

Introduction

The Juvenile Justice Commission’s primary responsibility is the custody and care of juvenile offenders committed to the agency by the courts. However, the Commission has additional responsibilities which include: overseeing county juvenile justice issues; administering fiscal incentives to local governments to provide programming; coordinating the planning and expansion of local services through county youth services commissions; establishing standards for county youth detention centers and monitoring compliance with those standards, and overseeing education programs in county youth detention centers.

The Commission is committed to: 1) providing a safe living environment for New Jersey’s men, women and, particularly, its children; 2) ensuring that juvenile offenders are held accountable for their unlawful behavior; and 3) providing juveniles with opportunities for personal growth and skills development through rehabilitation efforts and delinquency prevention services.

The Commission was created by statute in December 1995 to respond to findings issued by the Governor’s Advisory Council on Juvenile Justice. The Council reported a lack of centralized authority

for planning, policy development and provision of services in the juvenile justice system. The Commission was established as the single agency of State government to lead a wholesale reform of the juvenile justice system.

Continuum of Care

At any given time, there are approximately 2,000 juveniles in the Commission’s care. The Juvenile Justice Commission provides a continuum of services for juveniles placed in its custody including secure care, residential group homes, day reporting centers and aftercare/parole.

A guiding principle for the Commission is to base individual placement decisions on the unique needs and delinquency history of each youth. Through its programs and contracts with private providers, the Commission offers focused treatment to address the special needs of the youth in its custody. The ultimate goal is for a youth’s placement status to become less restrictive over time as the juvenile demonstrates an increased preparedness for release back into the community.



Education

Whether they take part in day programs, live at residential group centers or are housed in secure facilities, all young offenders in the custody of the Commission attend academic classes year round. Most juveniles advance several grade levels while serving their sentences. The Commission operates on the philosophy that education in general, and literacy in particular, helps juveniles acquire the skills and the motivation necessary to change the direction of their lives. In addition to the state-mandated curriculum, students develop marketable skills. The Commission provides students with access to a variety of vocational training programs including woodworking, video training, optical lab experience, welding, silk screening and upholstery.

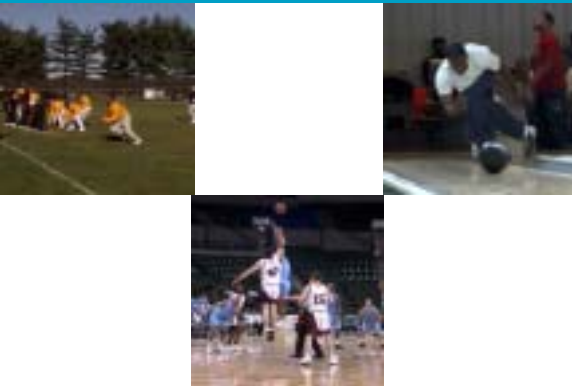
Restorative Justice

As a supplement to the ongoing efforts to combat recidivism, the Commission’s Restorative Justice Initiative requires juvenile offenders to give something back to the community. Restorative Justice crime scene repair crews and community service teams provide approximately 6,000 hours of service each month in communities throughout the state. A new component of the Restorative Justice Initiative allows juvenile offenders to meet with individuals who have been personally affected by crime. These sessions help young offenders to gain a personal understanding of the impact of their actions, not only on victims, but on family members and the community as well.

Community Involvement and Aftercare

The majority of juveniles in the Commission’s custody confront personal and environmental factors that make it difficult for them to succeed even after vigorous rehabilitation and counseling. Many of those who complete their time with the Commission return to crime ridden neighborhoods and to struggling families.

Aftercare/parole plans are developed for each juvenile in order to ensure a continuation of services and treatment upon release from custody. The Commission employs both parole officers and social workers to provide support and guidance, as well as to ensure that young people adhere to the conditions of their release. Aftercare staff members focus their attention on visiting juveniles at their homes, at their jobs and in their neighborhoods in order to measure progress first hand. As part of the Commission’s efforts to help youth develop a vested interest in their communities, the Community Involvement Initiative joins youth with volunteer mentors who work together with staff to assist youth through this transition process.



Local Programs and Services

Based on the belief that local communities have a unique understanding of their own youth populations, the Commission has developed several funding initiatives and state-level services that encourage the development and enhancement of community-based services. These include delinquency prevention programs and alternative sentencing options for at-risk, court-involved or adjudicated offenders. Funding areas include the State/Community Partnership Grant Program, the State Incentive Program, federal block grant funding through the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Program and the Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant Program.

The development and enhancement of a local community-based continuum is achieved through a cooperative effort between the state and its 21 counties through county youth services commissions. Each year the Commission awards approximately \$11 million in block grants to communities. Approximately 4,500 young people participate each year in one or more of the 224 programs available throughout the state.

In addition, the Commission allocates approximately \$3 million a year in formula grant funds to pay for local delinquency and treatment programs through the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Pre-

vention Committee. Another \$5.9 million in Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grants (JAIBG) allows both county and municipal level governments to create youth programs specific to their needs.

JJC Court Liaisons serve as a bridge between the Family Courts and the Commission by providing assistance in the placement of juveniles. The Juvenile Detention Monitoring Unit is responsible for monitoring, on a continuing basis, compliance with state regulations by county juvenile detention centers. The Grants Management Office researches and seeks funds that coincide with the needs of the Commission that are not supported by the State budget.

The Juvenile Justice Commission consistently monitors new trends in juvenile justice and is committed to assessing the long term impact of its programs. Whether through expanded mental health services, special education classes, drug abuse treatment programs, sex offender counseling or other individualized services, the Commission's focus remains on the development of relevant skills and a sense of competence in each young person. By promoting individual achievement and self-confidence, the Commission strives to return juveniles to their home communities prepared to honor the rules of society and possessed of the skills necessary to succeed.



For More Information

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