

# CHOICES

*for families*

## Diversion efforts reduce DMC

“Risking Solutions Together” was the mantra of dedicated leadership in the private and public sector of juvenile justice and child welfare in the early 1990s. That was nearly 20 years and many changes ago, but the phrase is still applicable. Today, carrying out the commitment requires more finesse, effort, skill and understanding of families and children we serve.

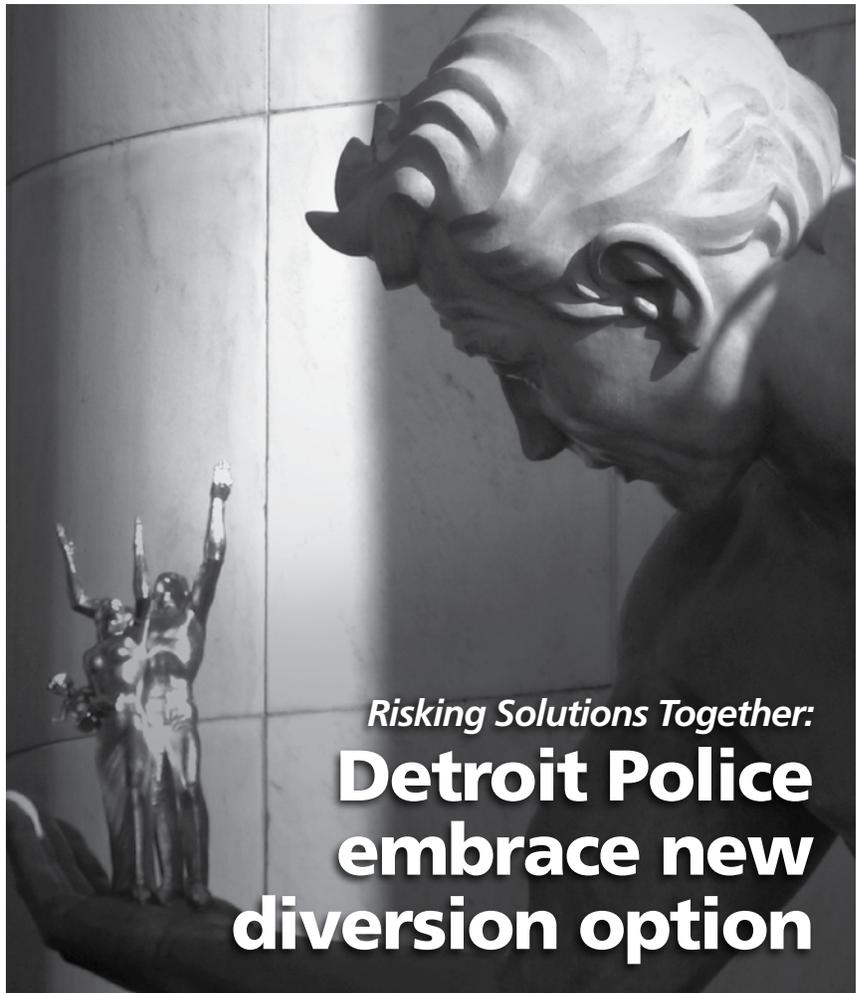
For many years, the issue of over representation of minority youth and families in the “system” has been documented and discussed. Now, government has put resources in place in the private sector to better monitor and address the issue. Unnecessary detention and accuracy of data from the point of police contact has begun to improve and allow for earlier resources and better cost management. Strengthening localized services within the community has greatly reduced the penetration of youth into the formal juvenile justice system.

Risking Solutions Together takes communication, learning from each other, continuity of structure and tremendous commitment. Nearly 20 years ago the group of providers that sought to address new solutions focused on the following vision:

“...We believe that collaborative leadership, our chosen style, demands that we:

- Take risks and bring about positive changes

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## *Risking Solutions Together:* **Detroit Police embrace new diversion option**

More than a decade ago, a group of forward-thinking reformers started looking for better ways to solve the growing problems parents, youngsters, neighborhoods and schools were facing as they tried to raise their families and prepare them for productive adult lives.

