

THE DJJ *Digest*

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Terrell County RYDC Ribbon-Cutting



Pataula Chief Superior Court Judge Joe C. Bishop and DJJ Commissioner Niles speak at the Faith and Community Alliance meeting in Terrell County



Wilkes RYDC Groundbreaking

In early October the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for its new Terrell County Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDC) and a groundbreaking ceremony for the Wilkes RYDC.

In addition, the Department held its initial Faith and Community Alliance meeting for the new Terrell County RYDC in Dawson. DJJ works with local community and faith partners in communities near its facilities. These alliances have generated positive impacts on the lives of youth who are in DJJ care at its 26 secure facilities located across the state.

The events are highlighted on the following pages.

Key Acronyms

- **CJCJ** – Council of Juvenile Court Judges
- **CSO** – Community Services Office
- **CYC** – Commissioner’s Youth Council
- **DJJ** – Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice
- **FFT** – Functional Family Therapy
- **GDOC** – Georgia Department of Corrections
- **NCCHC** – National Commission on Correctional Health Care
- **RYDC** – Regional Youth Detention Center
- **STU** – Specialized Treatment Unit
- **YDC** – Youth Development Campus

Ribbon-Cutting at New Terrell County RYDC



Georgia DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles addresses attendees



DJJ Commissioner Niles wields the ceremonial scissors as state legislators, DJJ Board members and local dignitaries look on

DJJ has completed work on its new RYDC in Dawson. Commissioner Niles presided over the official ribbon-cutting ceremonies for the Terrell County RYDC on October 4.

Commissioner Niles, State Senator Freddie Powell Sims and State Representative Gerald Greene spoke to a crowd of more than 100 community stakeholders and DJJ staff. Afterward, visitors toured the facility, which replaces DJJ's aging juvenile detention facility in nearby Albany. The Terrell County RYDC is located at 1666 Albany Highway in Dawson.

The RYDC is a former Georgia Department of Corrections (GDOC) adult probation facility that was transferred to DJJ. Construction was funded from bonds approved during the 2014 legislative session. The multi-structure compound is now a new juvenile facility with buildings constructed to securely serve male and female offenders from the area surrounding Terrell County.



Georgia State Senator Freddie Powell Sims speaks to attendees as Representative Gerald Greene looks on



DJJ staff members, local dignitaries and community stakeholders listen intently



The flags of the United States of America, the State of Georgia and DJJ fly during the ribbon-cutting



The Terrell County RYDC Media Center is named for retired DJJ Associate Superintendent, Dr. Audrey Armistad



The common area of one housing unit at the Terrell County RYDC

“This facility marks a milestone for the Department of Juvenile Justice here in southwest Georgia,” said Commissioner Niles. “Not only will the Terrell County RYDC provide a significant number of good jobs, it also showcases many updates in special construction, security engineering and educational facilities to accompany Georgia’s juvenile justice reforms.”

The RYDC incorporates enhanced security measures including closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance, steel cell construction and touch-screen security control panels as part of DJJ’s mission to ensure public safety. There is also an expanded educational wing with computer labs and state-of-the-art interactive learning boards that make the Terrell County RYDC a technology standard-bearer for DJJ and reflect the agency’s added emphasis on education.

“At DJJ we have nothing to do with how the kids get to the agency, but we have everything to do with their success while they are in our care and after they leave our care with additional education and a firm grasp on who they are,” Commissioner Niles continued. “Georgia’s kids who are served by DJJ deserve to be rehabilitated and provided with all the services they need. We are here to give them hope and opportunities for the future.”

In addition to the transfer of experienced employees from the nearby Albany RYDC, DJJ launched special recruitment efforts to bring aboard qualified candidates to staff the Terrell County facility. The new juvenile correction team members completed rigorous training to help young offenders through troubled transitions in their lives.

Commissioner Niles concluded by stating, “We deeply appreciate that Governor Nathan Deal and the General Assembly provided the resources for this facility and we’re grateful to the citizens of southwest Georgia who will support it.”



Local residents, reporters and DJJ staff tour the new Terrell County RYDC

Groundbreaking for New Wilkes County Regional Youth Facility Takes Place



State and local leadership breaking ground at the Wilkes RYDC

DJJ held groundbreaking ceremonies for the state juvenile justice system’s new Wilkes RYDC on October 11. The RYDC will be located at 1430 Industrial Park Road in Washington and will replace the aging Sandersville RYDC.

At the event, DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles stated, “The Wilkes RYDC groundbreaking marks an employment milestone for this area of east-central Georgia, generating 60 new jobs for teachers, nurses and juvenile corrections officers.”

The Wilkes RYDC will repurpose a former GDOC adult pre-release center and will incorporate a secure facility redesign. When it is completed, the Wilkes RYDC will join the Terrell County RYDC as a showcase for new Georgia juvenile justice programming.

Under the redesign plan, the Wilkes RYDC will include 30,000 square feet of dormitory space to securely accommodate a population of 40 male and eight female juvenile offenders. Another 6,000 square feet has been allocated for a gymnasium.

In addition, the Wilkes RYDC will demonstrate DJJ’s added emphasis on education and technology with 1,200 square feet designated for a new vocational education section.

“The design is another example of how the staff of DJJ work to prepare young offenders for reentry into their communities as responsible and law-abiding citizens,” said Commissioner Niles.

Like the Terrell County RYDC, the Wilkes RYDC will incorporate enhanced security measures as part of DJJ’s mission to ensure public safety, including CCTV surveillance, touch-screen security controls and the addition of upgraded perimeter fencing.

A number of community leaders and local elected officials attended the groundbreaking. Among them were representatives of the Washington-Wilkes Chamber of Commerce, Wilkes County Commission Chair Sam Moore, Washington Mayor Ames Barnett and Toombs Judicial Circuit Juvenile Court Judges Britt Hammond and Jaye Jones. Among the state legislators participating were Representatives Barry Fleming, Tom McCall and Trey Rhodes, as well as State Senator Bill Jackson.



**DJJ Commissioner
Avery D. Niles**



**DJJ Board Member
Willie C. Bolton**

Commissioner Niles said, "We're grateful to Governor Nathan Deal, the General Assembly and the citizens of Georgia for supporting our mission and this specific project. In particular, Senator Bill Jackson has spearheaded this project for several years and we appreciate his leadership."

In addition to a number of DJJ staff and citizens of the city of Washington and Wilkes County who attended the groundbreaking festivities, DJJ Board member Willie C. Bolton also was present. Bolton grew up in Rayle, a small town in Wilkes County. Bolton said, "I am proud that the Department of Juvenile Justice located this facility in Wilkes County. I know the citizens of the county will support DJJ in its efforts to help prepare the youth who pass through the Wilkes RYDC for the rest of their lives."

Commissioner Niles concluded the event by inviting the elected officials and Bolton to help him with the ceremonial groundbreaking. The Wilkes RYDC is expected to open and be operational in late 2017.



Dignitaries at the Wilkes RYDC immediately before the groundbreaking



**Contractor Joe Spivey looks over plans for the
Wilkes County facility**



**DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles at the Wilkes RYDC
groundbreaking with Senator Bill Jackson**

DJJ Faith and Community Alliance Meets in Dawson



DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles greets attendees

In concert with the ribbon-cutting at its new Terrell County RYDC, the Department of Juvenile Justice held its initial Terrell County Faith and Community Alliance meeting on October 3 in Dawson, the county seat.

DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles, DJJ staff and community leaders took part in the meeting, which was held at the Robert Albritten Neighborhood Service Center.

The alliance meeting focused on building support among local community and faith partners in order to strengthen the state juvenile justice system's outreach to young offenders from Terrell County and southwest Georgia. Similar alliances at the 26 secure facilities across the state have generated positive impacts on the lives of youth who are in DJJ care.



State Representative Gerald Greene and Commissioner Niles discuss the Terrell County RYDC with meeting attendees

Ministers, community leaders and those interested in making a positive change in the lives of local young people attended to learn about the hands-on opportunities to help increase the opportunities for success of the youth in DJJ's care. The activities undertaken by members of the Alliance help the youth during their incarceration and also help create safer communities for the long-term.

Going forward, DJJ hopes to obtain commitments from local churches and community groups to help address the following concerns: teaching parenting and counseling skills classes for youth and parents; providing character development instruction; developing mentoring programs for DJJ youth at churches and community organizations; and establishing re-entry assistance for youth returning to Terrell County and surrounding communities.

For ministers, pastors and/or leaders of community organizations who were unable to attend, DJJ Chaplain Danny Horne can be contacted at 404-508-6500 (office) or 404-295-0057 (cell).



