

# CHOICES

*for families*

## *Dear Readers:*

Efforts at collaboration and partnership continue to grow on behalf of youth and families in Wayne County.

This issue of *Choices* tells how Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services and the Detroit-Wayne County Department of Community Mental Health are reinventing ways to co-mingle existing funds to offer earlier, more preventive services for youth and families.

Because the Juvenile Assessment Center is certified to provide clinical assessments to the Community Mental Health system, it is becoming a bigger gateway for such services. The JAC will administer the new JIFF assessment tool, which evolved from the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale. As a result, the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office will be able to divert youth with status and misdemeanor offenses from court intervention to community intervention by local Youth Assistance Programs.

Using CAFAS along with clinical and psychological assessments, the JAC's team of psychiatrists and psychologists now are able to access Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health services for juvenile offenders with diagnosed serious mental health issues. The long-desired option opens the door of hope for many families whose youngsters need something more than traditional milieu or talk therapy approaches.

The new ventures could not happen without the ever-strengthening partnerships between the county's juvenile and mental health systems, and Sheriff's and Prosecutor's offices.

Sincerely,

*Cynthia J. Smith*

Cynthia J. Smith, MSW, LCSW  
President/CEO



## ***JAC increases efforts to "erase truancy"***

**A** sixth grader has been absent from school for 27 days without an excuse from home. A school attendance officer has visited the home twice to find out why. She is not admitted and the parent refuses to talk to her. The student likes school, gets Bs and As in math, science and reading. Why isn't this youngster in school?

The school filed a truant report with Wayne County's Prosecutor and the sixth grader and parent are summoned to meet with a county assistant prosecutor. They arrive, along with at least 20 other teens and their parent/guardian, filling the prosecutor's small lobby with nervous teens, angry parents, fed up school attendance officers – each waiting for a personal interview to determine whether the youth will go back to school or be petitioned to appear before a judge for adjudication.

*continued on page 2*

***Focus on Board******Usher says, "No child should fail"***

**Debra Usher** is the chief operating officer of the Girl Scouts of America, Detroit and Metropolitan District. She is responsible for the work of hundreds of staff, thousands of volunteers and many community projects designed to encourage, nurture and share the talents of more than 35,000 girls. She also volunteers as a community member of the Juvenile Assessment Center's Board of Directors.

Usher became involved with the JAC when, as a state employee, she was part of the transition team that shifted responsibility for delinquents from the state system to the new county system.

"Her extensive background in the areas of child abuse and neglect



*Debra Usher*

coupled with her passion about kids and knowledge of the limitations of the system makes her a valued professional, adviser and confidant," says **Cyndi Smith**, JAC CEO.

"I believe that no child should fail," Usher says, "and want to help the JAC see that every child has the resources they need to succeed." She

is supportive of the new efforts by the JAC and the county to fill the gap of early intervention options by drawing down and pooling funds and resources to focus on regional services.

Usher is particularly glad to be pushing the JAC CEO to be more involved in community activities like the "Weed and Seed" program in northeastern Detroit.

"I wanted her to be seen as a

resource," she explains, "and also to experience firsthand what kind of community initiatives are really happening in various locales."

Usher learned from her own family to value giving back to the community.

"I'm passionate about kids and families. I really don't understand allowing the child to fail and I'll never accept it. I believe we really have to train parents to advocate for their kids and instill in them that both they and their children deserve success."

Cyndi Smith says she depends on Usher to bring to the JAC board a special perspective on the needs of girls in our community and help it focus on ways to enable girls to not define themselves externally as depersonalized commodities but as women with positive skills, personal worth and important citizens in their community.

"Debra enriches our board and inspires me and my staff to stay true to our mission."

**JAC truancy staff attack causes** *continued from page 1*

Such a scene is repeated at least four times a month, every month, for more than 240 kids. When their names are called, they meet first with a member of the JAC's "Erase Truancy" staff who, in partnership with the prosecutor, privately screens the parent/guardian and the youth to determine reasons that stand in the way of regular attendance. They then contact the parent/guardian and offer specific services to help them intervene. They can only take on 10 percent of the most serious cases each month.

After the interview, the child and parent/guardian meet with a county prosecutor and a school attendance officer. They are once again asked

for an explanation for the prolonged truancy. Based on that explanation, the prosecutor outlines the consequences if the child does not return to school and offers them a compliance contract, one last chance, wherein the parents pledge to see that their teen reports to school every day and wherein the teen pledges to go to school every day and attend all classes on time. If they refuse to sign the pledge, the prosecutor will schedule a hearing before a judge.