Joining in the effort, Wayne County developed the JAC/CMO system. It redefined juvenile services, brought

all Wayne youth home from out of state placements, developed alternatives to the state training school and opened access to services in each county zip code.

Guided by a commitment to provide the right treatment at the right time, it found a way to serve juveniles with serious mental health issues. It attacked an expanding drug subculture with concrete testing and

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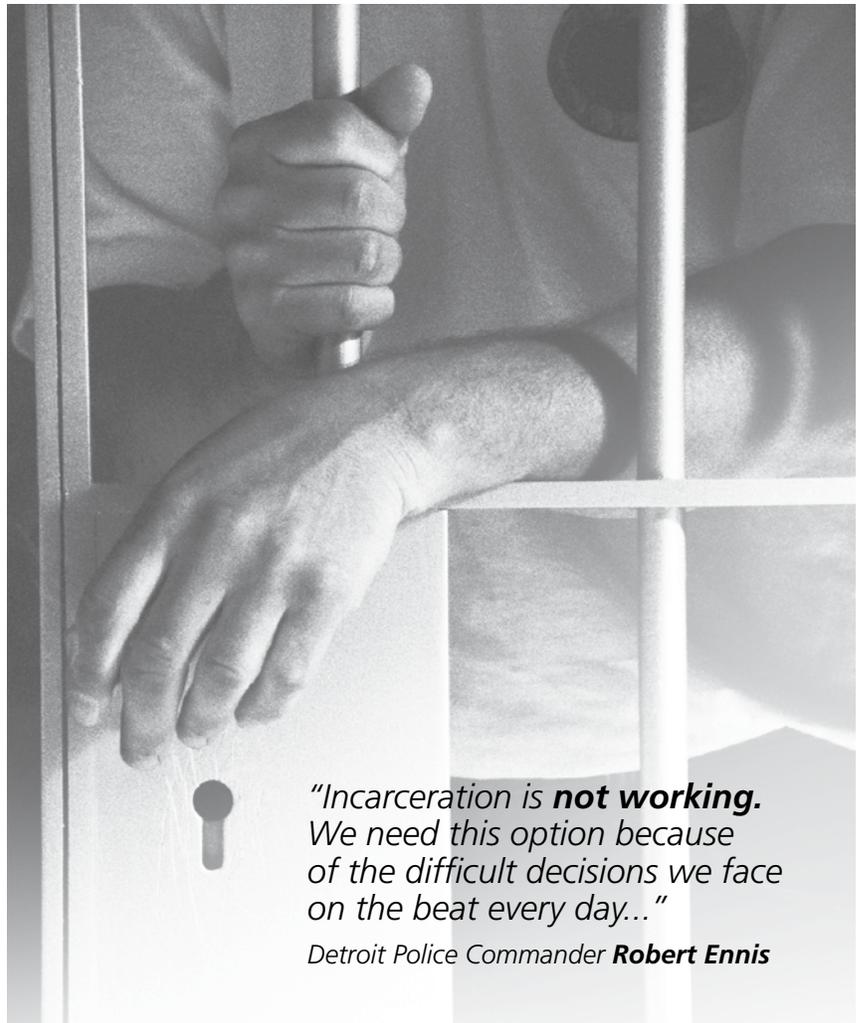
- Engage each other in vigorous debate
- Listen, support and differ to bring about change
- Engage clients in identifying and resolving problems
- Pursue the highest professional standards as measured by honest assessment of results.”

Both leadership change and technology have offered new methods to address community needs and an improved process to measure outcomes. The continued opportunity for improved processes makes the work exciting and always a learning experience.