DJJ Assistant Commissioner Keith Horton (left) speaks with Pataula Chief Superior Court Judge Joe C. Bishop



Pastor Frederick Murray of the First Brownwood Baptist Church (right) was a featured participant during the Faith and Community Alliance meeting



DJJ Chaplain Danny Horne (center) talks with local church and community leaders



Commissioner Niles takes part in an interview with a local television station



DJJ staff members, local dignitaries and community stakeholders listen intently

DJJ Was Ready For Action When Hurricane Matthew Hit Georgia

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Hurricane Matthew strengthens to a Category 4 storm



Scott Cagle (right) confers about the response to Hurricane Matthew
(Photo courtesy of Atlanta Journal-Constitution)



Georgia Governor Nathan Deal speaks to staff at the Special Operations Center

The National Hurricane Center predicted that Hurricane Matthew would threaten southeast Georgia after hitting the Florida coast. Acting on recommendations from the state's Emergency Operations Command, Governor Nathan Deal issued a mandatory evacuation order for six coastal counties located east of Interstate 95 on October 4, 2016. The mandatory evacuation impacted Bryan, Camden, Chatham, Glynn, Liberty and McIntosh counties. In addition, a voluntary evacuation order was recommended for coastal county residents west of I-95.

DJJ was ready for the hurricane. "Following the lead of Governor Deal, DJJ took numerous precautionary measures in the days prior to the hurricane's arrival," said Commissioner Avery D. Niles. "We sought to ensure the safety of our youth and staff in the Department's secure facilities."

Commissioner Niles pre-assigned staff from the Office of Planning and Preparedness and the Office of Communications to maintain ongoing contact with the National Weather Service and Georgia Emergency Management & Homeland Security Agency (GEMHSA) in order to provide guidance to agency staff and to respond to news media inquiries. DJJ's Planning and Preparedness Director Scott Cagle monitored the weather conditions from the state's Special Operations Center, providing regular updates to the Executive Staff and advising the agency's employees to be "alert, vigilant and proactive!"

DJJ safety officers focused emergency weather preparations on the agency's short-term RYDCs in the storm's probable path, including Savannah RYDC in Chatham County, Waycross RYDC in Ware County and Claxton RYDC in Evans County. By the time Commissioner Niles issued orders for the evacuation of the Savannah RYDC, the DJJ team of more than 4,000 state juvenile corrections professionals



Georgia Lt. Governor Casey Cagle also spoke to staff at the Special Operations Center

were already at work taking precautions. Preparations were made for potential interruptions of essential services at DJJ facilities across Georgia, particularly those in the hurricane's probable path or where flood damage was expected. DJJ Deputy Commissioners, facility directors and safety officers ensured facility perimeters were inspected and loose objects secured; fuel tanks were checked and generators and emergency equipment tested as precautions against power outages; inventories of food and water supplies were re-checked; and state vehicles were refueled and ready for long traffic delays.

As the State of Georgia began implementing the evacuation of the coastal counties, Commissioner Niles ordered the evacuation of the 60 young offenders and staff at the Savannah RYDC. DJJ deployed a Forward Command Post to the Eastman Youth Development Campus (YDC). The male youth were moved safely and securely to the Eastman RYDC and the female youth were moved in a similar fashion to the Macon YDC. More than 20 DJJ security staff were involved in the evacuation.

The evacuation transport team used DJJ vans and traveled a pre-arranged route that avoided Interstate 16 (due to the heavy westbound traffic generated by the evacuation). The transport team made regular status reports while moving the 60 youth to their temporary secure locations. The youth rode out the storm under Security Management and Response Team (SMART) and Security Emergency Response Team (SERT) supervision, without interruption to their daily programs, meals and routines.

The National Hurricane Center predicted Hurricane Matthew would intensify as it swept along coastal Georgia. Damages in Georgia from Hurricane Matthew were estimated at \$90 million. On October 13, after the storm danger passed, repairs were made and utilities were restored for regular operations, all evacuated youth were safely moved back to the Savannah RYDC. The joint secure transport effort was coordinated among the DJJ Offices of Secure Campuses, Special Operations, Investigations, Transportation and the RYDCs in Eastman and Savannah. The emergency Eastman Command Post and Communications Center and the GEMHSA Planning and Preparedness post were deactivated following their successful performance under emergency conditions.



Georgia Special Operations Center

Commissioner Niles Receives 2016 Martha K. Glaze Award from Council of Juvenile Court Judges



DJJ Commissioner Niles addresses CJCJ attendees after receiving the 2016 Martha K. Glaze award

The Council of Juvenile Court Judges of Georgia (CJCJ) recognized DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles for his ongoing efforts to partner with the courts to protect and improve the lives of juvenile offenders seeking rehabilitation and reentry into their communities as productive citizens. The Council is composed of all judges of the courts exercising jurisdiction over juveniles. It develops policies and provides support for juvenile courts through legal research services, legislative tracking and programs to help protect the best interests of children and the state.

address current social issues affecting children and families arising from substance abuse, domestic violence and untreated mental health issues.

Senior Juvenile Court Judge Cliff Jolliff, who formerly presided in Hall and Dawson counties, congratulated Commissioner Niles for “his outstanding leadership to develop and maintain a close agency relationship with the courts and the community by helping to initiate Georgia’s juvenile justice reforms.”

On October 24 at its annual conference in Athens, the CJCJ presented Commissioner Niles with the 2016 Martha K. Glaze Award for his efforts to establish rapport and planning with judges and the courts. The award is presented to a non-judicial individual recognized by the Council for significant contributions in the field of juvenile justice and child welfare. DJJ is one of many stakeholders working with the juvenile courts to



Deputy Commissioner Joe Vignati, Legislative Director John Smith, CJCJ Training Director Robert Bassett, DJJ Commissioner Niles and DJJ General Counsel Cindy Wang

The Council’s award is named in honor of Judge Martha K. Glaze, who retired from Clayton County’s Juvenile Court system after a career of more than 20 years of distinguished service. Glaze was the county’s first full-time Juvenile Court judge and sat on the bench from 1977 to 1999. Judge Glaze was known as an outstanding leader in the development of improvements and enhancements to the

Georgia juvenile courts and for resolving difficult cases in a just manner. As a former president of the Judges' Council, Glaze brought nationwide acclaim to the administration of juvenile justice in Georgia when she was presented the 1997 Meritorious Service Award by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

Commissioner Niles stated, "On behalf of the staff of the Department of Juvenile Justice, I want to thank the Council and its membership for this inspirational award." He added, "This award has added significance, since DJJ has a secure Regional Youth Detention Center in Hampton named in honor of Judge Glaze. Her legacy is important to both the Council and DJJ."

As the 2016 Martha K. Glaze Award recipient, Commissioner Niles joins the ranks of such Georgia notables as: Chick-fil-A founder S. Truett Cathy; Governor's Office for Children and Families Director Joe Vignati (now DJJ Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Community Services); DJJ Board Member Adam Kennedy; Governor's Office of Planning and Budget Division Director Joe Hood; and the Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children Deputy Director Michelle Barclay.



Retired Judge John Beam, Chatham County Juvenile Court Chief Judge LeRoy Burke, Fulton Juvenile Court Judge Willie Lovett, DJJ Board Member Judge Lisa Colbert, Chatham Juvenile Court Judge Thomas Cole, DJJ Commissioner Niles



Cobb County Senior Judge Juanita Steadman with DJJ Commissioner Niles



DJJ Commissioner Niles addresses CJJ attendees after receiving the 2016 Martha K. Glaze Award

Dr. Michelle Staples-Horne Presented NCCHC's Highest Honor

Dr. Michelle Staples-Horne, DJJ Medical Director, received the 2016 Bernard P. Harrison Award of Merit from the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) at its annual conference in Las Vegas. Dr. Staples-Horne was honored for her leadership and advocacy in serving the healthcare needs of youth in custody.

NCCHC's highest honor, the Bernard P. Harrison Award of Merit is presented to an individual or group that has demonstrated excellence and service that has advanced the correctional healthcare field, either through an individual project or a history of service. The award is named after NCCHC's co-founder and first president.

Commissioner Avery D. Niles stated, "On behalf of each DJJ employee, the Board and the youth that DJJ serves, I congratulate Dr. Michelle Staples-Horne on this singular honor." He continued, "Michelle exemplifies the dedication of DJJ's staff to the well-being of the youth that are our responsibility. She is highly deserving of the Bernard P. Harrison Award of Merit."

For nearly 25 years, Dr. Staples-Horne has been a national leader in public health and clinical care for vulnerable juvenile offenders in the correctional system. At DJJ she has consistently advocated for young people and enhanced the care provided to those in the system.



She led Georgia's juvenile health system from almost non-existence to a leader in healthcare among juvenile corrections agencies.

"I'm very excited and appreciative of the recognition from my colleagues in correctional health," Dr. Staples-Horne said. "It is an honor to receive the NCCHC Bernard P. Harrison Award of Merit. He was a trailblazer in correctional health, as I have also tried to be by creating a healthcare system for youth in the Georgia juvenile justice system. I am most proud of the public health impact I have made by providing health screenings, dental care, wellness programs, infection control and immunizations to this vulnerable population."

Dr. Staples-Horne was hired as DJJ's first medical director in 1993, charged with developing a healthcare program for more than 1,200 young people in 28 secure facilities and more than 15,000 youth in the community – many of them with inconsistent health or dental care prior to detainment.