Such a scenario plays out at least 240 times a month for youths truant anywhere from 21 to 57 days. The excuses for such excessive truancy are many. They are always sadly destroying a kid's educational future, and often indi-

cate corrosive problems in the home.

The prosecutors, the JAC's Erase Truancy staff and volunteers, and the school attendance officers know they are only skimming the surface of growing school truancy. Their partnership has enabled them to face problems together for three years. It is a testimony to their courage and their commitment to county teens that they have not quit trying to get kids and parents to see and value education as the ticket to a better life and to help them overcome overwhelming family situations that impair each youth's ability to sustain themselves as adults.

# “Correct Course” - a new diversion option focuses on early intervention

Based on what they have learned these past two years, Wayne County officials are more determined to halt the growing status offense and truancy problem by confronting the family and community issues that are behind the juvenile offenses with which many youth are charged.

The Wayne County Prosecutor, Department of Children and Family Services, and the Sheriff’s Department, along with the Juvenile Assessment Center, have brought together new options to deal more successfully with growing numbers of youth being formally charged with status and misdemeanor offenses. The creative ability to establish new partnerships is a result

of a growing recognition of the benefits of cooperation and collaboration for the county’s families.

The new program, to be known as **Correct Course**, builds a new relationship between the JAC’s staff, which will administer the Juvenile Inventory for Functioning (JIFF© Kay Hodges, Ph.D.) and the existing array of local community Youth Assistance Programs. The JIFF’s focus on the youth’s functioning is expected to provide the key information necessary for service providers to effectively examine the dynamics of child-family relationships and behavior. The JIFF specifically asks about the youth’s behavior in the home, at school, on the job, and in the community; about the youth’s emotional

state, relationships with peers, potential medical needs; and about the behavior of family members that could adversely affect the youth.

The service promises to help divert youth from the path to delinquency by offering resources to resolve the youth’s risk taking behaviors. And, the prosecutor will hold the youth accountable to follow the law. The

new diversion option seeks to achieve at least the following outcomes:

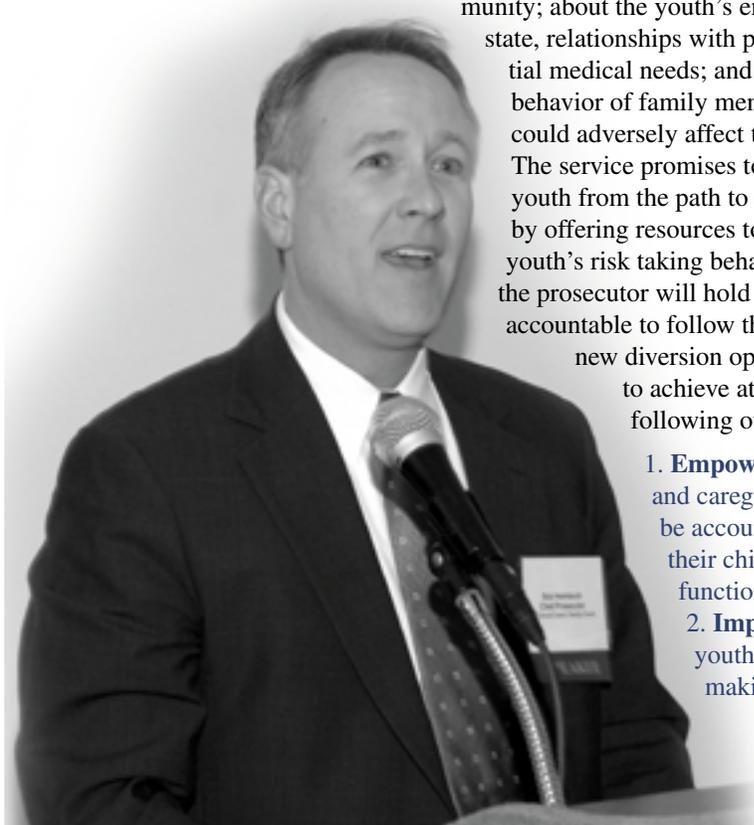
1. **Empower** parents and caregivers to be accountable for their child’s daily functioning
2. **Improve** youth’s decision making skills
3. **Allow** juveniles who successfully complete Correct Course the chance to keep their record clean
4. **Reduce** the growing number of juveniles who are entering the formal juvenile justice system



Because of the development of the new, computer-assisted assessment tool known as Juvenile Inventory for Functioning, designed similarly to the *Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale*. (CAFAS © Kay Hodges, Ph.D.), the Juvenile Assessment Center, the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office and Sheriff’s Department will be able to identify and provide more focused early intervention and prevention services to youth *before* they are charged with a crime in the family court.

