home providers and volunteers.

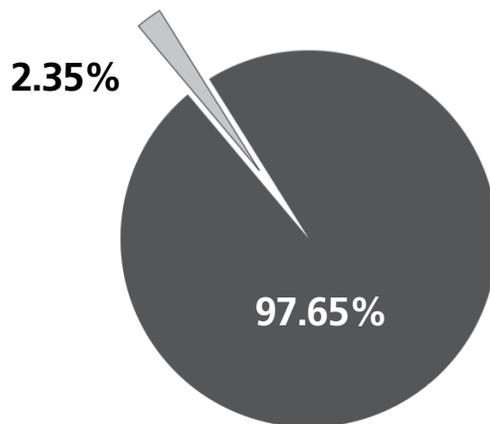
“They are critical to the court’s ability to move kids out of very restrictive placements and still function with their families and the community while the public remains safe,” she says.



Correct Course reduces court docket

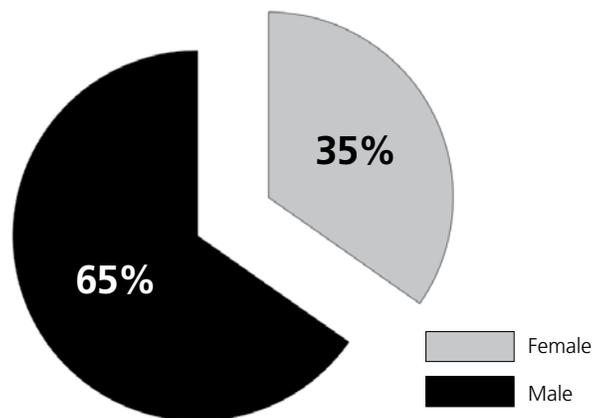
The charts show the success rate for juveniles involved in Correct Course, as well as the gender breakdown. The juvenile diversion program has put Wayne County on the cutting edge of juvenile justice. Correct Course is not only offering new options for treatment but also relieving the busy court docket.

Fiscal 2008 – Correct Course Success Rate



Youth with a new charge and Juvenile Justice conviction
 Youth successfully completed without new entry into Juvenile Justice System to date

Fiscal 2008 – Correct Course involvement by gender of youth



Female
 Male



Overwhelm them **early**

Offenders benefit from seamless relationship between court, providers

“This is good for the juvenile and for the community because immediate consequences have a positive effect on community safety.”

-Robert Heimbuch

Removal should be the last resort,” observes Court Referee Peter Schummer, Jr., “but our services have not been intensive and lucky enough to do this. It has taken too much time to activate any process we put in place, whether it’s probation, assessment, drug screening.”

When it comes to first offenders and status offenders, Schummer believes it is imperative to “overwhelm them early.” He strongly supports the new pilot because it gets services in place by means of a seamless relationship between the court and the providers with timely response to a youth on probation. Not only is the whole JAC process intensive and immediate after the court hearing, community services are also put in place more quickly. Equally important, youth experience more success because everyone stays on top of the case with immediate responses to

immediate situations.

A veteran jurist charged with hearing a wide range of serious juvenile and family issues, Schummer sees more social dysfunction within families and in schools. His approach is to flush out all the issues by asking both the parent and the child to identify their problems as well as indicate what they want the court to do to help them. The partnership put together under the umbrella of Correct Course and the Youth Assistance Programs now assures him that by ordering a structured probation option, there will be immediate, individualized follow up.

Schummer argues the new arrangement not only takes advantage of the JAC’s “proven amazing services, accountability and timeliness of feedback,” it is also helping him with dispositional decisions because of the noticeable increased

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TIMELY BRIDGE:

Growth Works focuses on

Editor's Note: Fifteen Youth Assistance Programs (YAP) offer early intervention services for youth and families referred by Correct Course. Each YAP is unique with treatment options appropriate to its service area. Rather than try to tell the story of every program, we highlighted one program from the western part of the county and one program from the eastside of Detroit as examples of the diversity of options.