According to Dr. Staples-Horne, "At that time, there were no medical policies, procedures, protocols or quality assurance standards and limited staff at a few secure facilities." She continued, "There was no on-site medical staff, dental care or behavioral health services, and very limited nursing services were available at only four facilities."



Dr. Eileen Couture, current NCCHC Board Chair, DJJ Dr. Michelle Staples-Horne and Jane Russell, immediate past Board Chair



Dr. Michelle Staples-Horne



From that, she created a national model of quality care with policies and protocols based on standards from NCCHC and other organizations. Today, DJJ health services include nursing care, pharmacy services, annual health screenings and assessments, dental services, immunizations, daily sick call, ongoing care for chronic conditions, nutritional services and health education. Current DJJ policy is that within two hours of admission, all youth are screened for medical and mental health issues, traumatic experience, substance abuse and suicide risk. The goal is to identify at-risk youth as early as possible and provide them the care required.

Dr. Staples-Horne has provided training and consultation to the U.S. Department of Justice, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute of Corrections. Her published works include several book chapters and articles in *The Lancet*, the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, the *Journal of Adolescent Health* and more. She was also the focus of a CNN article on correctional physicians.

Dr. Staples-Horne is a past president of the American College of Correctional Physicians and in 2013 was awarded

the Armond Start Award of Excellence, that organization's highest honor. She also received the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Award for Innovations in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. She earned her medical degree from Morehouse School of Medicine and her master's degree in public health from Emory University.

In summary, Niles said of Dr. Staples-Horne, "She has helped develop a unified voice in the field of clinical care for juvenile offender patient populations in Georgia and across the nation."



DJJ Dr. Michelle Staples-Horne receives the 2016 Bernard P. Harrison Award of Merit from Edward Harrison, retired President of NCCHC

Commissioner's Youth Council: A Juvenile Justice Forum for Georgia's Young Offenders



On November 1, DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles' quarterly Commissioner's Youth Council (CYC) meeting brought together 15 teen offenders, DJJ staff, parents and interested members of the community. A key event during the Council meeting occurred when the teens were asked by the Commissioner to share their opinions about their lives "behind the wire."

"Why did I ask them to share their opinions? Young people are accustomed to being minimized in an adult world, and suddenly they're asked for personal opinions about life in juvenile detention. That is truly an uplifting, liberating experience for them," Niles said.



The Commissioner's radical talk-back concept was to take those 15 carefully selected juvenile offenders from seven YDCs around the state and include them in a dynamic forum. The young offenders realized as members of the Commissioner's Youth Council that their opinions had real

significance for themselves and those they represent. They could share their questions, hopes and concerns with DJJ's Executive Staff, who were there to listen and interact with CYC members.

"We developed this forum as part of our overall approach to juvenile justice reform to provide our young Council members with opportunities to talk and exchange ideas with the Executive Team, as well as ask candid questions," explained Niles.

After a few minutes, CYC members were asking questions such as how to arrange more access to computer labs, how to increase visitation time with family members and how to meet qualifications for college course work.

The 12 male and three female students represent incarcerated juvenile populations at YDCs in Atlanta, Augusta, Eastman, Macon, Milan, Muscogee and Sumter. When they return to their YDCs they are expected to meet with other residents to report what they learned at the Youth Council meeting and to collect new questions and suggestions for the next forum.

"They share their concerns in this formal setting and all the while we as administrators have an opportunity to update our youth about DJJ activities and provide guidance to help them become young leaders who can actually make a difference in each other's lives," Niles explained.

The CYC meetings have also become the place where the Commissioner invites other young offenders to share the life lessons they have learned while completing DJJ educational opportunities and reentry programs.

When Commissioner Niles asked Zachari Gunter to speak to CYC members, Zachari was only days away from leaving DJJ, going back into the community and entering college. Zachari told his audience about how much he had struggled but how he eventually accomplished things he never thought possible when he was first incarcerated in 2010.

"I basically grew up at DJJ," Zachari said. "I was 14 when I first came here. Now I'm 20 years old and going out into the world."

Zachari admitted he was such an angry person when he was committed to the juvenile justice system that he believed everyone was against him. He confided he used his anger as a defense to create respect and fear and push everyone away. "When I first came in I wanted to be feared by everybody," he said.

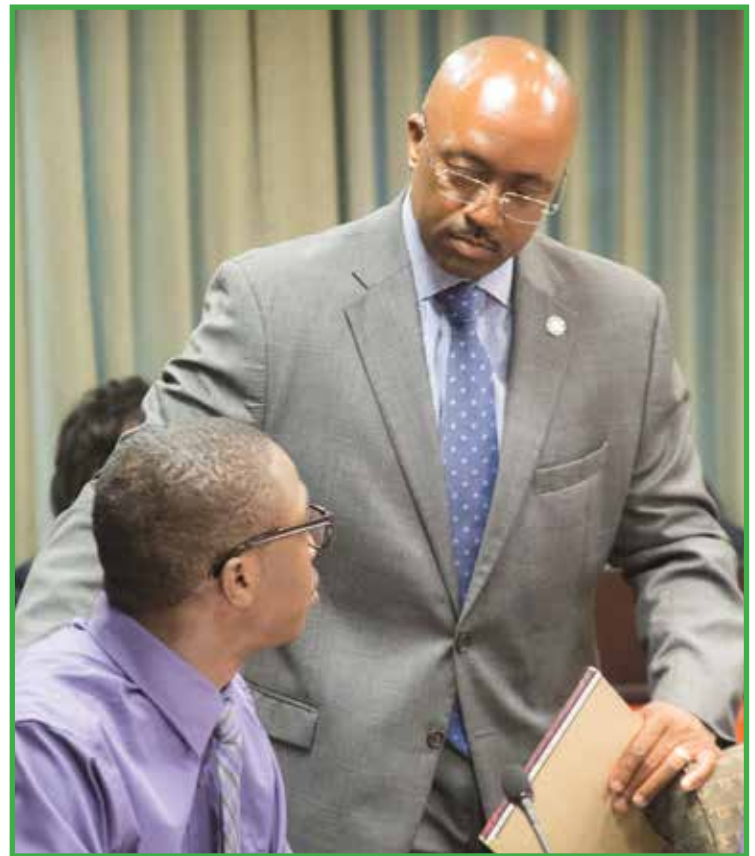
And unfortunately, he said it worked. For a long time no friends, not even his own family would visit him during his incarceration. "I wasn't getting any visitors," Zachari said. "My people wasn't even gonna see me because I was doing so much stuff."



Zachari Gunter is flanked by DJJ's Debbie Carter (left) and Lisa Casey Bryson

But then Zachari said he began observing what happened to other hard-to-reach youth who were released from juvenile detention and left without taking advantage of DJJ's education, counseling and community reentry programs and without leaving their anger behind.

"I didn't want to go home and become a statistic – locked up for murder or being murdered," Zachari told the CYC members and DJJ staff. "I've been next door to so many people who were released and later were shot in the head or shot hanging out of cars and I've seen pictures of them and I just talked to the man yesterday."



"I didn't want that to happen to nobody I talked to at DJJ," Zachari said. It made him determined to finish high school and commit to helping young people like himself avoid becoming recidivism or homicide statistics.

"I want to go to college and study psychology because people are making the same mistakes I made," he said. "I want to learn what's wrong with them before they make the mistake I made or the mistakes that we all made. I want to try to help."

Zachari told the assembled youth the change in him made staff at DJJ respect him for all the right reasons, instead of fearing him. Corrections officers even began asking how his college plans were proceeding.





“Now when I talk to them it’s something positive or it’s like, ‘when are you going to school?’ When people started respecting me for the good things I was doing, I never wanted it to stop.”

Commissioner Niles said, “We anticipate that hearing success stories from speakers like Zachari Gunter will continue to improve the self-confidence of our young people and help them develop more solid decision-making skills to shape better futures.”

Niles set the Youth Council concept in motion to help educate his top decision-makers about the life situations young offenders may experience in the system’s secure facilities and for DJJ leadership teams to develop corrective action plans to address concerns collected from the youth.

The Commissioner requires that CYC representatives be at least 15 years old and meet several rigid qualifications. Each candidate must display leadership skills and a positive influence on other youth. They must consistently participate in the behavior management program, maintain goals for a GED or high school diploma and have a release date more than six months away. The candidates must also obtain a letter of recommendation from the facility director where they are held in custody.

“The ultimate goal of the Youth Council is to improve communication with our youth in custody,” said Commissioner Niles. The Council has become an innovative tool to help DJJ meet the physical, emotional and educational needs of Georgia’s youthful offenders by simply accepting beneficial input from the youth themselves.

“The Youth Council provides another vantage point for DJJ’s leadership to better gauge where our youth are in their personal growth, development and rehabilitation,” the Commissioner said. Niles hopes someday his Youth Council members will also become change agents for other young people in their facilities.

“I ain’t never seen my mama so happy as when I told her I got accepted to college,” Gunter told those in attendance. “I feel so peaceful. I feel like a new man; I feel like I have no boundaries.”

