

DIVISION of

Juvenile Justice

MISSION:

... to hold juvenile offenders accountable for their behavior; to promote the safety and restoration of victims and communities; to assist offenders and their families in developing skills to prevent crime.



Patty Ware, Juvenile Justice Division Director.

“Essentially what we’re doing is changing our culture ... it’s not just about data. This is about using information to improve everything we’re spending our time on, every day, with kids.”

—Patty Ware, Director

The Division of Juvenile Justice, which was created in 1999, has a three-pronged mission: to hold juvenile offenders accountable for their behavior; to promote the safety and restoration of victims and communities; and to assist offenders and their families in developing skills to prevent crime.

The division’s responsibilities include providing short-term secure detention; court-ordered institutional treatment for offenders; intake investigation; probation supervision and monitoring; and juvenile offender skill development.

Under the reorganization, the division did not change structurally, but implemented a number of changes to improve its system. High on the list was a move toward “research-based practices,” or strategies that juvenile justice research has shown to be effective. What this means for Alaskans is that the approach the division uses to determine what kind of handling a young offender warrants is based on known practices.

“The field of juvenile justice has a fair amount of research on what works and what doesn’t work,” Juvenile Justice Division Director Patty Ware explained.

“It means we want to be able to say to Alaskans that the types of interventions we use — from making decisions about where to place the young person to what kinds of services he or she needs — are based on research and data.” To achieve ongoing improvement, the division “measures, reviews, improves and repeats.”

Another improvement Juvenile Justice is implementing is developing a “front loaded” system, or using community-based services instead of locked facilities to work with lower-risk youth. By employing strategies such as counseling and anger management for lower risk youth instead of a locked bed, the division better helps youth succeed and not offend again — and the division saves money it can reinvest in other services.

Those services include nonsecure shelter care, emergency shelters, foster care, electronic monitoring, increased community-based checks at home, school, work or in-home detention.

Among the division’s efforts to best serve young offenders and their communities is the Transitional Services Unit at McLaughlin Youth Center in Anchorage (see success story page 29). Staff work with

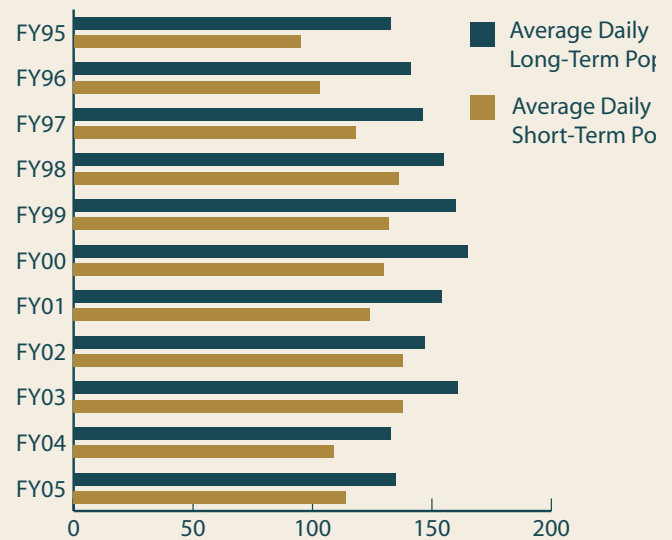
youth who are about to be released, coordinating with other community partners to guide the youth to attain education, job training, employment and continued counseling if needed. The continuum of services — even after the offender leaves state jurisdiction — provides a support system to prevent a youth re-offending and assists the young person in successfully integrating back into his or her community following release.

Another recent improvement is the expansion of the Nome detention facility to 16 beds, which increases services and decreases overcrowding for youth in the Nome and Kotzebue region.

Accomplishments 2003-05 Highlights

- Manage long-term treatment beds as a statewide resource, thus reducing waiting lists in one region while open beds are available in another area of the state.
- Adopt standardized screening and assessment tools to more accurately identify both risk level and specific needs of juvenile offenders. This ensures more effective use of detention resources and improved ability to tailor interventions to youth needs, ultimately reducing re-offense rates.
- Participate in the national, ongoing quality assurance process of Performance Based Standards (PbS) to improve the safety and effectiveness of services in juvenile facilities.
- Enhance transitional services for youth returning home from long-term confinement to improve success.