Western Wayne's Growth Works has provided Youth Assistances Programs since 1986. The expansion of its diversion services to multiple townships, villages and cities throughout the Conference of Western Wayne is now identified as Community Intervention & Treatment (CITx).

Brian Spitsbergen, program director, indicates the new relationship with Correct Course (and through it with the court, prosecutor and JAC) is a huge plus for Growth Works because it has increased the ability to assess and address a family's needs.

"The new relationship has created timeliness about youth matters," he notes, "allowing us to respond to issues of truancy, anger management, substance and alcohol abuse, as well as family matters as they are occurring."

Because Correct Course uses the JIFF assessment tool to isolate and identify key problems affecting the youth and family, it has proven very helpful for guiding services.

The assessment's immediacy assures a timely response by Growth Works.

"It helps focus where poor choices may have started and points to what modifications are needed," says Spitsbergen. Initial evaluations indicate 94 percent of youth remained offense-free one year after termination from the Youth Assistance Program.

Growth Works' community-based approach offers a rich array of therapeutic tracts for referred youth throughout western Wayne County, including:

- **Aggression replacement therapy**
- **Substance abuse education and assessment**
- **Adult and adolescent outpatient programs**
- **School-based programs**
- **Supervised parenting program/visitation**

By focusing on the issues within the family that are surrounding a youth's behavior, and by making adult participation in parent groups mandatory, CITx assures a high level of active involvement with parents.

CITx, along with the county's other Youth Assistance Programs, together form a "timely bridge" that crosses systems and works inside of them to bypass turf issues and work in partnership with multiple social, educational, legal and behavioral agencies on behalf of youth and families.

family's needs

Recognizing that schools and their services are a source issue for its population of clients, Growth Works program staff work tirelessly to integrate themselves into the systems by:

- **Engaging various school districts such as Van Buren, Redford and Plymouth to create a Title V program**
- **Participating on various committees and work groups with the public schools**
- **Going into the schools and developing seminars for educational staff about "tolerance levels" for issues like drinking, drop outs, anger management and school violence.**

Spitsbergen believes that working with the court, the prosecutors, the other YAPs, and the JAC/Correct Course, "a model is being created, even in tough economic times, that is proving to be cost-effective, outcome-driven, community-based and phenomenally effective in actually making a difference in people's lives."

Youth Diversion Programs and Service Areas in Wayne County / 2008

Funded by Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services and/or the United Way

Abayomi Community Development Corporation
(Detroit 48219, 48221, 48223, 48227, 48228, 48235)

Alkebu-Lan Village
(Detroit 48205, 48207, 48211, 48213, 48214, 48215, 48224, 48234)

Arab American and Chaldean Council
(48201, 48202, 48203, 48204, 48206, 48212, 48226, 48238)

Black Family Development, Inc.
(48205, 48207, 48211, 48214, 48215, 48224, 48234)

Children's Aid Society
(Detroit 49202, 48205, 48219, 48224, 48238, 48226, 48221, 48212, 48206, 48204, 48227, 48235, 48216)

Conference of Eastern Wayne / Children's Home of Detroit
(Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms, Grosse Pointe Park, Grosse Point Shores, Harper Woods)

Conference of Western Wayne / Growth Works
(Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, Livonia, Northville, Northville Twp, Plymouth Twp, Canton, Redford, Romulus, Wayne, Westland, Belleville, Huron Twp, Sumpter Twp, VanBuren Twp)

Don Bosco Hall
(Detroit 48201, 48202, 48203, 48204, 48206, 48212, 48226, 48238)

Downriver Community Conference / The Guidance Center
(Allen Park, Brownstown, Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, Ecorse, Flat Rock, Gibraltar, Grosse Ile, Huron Twp, Lincoln Park, Melvindale, River Rouge, Riverview, Rockwood, Romulus, Southgate, Taylor, Trenton, Woodhaven, Wyandotte)

Ennis Center for Children
(Detroit 48205, 48207, 48211, 48213, 48214, 48215, 4822, 48234)