Zachari Gunter was released from DJJ in November and begins full-time college classes in January 2017.



DJJ began its relationship with Decatur-based Columbia Theological Seminary in 2015. This article is adapted from a speech by Matt Conner, a third-year honor student pursuing a Master of Divinity degree at Columbia. He is the first chaplaincy intern from Columbia and served at the DeKalb RYDC.

Conner is from Gastonia, North Carolina, and graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2014 with a double major in Economics and Religious Studies. He was involved in a campus ministry group and served as the treasurer and interfaith chair. Conner gained experience in program planning, retreat/mission trip coordinating, budgeting and leading small groups.

Among Conner's career interests are prison ministry, teaching, chaplaincy, pastoral care and campus ministry. The majority of his work experience, and career interests that Conner feels called to, are focused around engaging with young people. In particular, he is interested in working with those whom society often label as "at-risk" youth.

Lessons Learned Inside the Wire: A Seminary Student's Journey of Prayer

It is an honor and a privilege to tell the story about some of my ministry experiences as a student at Columbia Theological Seminary.

Towards the end of my first year, I mentioned to Kim Clayton, Columbia's Director of Contextual Education, that prison ministry was an interest of mine. In response, she put me in contact with a man she had recently met – Danny Horne, the Director of Chaplaincy Services for the DJJ. Within a week, Chaplain Horne and I were sitting at a coffee shop in downtown Decatur setting up an internship. Chaplain Horne worked with Columbia to develop a program through which students could serve in youth detention and development centers in the metro Atlanta area. Columbia helped this dream become a reality for me, and was more supportive than I could have ever imagined. I am proud to be a student at an institution that encourages its students to pursue their interests, and try new things in ministry in our community.

I worked at the DeKalb RYDC. Juvenile offenders are taken there after being arrested and remain until the court places them somewhere else or releases them. The facility holds up to 64 youth between the ages of 12-17; they stay for as short a time as three days, or as long as a year. The RYDC is almost always at maximum capacity.

(continued on next page)





DJJ Chaplain Danny Horne and Columbia Theological Seminary student Matt Conner

To paraphrase Bryan Stevenson, the Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, when we get proximate to despair, only then can our faith truly come alive. It is in the face, or faces, of brokenness, that we discover most clearly our own brokenness. However, we also find hope; hope rooted in a God who knows that broken humanity as God's own. That hope is what empowers us to transform communities.

Every day when I would walk the halls, I would have guys say, "Hey Chap, will you pray for me?" I would say, "Absolutely! Do you want to start?" They would say, "Nah, nah, come on now, I don't know how to pray. You pray for me."

"I don't know how to pray." I do not believe that this sentiment is confined solely to the walls of a detention center. How often in our churches do we see this attitude? Just ask at a potluck dinner, "Who wants to say the blessing?" You'll see eyes dart to the floor.

Truth be told, I was not much of a fan of praying out loud before this experience. I did not feel that I was very good at it – would I say the right things, the right way? So I understood where these boys and young men were coming from. But what I began to realize was that I was not teaching them; they were teaching me to pray.

I started a Bible study in which we focused on the discipline of prayer. We read different types of prayer together – from praise in Psalms, to the Lord's Prayer, to prayers of lament. We engaged in prayer in styles they were familiar with, and others that they couldn't believe were "allowed."

We wrestled with many questions about prayer. What does it do? How do we do it? Why? So I wondered, "why do I pray?" I pray, because I have to! It's as essential as breathing. When a young man is crying in front of you because he was sentenced to 105 years in prison, when a mother visits her son – her baby – for an hour each week, but can't bring him home, when friends die before their 16th birthday as a result of gang violence, when looking at gunshot wounds is a daily reminder of the events that keep you up at night, when young men talk about suicide on a daily basis because "real hell" could not be worse than this hell, where else can we turn but to prayer?

When people join in prayer together, no matter how broken our words or grammar may be, you can feel something happening that is impossible to describe, and I felt it more at the DeKalb RYDC than ever before. I was beginning to learn the power of prayer.

On Monday, June 8, 2015, I performed a makeshift funeral service. I was walking out of one of the units, ready to leave for the day, and noticed John, a young man from my Bible study class, crying. Monday nights are telephone call nights, and John was talking to his mother. Hanging up, he broke down and explained that his mom had just told him that one of his best friends had been killed a few days earlier.

He said Chris, another youth at the facility, was also close to the young man who had been killed. I explained what had happened to one of the counselors and how we hoped to see Chris. He agreed to help, and escorted Chris through the heavy steel doors to the cafeteria, located in the center of the DeKalb RYDC.

There the four of us sat, huddled together around a lunch table that was bolted to the floor as staff came in an out to take dinner to the cellblocks. But the room and time seemed to stand still as John and Chris cried. They were devastated. Their anger, disbelief and sadness were palpable.

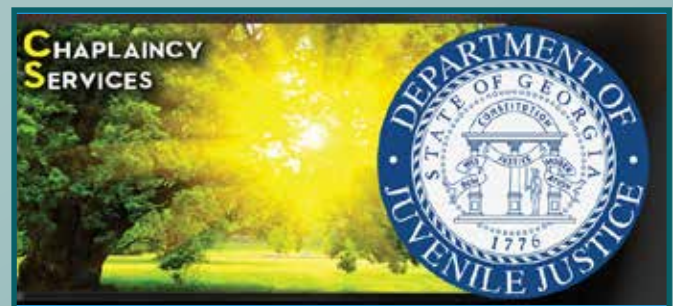
John and Chris were disappointed they had missed the funeral, so I asked if they would like to write letters as if they were going to give the eulogy. As they wrote, I watched Chris move from swearing and punching the table, to allowing tears to fall down his face and onto his paper. Then they read them to each other. It was such a beautiful and holy moment, listening to them preach. But then they asked me to say something.

As a Presbyterian, I will admit that I am guilty of relying on my head at times more than my heart. But in that moment, the only thing I could think to do was turn to Psalm 23. So I read; and then we prayed together.

When we finished, I was amazed by what happened next. The two of them thanked me, stood up, wiped their eyes with their matching navy jumpsuits, and actually hugged each other. I don't mean a haphazard pat on the back. They embraced each other. Two 16-year-old young men who had been charged with serious crimes, who were "dangers to society" and "at-risk youth" – they were showing compassion in a way that I will never forget. I was blessed with an opportunity to grieve, pray and be with those young men on a day like that.

This is the work we are called to as chaplains within the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice. Taking up the call of pastoral care for such a vulnerable population is truly an amazing experience. I am thankful for the opportunity to be able to engage in ministry within a department such as this.

We are continuing to work on strengthening the relationship between Columbia Theological Seminary and the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice. As the Church, if we want our incarcerated youth to become anything other than incarcerated adults, we cannot afford to ignore them while they are behind bars. I am heartened that multiple students have expressed an interest in engaging in this ministry. My hope, and the hope of the DJJ administration, is that Columbia continues to be connected and works with incarcerated youth in the metro Atlanta area. Together, we can transform our community and, in turn, the lives of the students at Columbia Theological Seminary.



Columbia Theological Society

Since its founding in Lexington, Georgia, in 1828, Columbia Theological Seminary has been committed to training persons for leadership in the church of Jesus Christ. Throughout its history, Columbia has nurtured, and has been nurtured by, the Presbyterian Church in the South; this connection continues to be a cherished tradition. While Columbia now enjoys an outstanding national and international reputation, it also faithfully upholds its historic covenants with the Synods of Living Waters and South Atlantic.

In 1830, Columbia, South Carolina, became the first permanent location of the seminary. The school became popularly known as Columbia Theological Seminary, and the name was formally adopted in 1925.

The decade of the 1920s saw a shift in population throughout the Southeast. Atlanta was becoming a commercial and industrial center and growing rapidly in its cultural and educational opportunities. Between 1925 and 1930, President Richard T. Gillespie provided leadership that led to the development of the present facilities on a 57-acre tract in Decatur, Georgia.

Columbia Theological Seminary is a community with a commitment of "educating imaginative, resilient leaders for God's changing world." God has called the Church to participate in God's global work of creation, reconciliation, compassion and justice.

Columbia develops leaders in a holistic manner. In addition to classroom and field experience, students are nurtured, challenged, and ultimately formed by mentoring relationships, engagement in community life, participation in community worship, and other spiritual disciplines and experiences. As a result, Columbia produces skilled leaders who are also mature disciples and lifelong learners.

Some of the smiling faces you see around the Metro RYDC are Masters Level students from the Emory University Candler School of Theology bringing ministry to youth and staff through the Contextual Education Program.

Contextual Education is the heart of the Candler curriculum and is designed to educate through scholarship, teaching, and service - faithful and creative leaders for the church's ministries in the world.

DJJ Chaplaincy Services and the Candler School of Theology are partners in the Department of Juvenile Justice's vision to prepare young people in its care to develop and sustain productive lives.