Juvenile Program (Long-Term) and Juvenile Detention (Short-Term) Daily Population FY1995-2005



What we continue to work on

The division has numerous goals for fiscal year 2006 and beyond, including developing a statewide quality assurance system to ensure that Juvenile Justice system improvements are effective and the data they generate ensure ongoing agency accountability in all facets of programming and services.

The division is also working on the second phase of the PbS process in all its facilities, with the emphasis on using information to gauge highest priority areas for improvement and making operational changes as needed.

DJJ will enhance community supervision by adding seven new juvenile probation officers throughout the state; and four new victim service positions, which will allow the division to improve and streamline information to victims of juvenile crime.

The division also has four pilot sites for the research-based practice of Aggression Replacement Training, which teaches anger management, moral reasoning and problem-solving skills to delinquent youth. The training was planned for November 2005, with implementation starting immediately after.

Working with juvenile offenders extends beyond their release

“Jana has worked tirelessly to make the Transitional Services program work, both inside the detention facility and out in the local community. She has good training in the restorative justice philosophy and shows this in her work with kids.”

—Ray Michaelson,
Mat-Su Youth Facility
Superintendent

Kids who end up crosswise with the law and land in Alaska’s juvenile justice system aren’t necessarily bad kids — although they may be kids who have done bad things. But sometimes they’re just kids who need a fresh start, which was the case with “Jerry” (name changed to protect privacy).

Jana Engle, a probation officer at the Mat-Su Youth Facility, first met Jerry a few years ago when she was working in detention as a Juvenile Justice Officer, offering counseling and supervision. “He was in detention for quite a long time,” Engle remembers, “because it had been alleged that his behavior was a danger to his family, making it impossible to return home.”

As she got to know him, she was impressed with Jerry. “He was one of the best-behaved role models on the unit — a very artistic young man, sensitive.”

Jerry, who comes from a troubled one-parent family and had run away from shelter placement, was eventually ordered by the court to an institution — McLaughlin Youth Center in Anchorage.

Engle then found herself in a new position: Transitional Services Juvenile Probation Officer II, responsible for helping integrate young offenders back into their communities. “This isn’t necessarily a probation story or a facility story,” says Engle’s supervisor Ray Michaelson, superintendent of the Mat-Su Youth Facility. “It’s a success story based on a combination of efforts to get this kid help, from both sides of the Division of Juvenile Justice.”

In her new position, Engle was handed files on all the local youngsters who were institutionalized, 22 cases that had originated in the Matanuska-Susitna area. “The great advantage of having worked in detention,” she says, “is that I knew almost all of the juveniles really well.”

Among those files was Jerry’s. “I visited him at McLaughlin, called him, he called me, and I attended monthly case planning meetings with his parent and his treatment team,” she says.

Meanwhile, Michaelson and Engle were establishing a connection between the Division of Juvenile Justice and Job Corps, a U.S. Department of Labor no-cost education and vocational training program that helps young men and women ages 16-24 better themselves. Job Corps’ only Alaska site is in the Mat-Su.

Engle took Jerry on a tour of the Job Corps campus and although he wasn’t interested at first, his family encouraged him to apply. “We started the application process and six months later Jerry was enrolled,” Engle says. Although it hasn’t always been a smooth ride, Jerry has been off probation for a year and is nearing Job Corps graduation — with a trade and a GED. “Jerry is just cruising,” Engle adds with obvious pride. “He’s flying through the books.”

One of the unique aspects of DJJ’s Transitional Services program is that it



Jana Engle, Transitional Services Juvenile Propation Officer II, Mat-Su Youth Facility.

continues working on a case after the state's court-ordered supervision of the youngster ends. "Transitional services cannot be confined to a period of legal jurisdiction over a kid," Michaelson explains. "As long as the family gives us permission, we will continue to follow this kid through. It's not good case management to cut kids and families off abruptly."

Since the transitional services program was instituted in 2004, Engle has transitioned 15 young offenders back into their communities, and only four have come back through the system — and those were not for new crimes, but for technical violations of their conditions of probation.

"Jana has worked tirelessly to make the transitional services program work, both inside the detention facility and out in the local community," Michaelson says. "She has good training in the restorative justice philosophy and shows this in her work with kids."

Engle, who in her private life was a foster mother to teen boys, puts it more simply: "Kids have always been of utmost importance to me."