Family Services, Inc.
(Detroit 48205, 48207, 48211, 48213, 48214, 48215, 48224, 48234)

Healthy Kidz
(Southwest Detroit 48208, 48209, 48210, 48216, 48217)

Matrix Human Services
(Detroit 48210, 48202, 48203, 48204, 48206, 48212, 48226, 48238)

Southwest Solutions
(Southwest Detroit 48208, 48209, 48210, 48216, 48217)

Wayne Mediation Center
(Dearborn Southwest Detroit, Detroit Public Schools, Wayne Co. Juvenile Court)

“PASSPORT”

Black Family Development Inc. puts youth on journey

Black Family Development’s Youth Assistance Program serves at-risk youth (ages 7 to 17) and families on the eastside of Detroit. It is a unique “passport” program containing four tracks or “ports of call,” each designed to take a youth on a journey to acquiring critical competencies in:

- **Education and culture (Port # 1)**
- **Entrepreneurialism and careers (Port # 2)**
- **Individual and family support (mandatory Port # 3)**
- **Structured recreation, physical development and teamwork (Port # 4).**

The Passport Youth Assistance Program goal is to prevent youth from entering or progressing through the juvenile justice system by offering early intervention and diversion program options.

Research-driven and family-centered, it offers prevention services that engage

youth with developmentally appropriate activities designed to add meaning to their daily lives, while also giving them alternatives to resist the destructive choices that can slide them into delinquent behavior, court involvement and a juvenile record.

At-risk youth with truancy and misdemeanor offenses and adjudicated youth placed on probation by the court are referred through Correct Course and automatically enrolled in the Passport Program. They are asked to select at least one port of call, offered one day per week, in addition to individual family support, which is offered twice weekly. A cohort of 25 youth works together for three months in a wide range of challenging interventions after school, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. - hours during which juvenile crime is most likely to occur.

Upon receiving parental permission, youth design a curriculum unique to their needs and guided by their JIFF

assessment. Once enrolled, they begin a three-month journey through a series of experiences designed to:

- **Support the recovery,** health and well-being of the individuals and families served;
- **Enhance the quality** of their lives through a wide range of educational and cultural activities, reduce symptoms of dependency on drugs or alcohol and build alternative options for personal development and improved self-esteem;
- **Challenge them to explore** careers designed to earn a living through “entrepreneurial” exercises that engage them in creating, marketing and selling a product;
- **Engage and support** the youth’s integration into the available recreation and leisure activities in the community, including a one-year membership to Youthville Detroit upon successful completion of the program.

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Young entrepreneurs package costume jewelry they made to sell for Mother’s Day.



DATA POINTS

90 percent of kids don't return to court

Eric Reed, director of Prevention Services Division for Wayne County's Department of Children and Family Services, works directly with the 15 Wayne County Youth Assistances Programs contracted to partner with Correct Course.

The pilot started in 2007 and was to serve 400 youth. As of April 2008, more than 491 youth are being diverted from the juvenile justice system. The common goal is to serve kids within the community and based on preliminary assessment data it is working: 90 percent are not returning to the court or entering more deeply into the juvenile justice system.

"The feedback from all parties," says Reed, "has been instructive and normative for continuing to refine and expand the pilot. The total teamwork of all the stakeholders — court, prosecutor, CAFS, the JAC, YAP providers — has enabled the system to provide immediate responses to pre-delinquent behavior."

He highlights some substantial benefits to date:

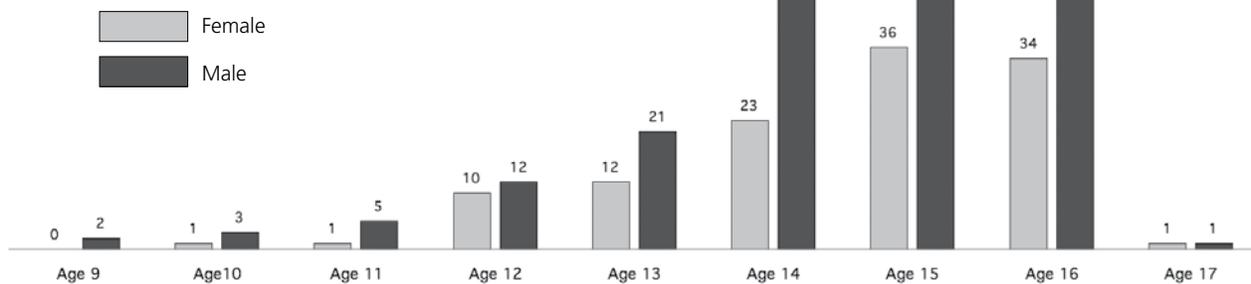


- The Youth Assistance Programs give "clear consequences" for youth and families so that they take the program seriously and use it effectively.
- They are able to collaborate with the prosecutors for positive results and keep them informed about every youth's participation through improved feedback using the Juvenile Agency Information System (JAIS).
- The assigned prosecutors who meet weekly with the JAC diversion staff for follow-up and accountability are impressed with the wide-ranging options made available by the YAPs. Consequently, they are confidently diverting more youth by enrolling them in services that are both appropriate and local.

- The JAC provides both the prosecutors, CAFS managers and the court with weekly charts to help them evaluate and reinforce the pilot. They are then able to measure and respond to all aspects of Correct Course.

Correct Course has spotlighted a huge, ongoing problem: the extraordinary numbers of truancies and suspensions from schools. CAFS administrators are beginning to work with public school officials to offer ways to reverse the trend. They have taken the initiative by providing the Wayne Mediation Center services to the Correct Course family by meeting with public school officials to outline available community resources and by offering to help keep kids in school and focused on completing their education. With the recent acquisition of federal grants for truancy reduction services, CAFS is beginning to focus on the next likely agenda for helping Wayne County's 36 school districts.

Correct Course involvement by age and gender of youth referred from Oct. 1, 2007 to May 15, 2008



Multiple options breed success

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proficiency of the CMO caseworkers, which he described as “shockingly good” the past five years.

“We have two prosecutors dedicated to Correct Course,” says Robert Heimbuch, juvenile division chief for the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office. “They play a nontraditional role by being able, with the JAC, to dedicate more time in the screening process to get the right kids in the right programs and to assure their case moves forward to prevent future delinquent behavior.

“Timeliness is critical in the process, because it allows the prosecutor’s office to move very quickly from ‘processing the charge’ to ‘services,’” Heimbuch adds. “This is good for the juvenile and

for the community because immediate consequences have a positive effect on community safety.”

Schummer credits the leaders at the prosecutor’s office, CAFS, and the JAC for bringing everyone to the table and getting the right people involved throughout the whole system.

“They have given us multiple options to deal with serious issues even as we get cuts and cuts and cuts,” he says.

He believes the court now has a better chance of fulfilling its dual mission of rehabilitation and community protection because a jurist can structure probation knowing there will be immediate follow-up.

Passport focuses on personal responsibility

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Whether participating in tutorial programs such as “Demystifying Mathematics” (a math mastery workshop), or creating a business plan to design, manufacture and sell costume jewelry as gifts for Mother’s Day, or attending special workshops conducted by county prosecutors on the legal issues and consequences surrounding auto theft, participating youth are slowly expanding their exposure to the positive opportunities available in their communities. They are building skills based on personal responsibility and concrete awareness of the dire consequences of delinquent behavior.

Stevia Simpson-Ross, vice president of Juvenile Justice Services, asserts that BFDI “offers each youth a ‘Passport’ into exciting alternatives to the small, stifling world of crime and delinquency, the loss of freedom and collapse of chances for a productive adult life.”

The low-cost Passport Program is intended not only to save the citizenry from paying high criminal justice costs, it offers youth a path to a fuller adolescence because “it is hands on, peer and family involved, life engaging and culturally sensitive to the needs of youth growing up on the eastside of Detroit.”



A Passport participant works on a craft project.

CHOICES *for families*

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