JIFF is a new assessment methodology designed to be self-administered with the youth and parent using an interactive voice, touch screen, and keyboard computer. By answering a series of targeted questions, both the youth and the parent are able to identify the supports they need to help them avoid court intervention, improve communication with their child, and do the right things to stay in school, stay out of trouble and get an education.

While the CMOs are meeting the daunting challenges of dealing with the more than 4,000 cases annually of adjudicated delinquents and their families, the new JIFF option adds a daring new initiative to enable existing local Youth Assistance Programs (YAP) to assist youth and families before they are adjudicated.



Robert Heimbuch, Chief, Juvenile Division, Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office.

*continued on page 4*



*“Finally, we have the means to offer families concrete, voluntary help to reclaim their children.”*

*--Mary Johnson*

## JIFF puts truant youth on correct course *continued from page 3*

This new diversion option means that:

- Parents and caregivers consent to a brief assessment by the Juvenile Assessment Center using the JIFF;
- Participation in a local Youth Assessment Program is voluntary;
- YAP services and progress are reported on the county’s JAIS;
- The Sheriff’s Department makes unscheduled visits to the home and supports YAP involvement;
- YAP provides feedback regarding successful completion upon which the case is dismissed without further legal involvement;
- The youth does not have a court record for the offense.

Because in most cases, the new option is the first contact youth and families may have with law enforcement and juvenile justice system, its creators believe they will readily take advantage of the opportunity to help them interrupt deeper entry in the system. In this

way, youth charged with misdemeanor and status offenses who are motivated and willing to confront their legal and behavioral issues have a unique option to correct the course of their lives and reset them on a more productive path.

Correct Course began serving Wayne County youth the last week of April. Within two days, 10 youth were deferred from adjudication. The new program has changed the agenda by enabling realistic access to timely, appropriate services and the full array of local prevention providers for at risk youth.

“I have yet to meet a parent who was not willing to share at least some of the issues causing concern in their family’s life,” says Mary Johnson, supervisor for the JAC Erase Truancy and Correct Course process and the new JIFF option. “After sitting in two days with referees from the court who heard special dockets, I would like to commend the court and prosecutors for their

cooperation with the alternative offered these youth and families.”

Within the first week, families were also participating in treatment follow up activities to confront the genuine problems that will prevent moving youth away from home into restrictive, out of home settings.

Johnson affirms her enthusiasm for the new initiative.

“Finally, we have the means to offer families concrete, voluntary help to reclaim their children before they settle deeper into the juvenile system. We can show them how to tap into local services ready and waiting to see them find fuller lives in school, at home and in their neighborhoods. This is a great new initiative that finally addresses the long sought after goal of early intervention and prevention that so many of us knew was needed in the juvenile system. It offers hope to families, help to teachers, and structure for kids.”

# Community teams focus youth on accountability, responsibility

When a youth gets in trouble and also becomes troublesome there is a tendency for friends and adults to pull away and leave them without support or direction. If youth begin damaging themselves and victimizing peers or members of their community, the people who suddenly enter their lives are likely to be police officers, prosecutors, social workers, probation workers. The more trouble they get into, the more likely they begin to lose their personal freedoms.

**Growth Works Western Wayne CMO** is doing something to change the downward spiral toward failure. It has invited citizens in all walks of life, parents, school principals, police officers, city officials and community leaders to join together in "Community Teams" with the challenge to offer kids a chance to learn accountability and

responsibility for their actions from people in their neighborhoods who are willing to help find a better path for their lives.

Community Teams in different areas of Western Wayne meet with youth assigned to the Growth Works for care, treatment and supervision. Individual youth, and their parent or guardian when available, meet with a particular team to unfold their personal situations and circumstances, admit how they have harmed their communities and determine what they can do to correct their behavior, give restitution to those they have harmed and uncover what kinds of resources they can take advantage of locally.

"We try to get kids to admit the seriousness of their behavior," explains one team member, "and, once they do, suggest the options that can help them turn around. We represent different points of view and, both individually and together, we can get the resources of the community to work together to help kids walk a more promising path to adulthood."