Leadership efforts focusing on diversion, disproportionate minority contact (DMC) and engaging new partners have significantly changed the landscape of juvenile justice in Wayne County in the past 11 years. The success of DMC and diversion across the county is showing positive outcomes and heartfelt positive family successes. In Wayne County, 90.1 percent of the youth served in 2007 – 2010 via Correct Course have not returned with a new charge or conviction after one year of community diversion services. Of the DMC youth from Detroit, 90.6 percent of the 274 post one year services DMC designated youth have not returned with offense convictions. What better outcome is there to “Risking Solutions **Together**” than to achieve such success with talented colleagues, caring families and community strength? Implementing vision takes time, but when we are persistent and faithful in our efforts for families, youth and community, success does happen. Families teach us to be creative and diligent. As one mother tells us, “**Don’t give up!**”

*Cynthia J. Smith*

Cynthia J. Smith  
President/CEO



*“Incarceration is **not working**. We need this option because of the difficult decisions we face on the beat every day...”*

*Detroit Police Commander **Robert Ennis***

## Pilot program offers options for change

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treatment alternatives. It adopted uniform assessment and treatment tools for boys and girls; and it focused on providing culturally-competent services neighborhood by neighborhood.

Even as budget cuts continue to hit youth services hardest, the county is adapting resources to assist youth in a creative approach to preventing deeper system control and cost. The newest pilot is a joint effort with Wayne County Children and Family Services, Detroit’s Police Department, Youth Assistance Programs and the JAC to divert youth early and with positive community involvement.

All juvenile programs are aware of the disproportionate minority contact that creates an ongoing disparity of services for youth of color. To redress the imbalance, the new pilot seeks to collect accurate, reliable data to identify who the young people are and “assure the same consequences for the same behaviors,” including opportunity for diversion whenever possible.

Building on the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office proven success with Correct Course, selected Detroit Police Department Youth Officers will be able not only to identify those kids who are “just starting” to show

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**Agenda:**  
Divert youth from penetration in the juvenile justice system while at the same time taking advantage of tested protocols to ensure the safety of youth and community.



### How it works

## Program aims to divert youth from juvenile system

The police officer on the beat has first contact with a youth and family in behavioral situations. The officer must exercise thoughtful discretion about how much to intervene to address a troubling family situation. Not knowing what's available or what's needed often leaves the officer with little alternative to issue a "warning" or resort to an arrest.

As part of Wayne County's ongoing effort to resolve disproportionate minority contact, the JAC will pilot an informal Reception Assessment Center for the officers to divert youth from unnecessary penetration in the juvenile justice system.

How will it work? Until the concept of local assessment settings is evaluated and defined, and because a police precinct is on the ground floor of the JAC's offices, **the JAC will take and respond to youth referrals for diversion. It will coordinate with consenting youth and families and administer the JIFF to youth and parents to help determine a safe alternative to arrest and work through the existing local network of CAFS Youth Assistance Programs.**