“The family is the first essential cell of human society.” – Pope John XXIII (1888-1963)

The mission of Chaplaincy Services within the Department of Juvenile Justice is to support the agency by ensuring First Amendment rights to religious worship and through pastoral care to youth and staff by providing spiritual guidance, counseling and support, education and crisis intervention.

The vision of Chaplaincy Services is to establish hope, a commitment to community, the duty to care, and positive change through accountable and responsible youth leadership and service.

There are no “random” encounters with staff and/or DJJ youth in the pastoral care model. Each encounter in this model of institutional service represents an opportunity for “relationship” and the establishment of hope.

The Office of Chaplaincy Services has received commitments from the Interdenominational Theological Center, Emory University Candler School of Theology and Columbia Theological Seminary for Master’s degree-level students to be involved in DJJ facilities in the educational ministry known formally as “contextual education.” These seminaries represent the major theological educational institutions with a history of service and involvement in the Atlanta area.

As part of its commitment, nine Candler School of Theology students in Contextual Education I (shown in the photograph above) completed their work at the Metro RYDC for the 2016 Fall semester in the second year of the relationship. Contextual Education is the heart of the Candler curriculum and is designed to fashion faithful and creative leaders for world church ministries through education and scholarship, teaching and service. DJJ’s Chaplaincy Services and the Candler School of Theology are partners in the Department’s vision to “prepare young people in its care to develop and sustain productive lives.”

Each student completed 44 hours of site work between August 24 and December 6, 2016 and will work again during the 2017 Spring semester. Students participating in Contextual Education I at the Metro RYDC engaged in direct ministry with incarcerated youth and were challenged to examine social, psychological and theological questions that arise in that context. Their work represents 390 hours of direct ministry to the youth.

DJJ 9/11 Memorial Dedicated



Following the December 8 meeting of the DJJ Board, a ceremony to dedicate the Department's 9/11 Memorial was held in the agency's Central Office lobby.

The key element of the agency's 9/11 Memorial is a piece of steel – a remnant from one of the I-beams that comprised the skeletons of the World Trade Center's Twin Towers. With the assistance of U.S. Representative Doug Collins of Georgia's 9th District, DJJ received the piece of steel from the New York Port Authority. The Port Authority has donated pieces of the steel I-beams to fire departments and law enforcement agencies around the United States.

Scott Cagle, Director of DJJ's Office of Planning & Preparedness, worked closely with U.S. Representative Collins and his staff to secure this very important piece of American history for DJJ. He also worked with Lanier Technical College; students under the supervision of Jay Maughon, a welding instructor, and Damien Anderson, an auto collision/repair instructor, fashioned a unique base for the piece of the World Trade Center. The remnant is welded to the base, but open to the air so that it can be touched by DJJ visitors and staff.

The steel centerpiece of DJJ's 9/11 Memorial was cut from the last large I-beam stored at a Fire Department of New York (FDNY) marine division location at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The marine division includes FDNY's storied fireboat units. In the aftermath of 9/11, the fireboats anchored offshore of lower Manhattan and pumped water to Ground Zero for firefighting purposes because many of the underground pipes that fed water to hydrants (and the hydrants themselves) were destroyed when the Twin Towers collapsed.

The Memorial dedication ceremony included the DJJ color guard, an overview of what occurred on September 11, 2001 (presented by Cagle), the reading of a letter from U.S. Representative Collins, a dedication prayer given by DJJ Chaplain Danny Horne, the unveiling of the Memorial by Commissioner Avery D. Niles and DJJ Board Vice-Chair Sandra Heath Taylor and brief comments by Commissioner Niles.

In his letter, Representative Collins wrote, "I hope it [the piece of steel] will serve to inspire and remind future generations of how America rose to meet the challenges that befell them on September 11, 2001, and how we healed and became stronger as a nation."



Commissioner Niles stated, "September 11, 2001 was a dark day in U.S. history. More than 3,000 first responders, police officers, military personnel, firefighters, airline passengers and workers and visitors in the Twin Towers and Pentagon were killed. Others from these same groups – as well as ordinary citizens – showed great heroism to rescue victims and help in many different ways." He concluded his remarks by stating, "The staff of DJJ is truly honored and humbled to receive such a haunting and significant piece of American history."



DJJ Youth Help Middle Georgia Community Food Bank

Young men at the Eastman YDC and young women at the Macon YDC recently participated in a service learning project that provided assistance to the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank.

The youth packed boxes of food, pantry items and toiletries that will be disbursed to those in need within the 24-county region served by the food bank. The project equipped the youth with on-the-job skills. In addition, the youth also learned about the issue of hunger in Georgia and how their volunteerism contributed to feeding individuals and families in need.

DJJ Volunteer Coordinator Kawain Reece said, "The youth really enjoyed the project and the staff members at the food bank were very appreciative of their help. I hope we are able to do this type of project again." Additional Victim and Volunteer Services staff who assisted on the project were Cynthia Joyce, James Durham and Ashaki Gordon. Security Management and Response Team (SMART) members from Eastman also participated, working side-by-side with the youth to pack the boxes for distribution. When they were finished, DJJ youth and staff were treated to a delicious lunch from Dairy Queen.

Mike Morrison, operations manager at the Middle Georgia Food Bank, said, "On behalf of the staff and those served by the Middle Georgia Food Bank, I would like to thank the youth from the Eastman and Macon YDCs and the DJJ staff and SMART members for their terrific help. We would welcome DJJ assistance any time it can be provided!"

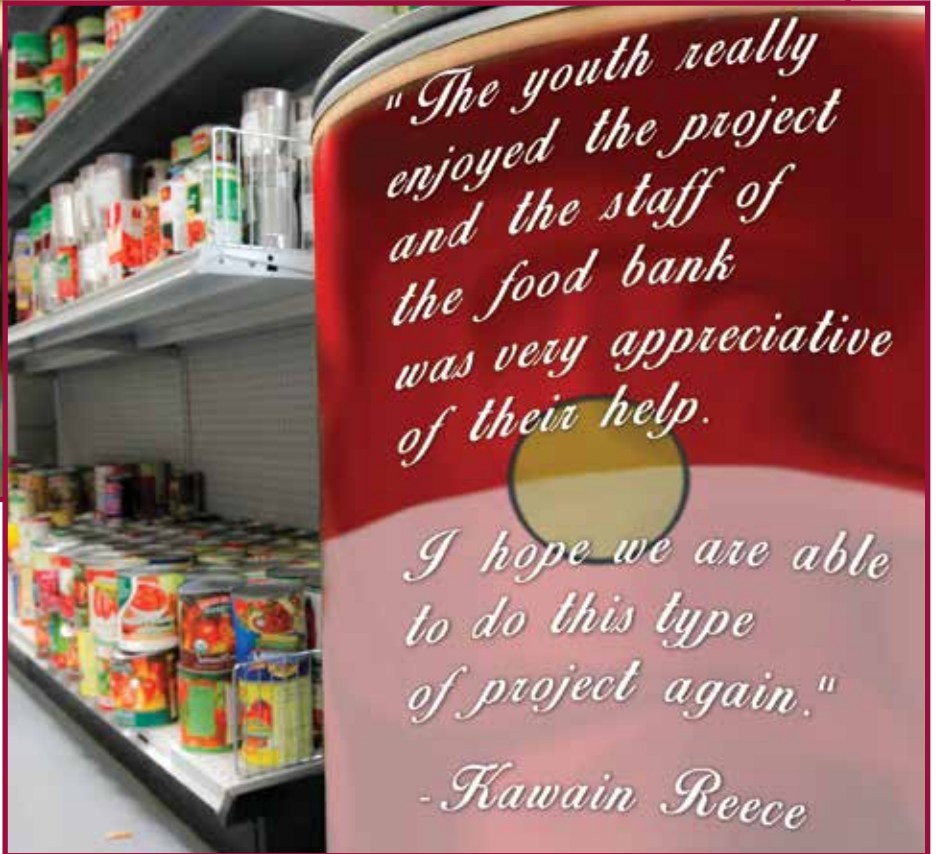


Young women from the Macon YDC and SMART officers at the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank



A SMART officer stacks boxes of food





"The youth really enjoyed the project and the staff of the food bank was very appreciative of their help."

"I hope we are able to do this type of project again."

-Kawain Reece

American Flag Folk Art Created by DJJ Youth



Over the past few years, many do-it-yourself artists have been creating versions of the American and state flags by painting wooden pallets. Young men at the Augusta YDC and young women at the Macon YDC are also creating this unique and patriotic folk art, using surplus wooden pallets and donated paint and supplies.

Led by Sara Gardner, a DJJ Victim Advocate, the following young women at the Macon YDC painted a pallet – Destiny Bolton, Kelsey Cotton, Kierra Keyes, Lacienea McCoy and Shantaneka Williams. Their American flag pallet will be presented by DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles to Georgia Governor Nathan Deal.

Six young men at the Augusta YDC – Cortavious Buchannan, Daniel Herrera, Santaviuos McDowell, Tommy Redhead, Jacob Thornhill and Jeffrey Tittle – also painted an American flag on a pallet. It was presented to DJJ Board Chair Elaine P. Snow at the October 27 Board meeting.