In a recent meeting held at the City of Westland Police Department, a 16-year old girl and her mother

met with the Westland community team. Narrowly skirting possible imprisonment for being part of a major theft, the

young woman, also in the early stage of pregnancy, made some bad choices that shifted her life from that of a successful student and encouraging daughter, to a hostile, somewhat scared and cautiously mistrustful person. She was confronted by members of the team, especially the police officer who had arrested her and the school official who knew her. She admitted the risk she was in and the serious-

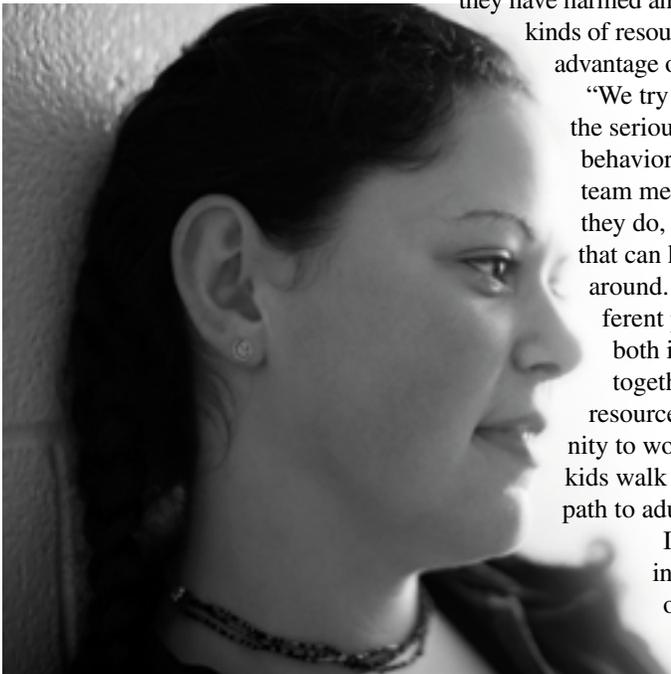
ness of what she had done. Specific new goals were outlined for her and for her mother. If she agreed to perform them, the community team would help her in any way necessary. If she failed to do so, the community team would declare her in violation and remove her right to remain in the community. She now understands her options and the possible consequences of how she manages them.

Community Teams extend the police department's commitment to "protect and defend" and the Growth Works CMO mission of service by engaging local city residents to get closer to youth in trouble instead of leaving them alone and exposed to being embraced by negative peers and gangs.

Because Growth Works CMO believes strongly that it is accountable to the communities it serves, it has been creating and using community teams as partners for the past five years. Training them in the principles of Balanced

*"We try to get kids to admit the seriousness of their behavior, and, once they do, suggest the options that can help them turn around."*

*--Team member*



Individual youth and their parent or guardian meet with a particular team to assess personal situations and circumstances.

*continued on page 8*

# Case managers share best practices at first conference



*Don Spivak, M.D.  
Detroit-Wayne County  
Community Mental Health Agency*



*Judge Judy Hartsfield  
Presiding 3rd Circuit Family Court*

CMO case managers shared experiences and best practices at the first ever CMO Case Managers Conference January 22 at Wayne State University. **Cynthia Smith**, CEO of the Juvenile Assessment Center, called it “a day of training for CMO case managers that would allow them to create a network of support and promote successful interventions with the children and families of Wayne County.”

To make the first case manager conference uniquely enriching, the planning committee, headed by JAC Training Coordinator **Jennifer Fuller**, invited CMO case managers to submit proposals for 10-minute poster presentations reflecting their successful approaches working with juveniles and families, neighborhoods or schools. Case managers responded overwhelmingly. Every CMO submitted a well developed proposal that reflected the variety of services provided throughout Wayne County. The services reflect the diversity of populations served and the ability of CMOs to tailor their services to be culturally appropriate.

**Sue Hamilton-Smith**, director of Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services, opened the conference. She encouraged attendees to take advantage of the day to move their skills to an even higher level on behalf of their clients.