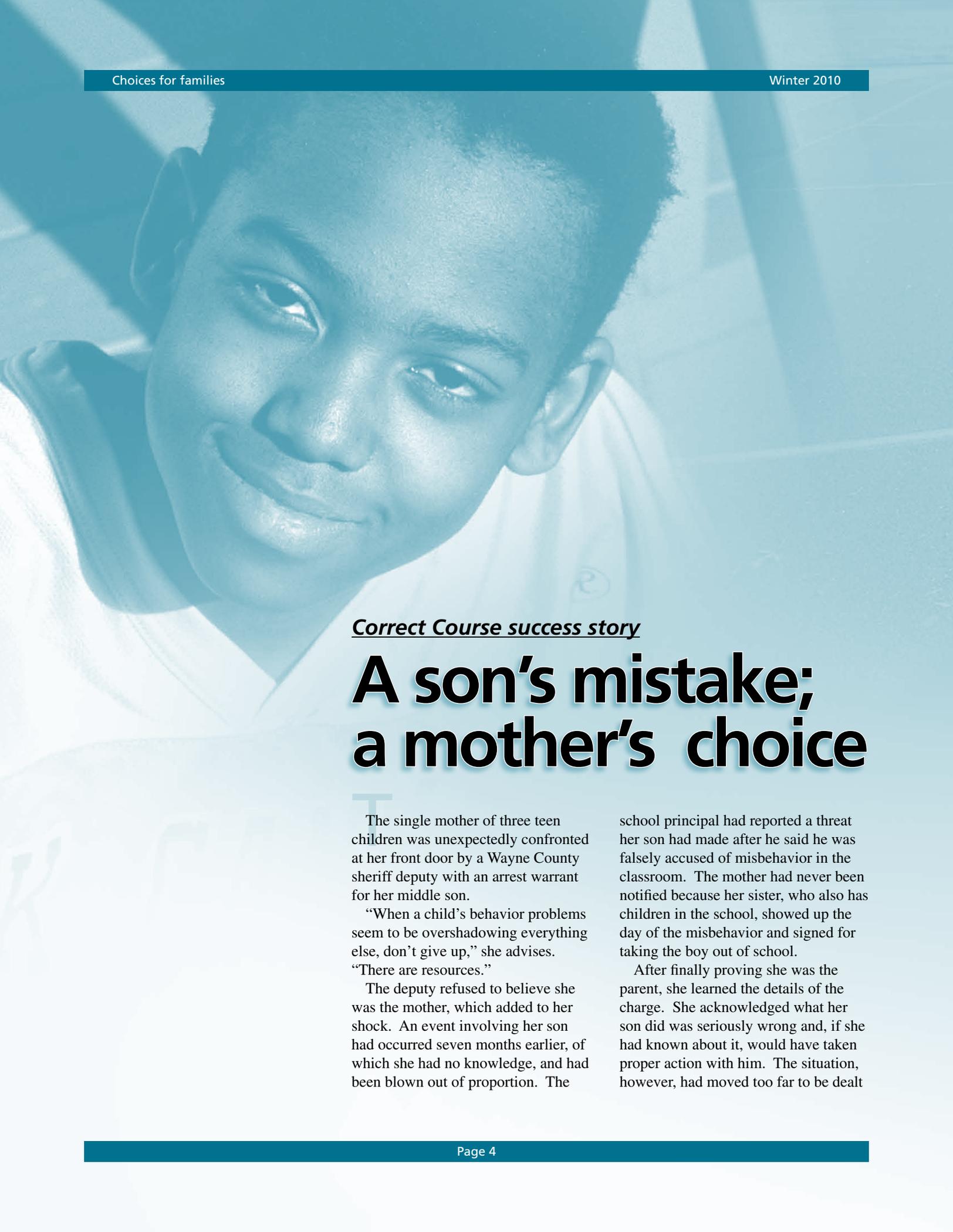
**The JIFF is a proven assessment tool. It can be administered in any local setting, such as churches, schools, nonprofit organizations or recreation centers by trained staff. In short, the JIFF could be administered wherever youth and families typically gather socially -- the less threatening the setting the better.** However, to be able to ensure appropriate, safe use of the

instrument, it will require (1) excellent training of those who administer the instrument, (2) availability of appropriate services able to respond to the JIFF's findings, (3) ongoing expert supervision of the entire process, and (4) data oversight.

**If and when a local network of reception assessment centers is put in place and police and neighborhood leaders are made aware of its availability, families will be evaluated quickly with the JIFF either from a referral by police, by staff members in non-clinical settings or by families who walk in asking for help.**

The agenda is the same in all settings: *divert youth from penetration in the juvenile justice system while at the same time taking advantage of tested protocols to ensure the safety of youth and community.* As in all Wayne County youth services, follow up and outcome measurement will be essential and specifically targeted behaviors or symptoms will be measured before and after interventions to determine if they are effective.

**Carlita Wilson**, LMSW, ACSW, special projects program manager, Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services, hopes the data that comes from the pilot will enable the county to better determine its needs, and in collaboration with Detroit Police Department decide how effective it is in decreasing disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system. ■



*Correct Course success story*

# A son's mistake; a mother's choice

The single mother of three teen children was unexpectedly confronted at her front door by a Wayne County sheriff deputy with an arrest warrant for her middle son.

“When a child’s behavior problems seem to be overshadowing everything else, don’t give up,” she advises. “There are resources.”

The deputy refused to believe she was the mother, which added to her shock. An event involving her son had occurred seven months earlier, of which she had no knowledge, and had been blown out of proportion. The

school principal had reported a threat her son had made after he said he was falsely accused of misbehavior in the classroom. The mother had never been notified because her sister, who also has children in the school, showed up the day of the misbehavior and signed for taking the boy out of school.