Project staff support was provided by Ashaki Gordon and Barbara Smith of the Office of Victim and Volunteer Services, and Sandra Redd, Volunteer Resources Coordinator at the Augusta YDC. Aishia Hunter, Director of the Augusta YDC, and Sherry Shoats, Director of the Macon YDC, were instrumental in selecting the youth and providing space at the YDCs for the projects to be completed.

Donated materials and supplies were provided by Target, Ken Willing of the Sherwin-Williams Paint Store in Decatur and Katy Scallan of the Sherwin-Williams Paint Store in Atlanta.

Commissioner Niles stated, "This is an absolutely wonderful project! I am very glad to see youth in the DJJ system creating patriotic artwork. I also want to thank the DJJ staff who worked with the youth on the project and those businesses that donated materials to make the project successful."



A youth starts the painting process



Completed pallets dry in the sun



Commissioner Avery D. Niles and
DJJ Board Chair Elaine Snow



DJJ Service Learning Project: Dodge County CSO



Story support from Southeast Regional Administrator Rusty Rodgers

The Dodge County Community Services Office (CSO) recently held a successful service learning project for youth under its care at the CSO in Eastman. The focus of this service learning project was Operation Christmas Child, a program created by the Samaritan's Purse international relief organization. The purpose of Operation Christmas Child is to gather and collect boxes of Christmas goodies and basic toiletries for youth in need across the globe.



For the youth served by the Dodge County CSO, assembling boxes full of candy and supplies for disadvantaged children in faraway locales helped give them perspective on global poverty. Learning that many children do not even have basic necessities such as soap and toothpaste in their lives, the Dodge County youth realized the impact that even a small gesture like Operation Christmas Child could make in the lives of those in need. With that realization, many of the participating youth expressed a strong willingness after the event to continue to help meet the Samaritan's Purse mission to provide spiritual and physical aid to hurting people around the world.

As a result of the service learning project, 40 boxes were filled for needy children overseas. While each participating youth received three hours of credit towards their community service requirements, the positive feelings and perspective given by helping others was the true reward for this successful activity.

To learn more about Samaritan's Purse, visit the organization on the web at www.samaritanspurse.org.



DJJ in the Community: Dougherty CSO Red Ribbon Week



Since its beginning in 1985, the Red Ribbon Campaign has touched the lives of millions of people around the world. In response to the murder of DEA Agent Enrique Camarena, angered parents and youth in communities across the country began wearing red ribbons as a symbol of their commitment to raise awareness of the killing and destruction cause by drugs in America. In 1988, the National Family Partnership, a grassroots, nonprofit organization, sponsored the first National Red Ribbon Celebration. Today, the Red Ribbon Campaign serves as a catalyst to mobilize communities to educate youth and encourage participation in drug prevention activities.

To learn more about the Red Ribbon Campaign, visit www.redribbon.org.

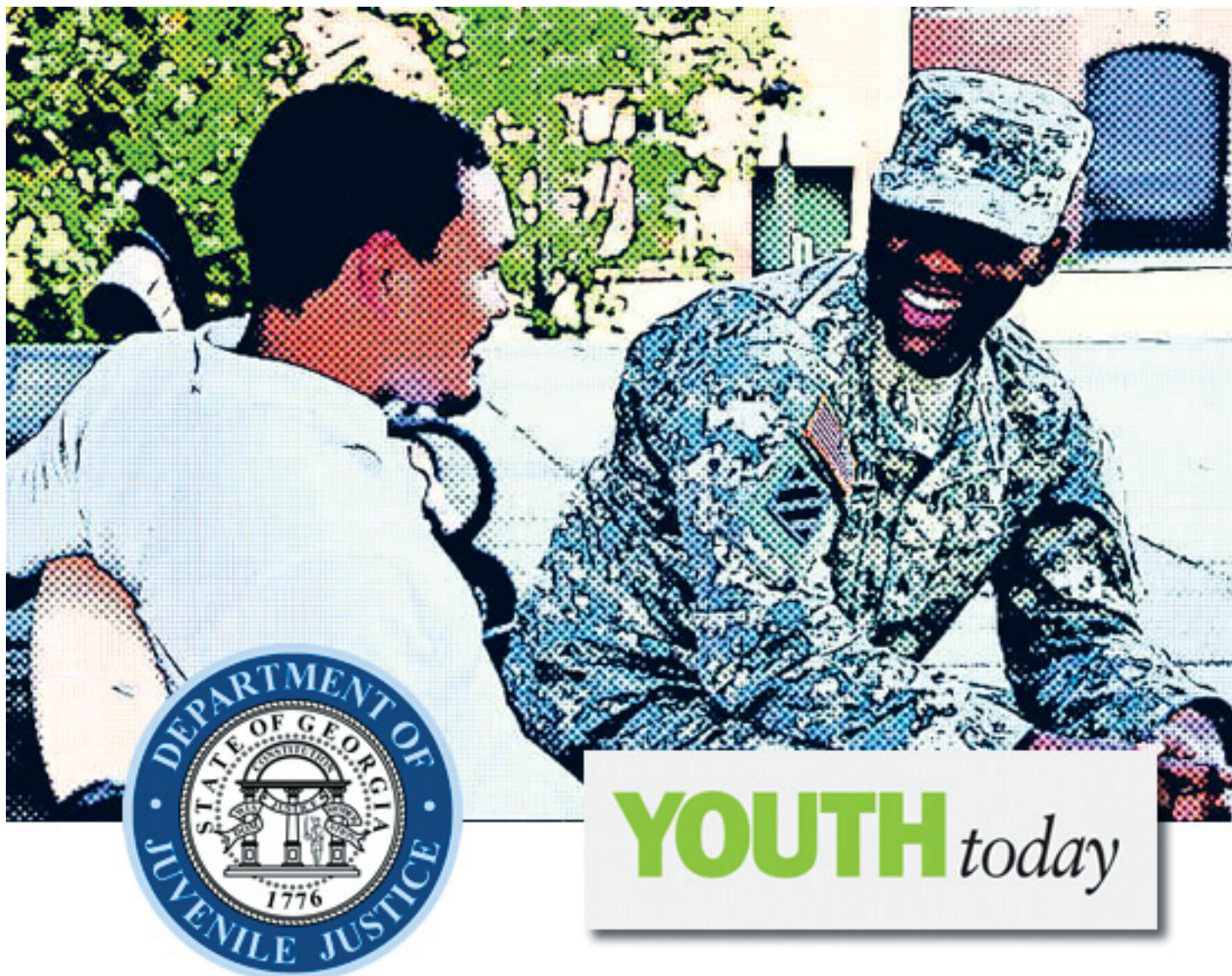


Story support by District Ten Director Steven Mancuso

Recently, members of the Dougherty CSO participated in the nationwide Red Ribbon Week at Radium Springs Elementary School in Albany. Led by Juvenile Probation Parole Specialist (JPPS) Robbin Green, JPPS Linfred Davis, JPPS Afiya Askew and PA Kenshay Snead, the Dougherty CSO team spoke to local youth about the juvenile justice system and the dangers of illegal drugs.



YOUTHtoday Article - Family Focused: Opposite of 'Scared Straight,' Intervention Helps Youth Connect and Feel Understood



YOUTHtoday Article Written by Patricia Etheridge

"I thought my life was coming to an end. Oh my God, he's a good kid," said Geselle Colón, recounting the story of her son being sent into juvenile detention in Columbus, Georgia.

Sixteen-year-old Esteban De Jesus-Colón is a stellar athlete, popular and a good student at school. But early into adolescence, his anger was spiraling out of control.

"I had a brand-new car, and he went and kicked out the headlights," Colón recalled.

Esteban lashed out at both parents following their separation. Last year, he got into a physical altercation with his father. His 13-year-old brother saw what was happening and called the police. His father pressed charges. Esteban was charged and convicted of domestic violence – and spent 16 days in lockup at a youth detention center. At the time, both parents felt it was time he faced the music. But Esteban felt betrayed.

"If someone was trying to control me, I was quick to react with my hands instead of taking the time to think about consequences," Esteban said.

But what happened next was life-changing. A court referral led to an evidence-based intervention called Functional Family Therapy (FFT), which involves short-term counseling in the home, working with family members or caregivers. Geselle, her son Esteban and his three brothers all participated, though his father did not. Even so, Esteban says his relationship with his dad and all family members improved.

“It taught me different ways to handle a situation. It got my mom and brothers to understand what I was going through – and how to cope,” said Esteban. “It just really helped that we were able to talk as a family. Everyone learned how to speak to each other without pointing fingers.” Esteban now lives with his father on much better terms.

Large-scale effect, limited scope

The pathway to getting this kind of help varies. Mostly, individual states provide funding for court-ordered FFT. But increasingly community programs and schools offer the program – and in some cases, individual insurance and Medicaid cover the costs. Bottom line: where FFT is accessible, it is possible for troubled youths and families who otherwise could not afford treatment to benefit.