During packed morning sessions, presenters rotated between rooms, repeating presentations to groups of attendees:

- **Rites of Passage** program (Black Family Development CMO)
- **Use of the CAFAS** for assessment and treatment (Bridgeway Services CMO)
- **Community Service Projects** (Central Care Management Organization)
- **Community Phase Program and Community Teams** (Western Wayne CMO)
- **Switchboard System for Managing Cases** (StarrVista CMO)
- **Predictors of Services and Recidivism** (JAC information based on research conducted on Wayne County adjudicated youth)
- **How to Train and Support Case Management Staff for Court**, a special seminar for management staff presented by **Kathryne O’Grady**, director, Policy and Resource Development, Wayne County Children and Family Services.

The luncheon keynote speaker, **Don Spivak, M.D.**, Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency, delivered significant insights into identifying and dealing with “Violence, Risk Assessment & Anger Management.”

Afternoon speakers focused on general information useful to all CMO case managers:

- **Jim Belknap**, assistant director, and **Dan Chaney**, director, Juvenile Services, Wayne County Children and Family Services reviewed the critical path processes of case management.

- **Robert Heimbuch**, Chief, Juvenile Division, Prosecutor's office, presented the Prosecutors Perspective and reminded the audience of the importance of the victims' perspective and concerns and the prosecutor's role in community protection. His presentation sparked a dialogue about restitution.

- **Judge Judy Hartsfield**, presiding judge, Third Circuit Court, Family Court challenged case managers to be organized, precise, punctual and prepared. She reviewed court policies and procedures and explained jurists/court expectations. Her presentation evoked such reactions as, "Awesome...great speaker...informative."

- **Carl Latona** of CjL Strategies, LLC, provided a motivating and empowering close to the day. He reminded case managers that they are Wayne County's 911 responders for children and families. Referring to the book, *Advocating Success*, he suggested they are the "future authors" who will write the fuller story of the JAC/CMO system.

Feedback from conference attendees rated the conference "very good to excellent." Most responses were summed up in the following quote from one attendee. "I am new to this field. Listening to the morning and

afternoon speakers taught me a lot. The speakers really opened my eyes to a wealth of knowledge. I can use my notes and the PowerPoint presentations as reference. This was a good conference."



*More than 175 case managers attended the January conference.*



## Search under way for gender-specific treatment for girls

In recent months, both the Juvenile Assessment Center and the Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services have been evaluating data gathered from 1,318 males and 336 females served from 2000 through 2005. The following has been learned:

	Females	Males
Removed from the home due to abuse/neglect before juvenile status	30 percent	18 percent
History of self-harming and unsafe behaviors	23 percent	11 percent
Significant symptoms of mood disorders and/or anxiety disorders (including symptoms of PTSD) as a result of trauma and victimization	50 percent	35 percent

Because of the growing numbers of girls entering the juvenile justice system, efforts are underway to create locally-provided gender-specific treatment options beginning with programs for girls. Many are experiencing significant cognitive behavioral disorders due to victimization and trauma. More skilled, specialized treatment is necessary due to sexual assault, child maltreatment, witnessing

major family and other violence, which deeply affect a young girl's ability to trust and engage in treatment. New gender-specific services must be prepared to:

- Use trauma-recovery interventions
- Treat co-occurring disorders
- Involve family-based services
- Adopt cognitive behavioral approaches
- Use evidence-based methodologies to stabilize and treat.

Local services to resolve such presenting issues

for adjudicated girls are limited, due to their serious clinical needs. Furthermore, any aggressive behavior inevitably leads to removal from home and community. As a result, girls may be placed into existing programs that are not specifically designed to meet their most significant needs.

The county is trying to eliminate the barrier of placing delinquent girls in specialized facilities a significant distance from home because of limited local programs for them. Local services will also remove obstacles that prevent increased parental participation. Although these initiatives are just getting underway, *Choices* will report on how they unfold in following issues.



Growing number of girls entering the juvenile justice system increases need for programs

### Teams help uncover local resources continued from page 5

and Restorative Justice (BARJ), it taps into the skills and resources that local citizens can bring to bear to help one youth at a time refocus their lives, accept responsibility for their conduct, and give restitution to those they have harmed.

**April Wyncott**, director of Growth Works CMO Services, believes the brave experiment proves itself effective every time one youth meets his or her

community in the form of real people rather than anonymous citizens.

“It helps us because we get different points of view from participating citizens and we also get access to the resources the community team has to offer,” explains a Growth Works CMO staff member. “In addition to helping the kid, community teams are broadening our experience and skills as community social workers.”

*Choices* is published by

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

Cynthia J. Smith, MSW, LCSW  
*Publisher*

*Publication Management*  
CjL Strategies, LLC

Volume VI, No. 1, Spring 2007