



St. Louis County  
Family Court:  
How It Works and the  
Services It Provides



# Tenets of the Juvenile Justice System

- The juvenile justice system has an inherent belief in a juvenile's capacity to change and be "rehabilitated".
- The system provides individualized justice customized to the needs of the juvenile.
- The family should be the primary source of guidance and support.



# Juvenile Justice System Tenets (continued)

- The juvenile system believes in collaboration with the community and its resources to provide a “wrap around”.
- The Judges and professionals that are involved require unique expertise.
- Juvenile Courts are truly the first “problem solving Courts”. The Juvenile Court is concerned about outcomes for the juvenile and not just the individual case or offense.



# The Family Court

- The Family Court has sole authority to hear a variety of cases including some of the following:
  - Divorce / Custody
  - Adult Abuse
  - Juvenile Delinquency
  - Abuse and Neglect
  - Adoptions
- The Family Court system was created in 1993 by the passage of the Family Court Bill by the Missouri Legislature.
- The Family Court is under the direction of an Administrative Judge.



# What is Juvenile Delinquency?

- Acts committed by a juvenile that constitute a criminal law violation. Juveniles can also be referred to the Court for status offenses. Status offense are actions that are committed by a juvenile but do not constitute a criminal law violation.



# Status Offenses

- Status offenses are behaviors that are adverse to the child's welfare because the child is under the age of 17.
  - Truancy (repeated failure to attend school without justification)
  - Runaway (leaving home without permission for a period longer than 24 hours)
  - Incurability (beyond the control of the parent/guardian)
  - Behavior Injurious (the juvenile's behavior is harmful to his/her welfare or the welfare of others)
  - Curfew (being out in the community without adult supervision after 11:00pm Sun-Thur, 12:00pm Fri-Sat, for St. Louis County). Curfew hours can vary by individual municipalities.



# Criminal Acts

- All offenses that if committed by an adult would be considered an ordinance violation, Misdemeanor or Felony.
- Some of the more common referrals received by the Court
  - Misdemeanors
    - Assault 3<sup>rd</sup>-MA
    - Stealing-MA
    - Possession of Marijuana / Drug Paraphernalia-MA
    - Property Damage 2<sup>nd</sup> –MB
    - Sexual Misconduct 1<sup>st</sup> MA
  - Felonies
    - Assault 2<sup>nd</sup>-FC
    - Burglary 1<sup>st</sup>-FB
    - Burglary 2<sup>nd</sup>-FC
    - Stealing-FC
    - Unlawful Use of a Weapon-FD



# Informal Action

- Allows a Deputy Juvenile Officer to address the delinquent behavior of juveniles without the intervention of a Family Court Judge or a formal petition being filed.
- In place of a court hearing, a Deputy Juvenile Officer may meet with a youth and his/her custodians. The family and Deputy Juvenile Officer develop a contract which will address the child's unlawful behaviors and hold the youth accountable while allowing him/her to provide reparation to the community/victim.
- In most instances, these cases involve youth referred to the Court for either misdemeanor or status offenses.





# Formal Court Action

- A police report is forwarded to the Family Court or a youth is brought into the Family Court Detention Center for delinquent behavior.
- Court's Legal Department (similar to the adult prosecutor) reviews the charge and files a petition.
- A petition is a formal document that sets forth the charges being brought against the juvenile.
- In most instances, cases that are set for a formal Court hearing involve youth who have committed a felony offense or who have displayed a repetitive pattern of delinquent behavior.



# The Detention Center

- The Detention Center of the Family Court of St. Louis County provides for the safe and secure custody of juveniles alleged to have committed an offense that brings them within the Jurisdiction of the Court.
- Juveniles are only detained if it is believed that they present a threat to themselves or the community.
- Juveniles remain in Detention until the Court hears their case or until appropriate alternative arrangements can be made.



# Detention Center Services

- Basic Needs
  - shelter
  - food
  - clothing
- Support Services
  - drug/alcohol counseling
  - arts and crafts
  - self-help programs
  - recreational programs
  - volunteer programs by community members
    - Mentoring and educational services
  - voluntary religious services
- Educational Services
  - year round school program offered by SSD



# Interventions to Deal with Juvenile Delinquency

Formal & Informal Court Interventions



# Formal & Informal Court Interventions

- Monitoring & Supervision by a Deputy Juvenile Officer
- Electronic Home Detention Program



## Formal & Informal Court Interventions: Educational Programs

- Project LEARN
- GED/HiSET



# Formal & Informal Court Interventions: Restorative Justice Programs

- Restorative Justice is a set of principles that guide the justice process. Howard Zehr defines restorative justice as: “...a process to involve, to the extent possible those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible.” Restorative Justice acknowledges that crime harms relationships and therefore, victims, offenders and communities must be involved in the justice process.
  - Harm Questions
    - Who was harmed?
    - What was the harm?
    - What needs to be done to repair the harm?
    - Who needs to do it?



## Formal & Informal Court Interventions: Restorative Justice Programs (cont)

- Victim Offender Dialogue
- Juvenile Conference Committee
- Victim Impact Panels
- Victim Impact Classes
- Mediation Programs
- Restitution
- Community Service





## Formal & Informal Court Interventions: Clinical and Therapeutic

- Individual Therapy
- Family Therapy
- Psychological Evaluations
- Group Counseling Programs
  - Social Skills/Anger Management
  - Project GUNS
  - Healthy Lives
  - Treatment & Support (Sexually Harmful Youth)



## Formal & Informal Court Interventions

- Day Treatment/MET Center
- The Reporting Center
- Mentoring Programs



# Juvenile Delinquency

- Youth who have engaged in delinquent behavior require a consistent and measured response.
- The Family Court of St. Louis County strives to provide services that give balanced attention to protection of the community, accountability for offenses committed and development of competencies that enable youth to become responsible and productive members of the community.