Yet its scope is limited. Only five percent of families nationwide receive science-based treatment and of that, FFT is a subset. The model currently is in use in 45 states and 10 countries around the world, serving 50,000 families, according to Functional Family Therapy LLC, the model’s training and quality assurance organization. Psychologist James Alexander created the concept in the 1970s, but only in recent years has it picked up steam, as policymakers began to do the math and recognize the potential savings.

“One in five kids in the United States lives in poverty. Those percentages are even higher for those involved in the juvenile justice system,” said Doug Kopp, CEO of the Seattle-based Functional Family Therapy organization.

As a result, a high proportion of FFT clients tend to be from families who are living in poverty.

How effective is FFT? The range is wide but significant: a 25 to 60 percent recidivism reduction in areas that provide the program, based on internal and external evaluations, according to Functional Family Therapy LLC.

“In juvenile justice reform, we know what works and what doesn’t when it comes to effective interventions that get kids and their families back on the right path,” said Sharon Hill, executive director of Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice – and a former juvenile court judge. “Functional Family Therapy is one of the programs that actually works, and works very well at a reasonable cost of both time and money.”

Creating a family alliance

“The intervention is noteworthy because it is family-focused. We provide a sense of alliance so each person is going to be heard,” said Kopp.

“What we find is there has been a fair amount of blaming, negativity and difficulty functioning as a family. Parents often already have beaten themselves up saying, ‘I haven’t done enough of all the things I could have, I should have,’” said Kopp. “Often there’s a profound sense of hopelessness.”

FFT helps find ways to give them another shot. “With kids, what we’re trying to do is decrease the likelihood they will do harm again against someone else or the community. We definitely want people to own their behavior – but without judgment or shame.”

It’s a far cry from finger-wagging or so-called “scared straight” interventions. “We approach things first of all from a position of respect, and people can feel that,” said Kopp. “It’s powerful. Families feel better about themselves. It’s a relief to get things back on track and have the tools they need to do that.”

“I felt that we had a toolbox at home and we were just not using the tools inside. Our therapist showed us how to unlock the box and use the tools,” said Colón. “I learned to stop accusing first and to say ‘I am not comfortable with that behavior,’ instead of saying ‘what you are doing is wrong.’ It made a big difference to have all of us there – Esteban and his brothers.”

Improvements following Juvenile Justice Reform

The United States incarcerates more young people than other any other developed nation – with staggering costs. In fiscal year 2015, Georgia spent an average of \$113,269 for each of the approximately 1,300 young people in juvenile lockup, according to the Georgia DJJ.

Georgia's Governor Nathan Deal, a Republican, himself a former juvenile court judge, has backed sweeping reforms, including Juvenile Justice Incentive Grants (JJIG) to fund evidence-based programs like FFT and the Juvenile Drug Court (JDC) program. DJJ statistics show the number of incarcerated young people has dropped 18 percent since 2013.

"Georgia leads the nation in meaningful justice reforms, and the JJIG program has furthered the goal of increasing public safety while rehabilitating youth through a more effective juvenile system," said Deal.

DJJ Deputy Commissioner Joe Vignati puts it this way: "As we move into our fourth year of incentive grant funding, we continue to be pleased at how juvenile-specific, evidence-based interventions have positively impacted the lives of children across Georgia. We are particularly pleased that family-focused models, like Functional Family Therapy and Multi-Systemic Therapy, have expanded into more rural areas of our state and are available to more families than ever before."

"Before the incentive grants, there simply wasn't enough money to pay for these gold-standard interventions. So we paid even more by locking kids up," said Hill, whose organization was a lead partner in advocating for the sweeping reform legislation. "But now Georgia is making a lot of smart decisions. The challenge is to keep reinvesting in the JJIG program so that it can expand to serve kids and families on the cusp of entering the system. The good news is that we are getting there."

A tailored approach

"FFT offers specific interventions for the unique challenges, diverse qualities and strengths of families," said Kopp.

Sherri Felton – custodian for her 13-year-old nephew, Jermaine Graham – needed that kind of help. "When I tried to tell him what to do at home, it got worse and worse. Things were escalating, and I wasn't reaching him," said Felton, who is retired and raising Jermaine on her own. "It seemed hopeless."

"One day, he just stood in front of me and refused to move. I tried to call 911, but he slapped the phone out of my hand," said Felton. The connection already had gone through and when police arrived, they arrested Jermaine for interfering with the call.

"I really thought I was going to jail," Jermaine recalled. Instead, Muscogee County Juvenile Court Judge Warner Kennon ordered a 30-day probation followed by an anger management course and Functional Family Therapy.

Columbus, Georgia-based FFT consultant Ervin Christie began counseling Jermaine and his custodial mom. "He [Christie] respects me," Jermaine said. "He listens. It's important because I didn't have anyone to listen before. Now I listen to my mom – and she listens to me, too."

Jermaine learned to cool off with simple acts such as going to his room and counting back from 100. "I've learned to take a timeout breath and think through the consequences," he added.

The positive ramifications are far-reaching. In Jermaine's case, behavioral changes extend to his school and community. "He's made a U-turn, a real turnaround," Felton said. "His grades are up. His teachers say it's like night and day. He runs track and expresses himself through art. He's calmed down. And I've learned to listen and be more patient. I'm feeling very positive."

It's young men like K.P. who Judge Kennon wants to see succeed. The 17-year-old first came through juvenile court charged with misdemeanor theft by taking. Kennon assigned the teen and his family to FFT. It helped – but later K.P. ran into trouble again, this time with a misdemeanor for possession of marijuana. He then entered the Muscogee County JDC program and was paired with a volunteer mentor: U.S. Army Sergeant Darryl Smith from nearby Fort Benning. The teamwork paid off. K.P. recently graduated from JDC.

Tracking FFT's success

A program called Blueprints at the University of Colorado-Boulder tracks evidence-based positive youth development programs to assess their effectiveness. More than 1,400 programs have been reviewed, but less than five percent have been designated as promising, model programs. Functional Family Therapy meets Blueprints' highest criteria for success.

The FFT model generally covers just eight to 16 weeks of counseling, but supporters say it empowers youth and their families with a long-term foundation to

become more adaptive and successful. "Our time with Dr. Christie is finished, but we still have his number and we know we can call," said Felton.

"FFT gave us a solid foundation to carry on," said Colón. "As the mother of four boys, I now have the tools to approach them. It makes a difference. Before, we were not communicating how we felt and we were walking on eggshells. Now we don't hold things inside. The change is absolutely amazing."

"This is going to stick with me," said Esteban. "I hope when I have kids, I'll be able to teach them to express themselves without blaming others. I want to use what I've learned, so that they grow up to be responsible – and be leaders."

This **YOUTH**today story was first co-published with Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity, a nonpartisan initiative that unites perspectives from the political, policy, advocacy and philanthropic communities to find genuine solutions to the economic hardship confronting millions of Americans.

YOUTHtoday is the national news source for youth-service professionals, including child welfare and juvenile justice, youth development and out-of-school-time programming.



Governor Nathan Deal signs the Juvenile Justice Reform legislation on May 2, 2013. DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles, Mrs. Deal, state legislators and others look on.

DJJ in the Community: Jeff Davis County Fall Festival



Story information from Jeff Davis CSO
JPPS Ryan Ledbetter



On Halloween, members of the Jeff Davis CSO joined educational and community groups in proudly participating in the 2016 Jeff Davis County Fall Festival. Partnering with Coastal Pines Technical College and led by JPPS Ryan Ledbetter and Jan Stone, the Jeff Davis CSO team provided information to festival-goers on how to obtain their General Educational Development (GED) degree, the equivalent of a high school diploma.

The Jeff Davis County Fall Festival was a great opportunity for the Jeff Davis CSO staff to talk at length with many of their DJJ clients and their families. While handing out candy to the trick-or-treaters in the crowd was fun, the chance to get people signed up and enrolled in GED classes was an experience that will lead to positive benefits for years to come.

The Jeff Davis CSO would like to thank Mrs. Claire Quinn of Coastal Pines Technical College for her help and support in providing information on GED programming in the area. Special thanks also goes out to the Jeff Davis Chamber of Commerce for hosting the event and to the Hazlehurst Police Department, Jeff Davis Fire Department, the Jeff Davis Board of Education and the local businesses, churches and community groups that participated.



PBIS at DJJ: Muscogee YDC Festival



Story support and photos from Janette Nihles, Betty Brown-Williams and Veronica Garlic

The Muscogee YDC held its annual Fall Festival on its facility grounds in November. Part of the YDC's Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program, more than 30 youth were rewarded for recent exemplary behavior with the chance to participate in miniature golf, musical chairs, hopscotch, a basketball shoot-out, bowling, ping-pong, a long-jump competition, a three-legged race and a marshmallow and spaghetti competition. Staff from throughout the facility contributed to the Fall Festival as either volunteers or active participants in the games and activities.