After finally proving she was the parent, she learned the details of the charge. She acknowledged what her son did was seriously wrong and, if she had known about it, would have taken proper action with him. The situation, however, had moved too far to be dealt

## Son learns self control, earns parent's trust

with informally. Faced with court action, she was offered the option to participate in Correct Course or take the matter before a judge. She opted for Correct Course and does not regret her choice.

Mrs. H and her son "J" each completed the JIFF assessment, which showed that specific issues in the household had to be better addressed. She had been focusing on dealing with her son's ADHD history, raising three children, working a patient care job, going to school at night and thought she was doing all she could to keep her family on track. Based on their mutual assessment, Mrs. H and J were referred to Black Family Development's Youth Assistance Program.

J began participating in weekly group sessions that focused on people skills, attention span and social skills. The group watched special movies to discuss new ways of dealing with behavior in school and with peers. J says it was a good program and it helped him stay out of trouble. He and his mother talk more about their issues and his mom helps him process situations that need more focus.

"I can trust him more," says Mrs. H. J feels like he can make better decisions for himself, especially in tough peer situations." He is in high school now, had been promoted from Jr. Varsity to Varsity and is excited about the new

challenge. He is a good skater and recently received a certificate as the best skater in his age group.

Because the family completed the program, charges against J were dismissed and he is able to continue pursuing his goals free of the threat of being in the juvenile system.

Asked what advice they would offer

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*"I can trust him more. J feels like he can make better decisions for himself, especially in tough peer situations."*

–Mother

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to other parents and teens, Mrs. H shared what she had learned through the process:

- Don't give up; never give up on your kids because they can change.
- Your participation as a parent is important, because it strengthens the program and makes the best use of limited resources
- Take advantage of positive offers of help; you don't have to go it alone. There are resources out there that will help you keep fighting for your child.

- Be the parent; Don't allow negative behavior.

She summed up why she is so satisfied for having followed her own advice:

"My son learned to watch his mouth, show better self-control, pick his associates better and be his own man. I am proud of how much he has grown."

J learned a lot about himself and offered this advice to his peers:

- "If you are doing something bad, you need to stop. It's just peer pressure. What's the point of wasting your chances? You don't have to be a drop out."
- "There's stuff you can do instead of being bad – in your neighborhood or church or play sports. I discovered I can be good in a lot of sports – football, basketball, baseball, but especially skating -- but education has to come first."

Mrs. H and her son J are one of the 93 percent of families who are benefiting from Correct Course and have not had further involvement with any convictions throughout Wayne County. Their refusal to give up became the formula for their own success. ■

# Law enforcement veteran joins JAC board

**Robert Ennis**, commander of the Detroit Police Department’s Eastern District, has joined the Juvenile Assessment Center’s Board of Directors.

Ennis, a 30-year law enforcement veteran, says he hopes to contribute to the JAC’s success in helping the more than 16,000 juveniles in the city’s eastern district.



He expressed high hopes for the pilot program between the JAC and the Wayne County CAFS Youth Assistance

Programs and looks forward to learning about more options for his officers as they work with juveniles.

“The amount of peer pressure on most kids every day is incredible,” he says. “I know many kids are

salvageable if you just provide the right programs. If we can shift kids away from contact with the police department to fuller participation in school – imagine the benefits for them.”

“Commander Ennis brings concrete, realistic knowledge of day-to-day life on Detroit’s eastside streets,” says **Cyndi Smith**, JAC CEO. “We look forward to the insights he will bring to the board.” ■

## Incarceration not the answer continued from page 2

behavior problems at home, in school or in their neighborhood but also plug them and their families into local Youth Assistance Programs, using the JAC as their central processing unit. Instead of just warning and sending them back home, they will offer youth and parents concrete ways to change course.

**Richard Smart**, court administrator, 3rd Judicial Circuit, says the Disproportionate Minority Contact pilot program is “one of fundamental fairness, especially today with so many single-parent and often no-parent homes.” Smart shared his

understanding of and experience with juvenile court services with participants at a October 26, 2010 Disproportionate Minority Contact Training Conference.