Events such as the Fall Festival are an important part of DJJ's PBIS program. PBIS is an evidence-based, data-driven framework proven to reduce disciplinary incidents, increase a school's sense of safety and support improved educational outcomes. More than 19,000 U.S. schools are implementing PBIS and saving countless instructional hours otherwise lost to discipline. The premise of PBIS is that continual teaching, combined with acknowledgement and feedback regarding positive student behavior will reduce the need for discipline and promote a climate of greater safety, productivity and learning. PBIS schools apply a multi-tiered approach to prevention, using disciplinary data and principles of behavior analysis to develop school-wide, targeted and individualized interventions and supports to improve the school climate for all students.

To learn more about PBIS at DJJ, visit <http://www.djjnewsandviews.org/pbisatdjj/>.



First Graduations at Specialized Treatment Units



DJJ's Specialized Treatment Units (STUs) help youth (both male and female) with severe behavioral disorders. An STU is a secure residential treatment unit that provides intensive treatment to youth with designated felony sentences who have had: sustained difficulties engaging in treatment/making progress in treatment; sustained difficulties with peer and/or staff interaction; and a sustained pattern of difficulty with affect regulation. *(For more information about the STUs, see the article "DJJ Staff Make Presentations at American Correctional Association Annual Congress" on pages 20-22 in DJJ Digest #3.)*

The first of DJJ's two STUs went "on line" on April 1, 2016 at the Macon YDC. Eight young women were in the first cohort (group) treated at the Macon STU. A second STU opened at Eastman YDC in mid-May and six young men were in that cohort.

Four of the young women who constituted the first STU cohort at Macon YDC graduated from the program on Friday, July 29, at a ceremony attended by facility staff, Central Office staff (including Deputy Commissioner Margaret Cawood), the families of two of the girls and all six of the girls selected for the second cohort.

Shaneika White, a juvenile detention counselor at the Macon YDC, gave the opening remarks and welcomed attendees. In a powerful speech, Leanna Hill, speaking for the graduating cohort, described their experiences in the STU as "life-changing."

Sherry Shoats, Facility Director of the Macon YDC, and Dr. James Warren, Clinical Director at the YDC, gave remarks about the impact of the STU. Dr. Ron Koon, DJJ's Chief Psychologist, gave the keynote address and spoke about the Department's commitment to the health and welfare of the youth it supervises.

Jerry Little, another juvenile detention counselor at the STU, presented certificates of completion to graduates Keialha Bailey, Shanquana Braxton, Kelsey Cotton and Hill. The benediction was given by Phyllis Hightower, an activity therapist.

Following the ceremony, members of both STU cohorts, staff and guests enjoyed refreshments at a reception provided by the facility.

On September 16, the young men at the Eastman STU – Fredrick Davenport, Cameron Jones, Hakeem Strickland, Kynte Wingo, Danny Wood and Samuel Wooten – also graduated.

A program was held to signify the event. Each youth contributed to the program; they gave the invocation and welcome, recited scripture and a poem and a conducted a dramatic reading.

Dr. Marty Mathis, Clinical Director at the Eastman YDC, gave an overview of the STU program. He noted that Georgia's sweeping juvenile justice reform bill was signed into law by Governor Nathan Deal in 2013, and it went into effect in 2014. Among the law's benefits, more emphasis is being placed on mental health

counseling and innovative ways to help youth with mental health issues. The STU concept is a direct result of the reform.

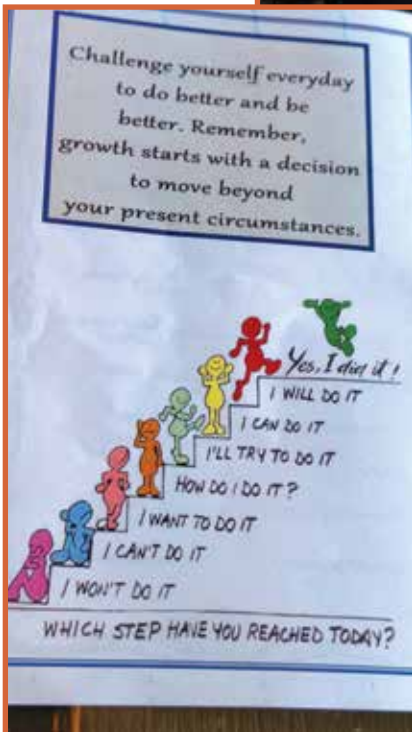
Chaplain Robbie Passmore gave the benediction and said grace. The keynote speaker for the event was Jeff Tarver (who was a DJJ employee from 2008-2013), an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at Middle Georgia State University. He is the founder of L.I.F.E. League, Inc., a non-profit organization that incorporates life skill courses with sports and activities in several central Georgia counties. Tarver provided inspirational remarks about life and the opportunities the graduates have going forward. He told the

graduates and the others gathered for the ceremony, "Make the most of your life! Use the experiences you have had within DJJ to help inspire you as you plan for your future." Certificates were presented to the graduates to recognize their graduation from the program.

Among those attending the event were the six youth in the second STU cohort. In addition, three of the graduates had family members who attended. At the end of the formal program, the youth were able to visit with their family members and a pizza dinner was served to celebrate their accomplishments.



Eastman STU graduates pose for photographs



Macon STU graduates pose for photographs

Graduation Ceremony for Basic Juvenile Correctional Officer Training Class 215



On October 28, DJJ held a graduation ceremony for Basic Juvenile Correctional Officer Training (BJCOT) Class 215 at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center Auditorium in Forsyth. Featuring the motto, "We Embrace the Pain, We Train to Maintain, We Stand with Pride, Only the Strong Will Survive," the class had nearly 100 officers graduate.

Among the many attendees and speakers were: DJJ Board member Willie C. Bolton; DJJ Chief of Staff Mark Sexton; Deputy Commissioner Margaret Cawood; Albany RYDC Director Sandra Cawthon; and DJJ Chaplain Danny Horne.

Leaders and speakers from Class 215 included: John Shirley (Metro RYDC); Hailey Solomon (Gainesville RYDC); Shayla Burns (Albany RYDC); Kameron Moore (DeKalb RYDC); Gary Bradley, Jr. (Muscoogie YDC); Shawn Fulton (Marietta RYDC); Zandra Gunn (Metro RYDC); Uershon'dria Hudson (Marietta RYDC); Celeste Orlandi (Martha K. Glaze RYDC); Karenna Sumlin (Martha K. Glaze RYDC); and Jessica Timms (Elbert Shaw RYDC).

Congratulations to each of the graduates and best of luck during your career!



Valbrun Reappointed to DJJ Board

Governor Nathan Deal has reappointed James Valbrun to the DJJ Board to represent Congressional District 13. He was first appointed by Governor Deal to the Board in 2015.

Valbrun is the founding attorney of the Valbrun Law Group, LLC. He is engaged in multiple areas of civil litigation including personal injury, medical malpractice and commercial disputes. His practice also focuses on representation of clients in a diverse array of criminal matters. Prior to starting his own Atlanta law firm, Valbrun practiced with Wotorson, Thompson & Valbrun from 2009 to 2013. He was an associate at Nelson Mullins from 2006 to 2008.



Valbrun has served as a legal analyst for CNN's Headline News and has offered his legal insights on the television program "Issues with Jane Valez." He has successfully handled complex cases in federal and state courts, both at the trial and appellate levels, including several multi-million dollar disputes. Based upon his experience, reputation and legal expertise, Valbrun was recognized as a Georgia Super Lawyers Rising Star, an honor that goes to only 2.5 percent of Georgia attorneys. He has also been honored in Atlanta's Business Who's Who, as well as Who's Who in Black Atlanta. In 2013, he was invited to China with a U.S. delegation for the improvement of U.S. and Chinese education systems.

A solo practitioner, Valbrun earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and a law degree from Georgetown University. He served as a law clerk to U.S. District Court Judge Victoria A. Roberts. He and his wife, Tanika, have one son and they reside in Lithia Springs.

DJJ Board



Commissioner Avery D. Niles poses with members of the DJJ Board following the December 8 Board meeting



The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is a multi-faceted agency that serves the needs of this state's young offenders up to the age of 21. The Department employs more than 4,000 men and women at 26 secure facilities and 92 community services offices throughout the state to effect justice and redirect the young lives in the agency's care.

Including those who are placed on probation, more than 50,000 youths are diverted each year to evidence-based community programs, sentenced to short-term incarceration or committed to the Department's long-term custody by the Juvenile Courts. It is the duty of DJJ's professional corrections staff to preserve public safety and safeguard the citizens of Georgia, as well as protect the victims of crimes so that they can rebuild their lives.

At the same time, DJJ holds juvenile offenders accountable for their delinquent conduct so that they can take responsibility for their actions through probation, supervision and secure detention. The youth are provided with medical and psychological treatment, as well as specialized education and programs designed to equip them with the social, intellectual and emotional tools needed to achieve their successful reentry and reintegration into community, workplace and neighborhood settings as more productive and law-abiding citizens.

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“One Team. One Mission.”