“We can’t lock up the problem,” he told the group of Detroit police officers and youth assistance program directors. “This is the right way and the right thing to do. These programs stand in the breach and that’s why the court wants to see these kids diverted and reclaimed.”

*“This is the **right way** and the **right thing** to do. These programs stand in the breach and that’s why the court wants to see these kids diverted and reclaimed.”*

**Richard Smart**

decisions we face on the beat every day in my region with up to 16,000 juveniles!”

Ennis expects the pilot diversion program to give his youth officers a new way for

parents who ask them, “What can I do?” and “Where can I get help?” **DPD youth officers will be able to answer their questions by introducing parents to providers in their neighborhoods who, in conjunction with the JAC using a JIFF assessment, will be quickly and directly guided to immediate help so their sons and daughters don’t end up deeper in the system.**

Detroit Police Commander **Robert Ennis**, a new member of the JAC Board of Directors, echoed Smart’s message.

“Incarceration is not working. We need this option because of the difficult

“We need you service providers to work with our officers,” Ennis stressed, summing up the challenge, “to make sure it doesn’t get worse than what it is, especially today when there’s no more money. You’re our first line of action,” he encouraged, “and the DMC project is aimed for you as your tool to be ‘more of a parent sometimes than the real parent.’” ■



## *Prevention Services Diversion Overview*

# Officers play key role in preventing, reducing juvenile delinquency

*By Eric Reed, Director  
Prevention Services Division  
Wayne County Department of  
Children and Family Services*

Law enforcement officers play a crucial role in our juvenile justice system, one that extends beyond enforcing the law. Officers have first-hand knowledge of the communities in which they work, are familiar with the youth in those communities, and their activities; and they frequently encounter youth who are exposed to conditions that predispose them to possible delinquent behavior.

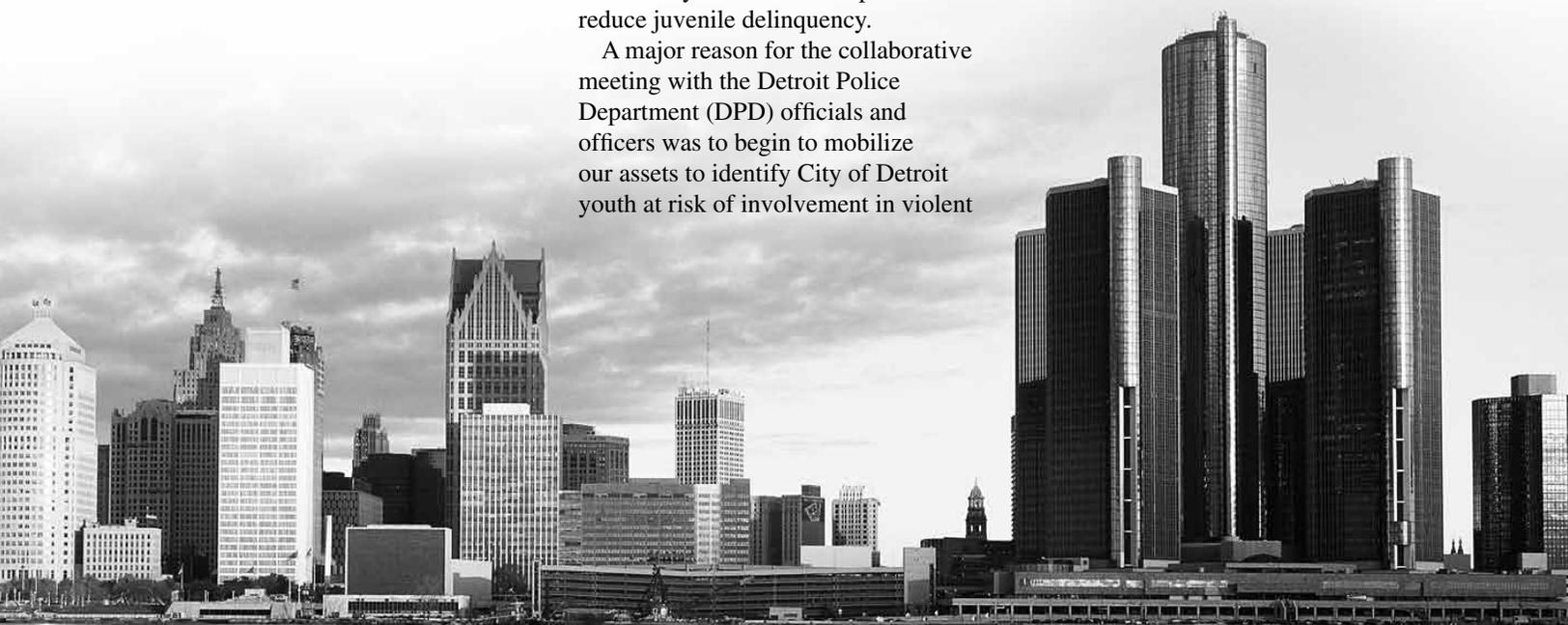
Furthermore, their status and position as law enforcement officers allow them to serve as unifying elements in community-wide efforts to prevent and reduce juvenile delinquency.

A major reason for the collaborative meeting with the Detroit Police Department (DPD) officials and officers was to begin to mobilize our assets to identify City of Detroit youth at risk of involvement in violent

behavior, youth experiencing academic and school truancy issues, youth experimenting with drugs and alcohol and those associating with gangs. We want to be able to address their needs through a collaborative approach involving DPD, the Prosecutor's Office, the Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services (CFS), the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) and our existing network of youth-serving agencies.

In 2004, CFS developed the Prevention Services Division to fund, expand and monitor quality diversion and early intervention programs for young people who are at risk of being placed on probation, or possibly

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## Collaborative approach mobilizes assets

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adjudicated and also those youth at risk of being removed from their homes and placed in foster care. The department views such services as essential to the healthy development of our young people, their families and the communities in which they reside.

In fiscal year 2010, the Prevention Services Division of the Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services contracted and subcontracted with 105 different organizations throughout Wayne County to provide prevention services. Of that number, 74 organizations are located in the City of Detroit - eight Youth Assistance Programs, 22 donor funding agencies, two federally funded mentoring programs and 42 PASS (Prevention Action Services System) organizations.

The **Juvenile Diversion Program** provides services to Wayne County youth up to age 18, many of whom have come in contact with law enforcement or the court system. Youth involved in our juvenile diversion programs are required to participate in designated services a minimum of once per week, for as few as 12 weeks and up to 24 weeks. The services are offered so youth can participate in community and school activities, and avoid entry into the formal juvenile justice system. Correct Course, Youth Assistance Programs, and our Donor Funding Initiative support the stated goals. In the recently-completed contract year, 2,200 youth were involved in YAP (nearly 800 were Detroit youth) and 3,700 youth were involved in our donor

funded programs. Of that number, more than 2,300 were City of Detroit youth.

Our **Early Intervention Program** provides youth development, educational, truancy reduction and family support services to Wayne County at-risk youth up to age 17. Interventions include after school programs, summer day camps, school-based social work services, recreational and sports programs and mentoring. In most cases services are available five days per week. From October 1, 2009 – September 30, 2010, our 42 Detroit-based PASS organizations and two federally-funded mentoring programs (Michigan State University Extension and Young Men / Young Women In Transition) provided services to nearly 10,000 of the 12,600 youth who were enrolled with PASS agencies.

Services available within our prevention network include:

- Individual and group counseling; and some offer family counseling as well
- Tutoring and homework assistance
- Substance abuse education and treatment
- Life skills
- Truancy mediation
- Conflict resolution workshops
- Parent workshops
- Mentoring (one-to-one and groups)
- Recreation and competitive sports
- Job preparation and employment assistance
- Youth entrepreneurship
- Dance and drama; Arts & crafts
- Community service activities.

## CHOICES for families

Choices is published by

**The Juvenile  
Assessment Center**  
7310 Woodward Ave., Suite 601  
Detroit, MI 48202

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*Publisher*

CjL Strategies, LLC  
*Publication Management*

Volume IX, No. 2  
Winter 2010