

# FOCUS

## A Look at the Maricopa County Juvenile Court



*Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County*

*Spring Edition*

## BROKEN WINDOWS/MENDED KIDS

*by Shay Bilchik*

*Administrator, Office of Juvenile Justice and Dependency Prevention*



Rarely a day goes by without a dramatic news story about yet another episode of youth violence. Indeed, both research studies and first-hand experience tell us that more of today's juveniles are involved in violent offending than in past generations. This

is a reason for legitimate public concern and aggressive action, including a focus on law enforcement and other immediate public safety responses.

Nevertheless, violent and chronic juvenile offenders, labeled by some as super predators, are actually few in number -- just 1% of all youth ages 10-17 were arrested for a violent crime last year. Further, less than 5% of youth with a juvenile record are chronic and violent offenders. More important, however, behind these so-called super predators are quieter predators that are threatening our youth: kids with too much idle time, too little positive adult supervision, and too few healthy role models; guns and drugs too readily available; more than a million cases of child abuse and neglect each year; parents without parenting skills; inadequate attention to children with special education and mental health needs - and the list goes on, leading many of our youth down a pathway to crime.

It's taken years to get to this point and there are no "silver bullets" to cure the problem overnight. But experience and research tell us we can make a difference. To effectively reduce juvenile crime, we should respond to young people in need the same way community police have begun responding to street crime, with the "broken windows" strategy. At the first sign of deterioration in a community - broken windows, graffiti, vandalism, abandoned cars, prostitution, or other blight - police and community leaders are taking

aggressive action to eliminate the problem and avoid further deterioration, with great success. This response sets a community standard, clearly announcing, "we don't allow that here." The response works, New York City is perhaps the best example that such actions can reduce crime and improve the quality of life in a community.

We need to apply the same to our youth. Kids, too, give off warning signs - running away, skipping school, failing academically, acting out aggressively, or showing signs of abuse or neglect. An effective violence reduction strategy does not ignore these early symptoms but rather treats them directly - just like fixing broken windows - putting the broken pieces of children's lives back together again.

The research tells us this strategy will make a difference. We know what works to prevent crime, starting with the earliest stages of life: good prenatal care, home visitation programs for newborns at risk of abuse and neglect, steps to strengthen parents' skills for dealing with crises, and initiatives to prepare children for school. These initiatives build the foundation for law-abiding lives for children and interrupt the cycle of violence that can turn abused or neglected children into delinquents.

We also know what works to prevent crime with older children: opportunities for youth in the after-school hours and weekends will reduce the more than 50% of violent juvenile crime that occurs between 3 and 8 p.m. Boys and Girls Clubs and well-designed mentoring programs like Big Brothers and Big Sisters reduce juvenile alcohol and drug use, improve school performance, and prevent youth from getting involved in crime and violent behavior.

The "broken windows" strategy requires that we couple these effective prevention programs with a juvenile justice that takes quick, effective steps with kids as soon as they come to the attention of police, juvenile

*Continued on page 2*

## Broken Windows

Continued from Page 1

courts or social service agencies. A strong juvenile justice system assesses the danger youth pose, determines what can help pull them back from the edge, delivers appropriate treatment and sticks with these kids when they return to the community to keep them on course. A strong system also appropriately identifies those juveniles beyond its reach and ensures their criminal prosecution and incapacitation.

We know these interventions will make a difference. The tragedy is that we are failing to intervene with many delinquent, abused and neglected kids who can, in fact, be saved. Why? Because the programs designed to serve children, families and communities too often lack the resources to get involved early enough to get the job done. Unfortunately, low levels of funding permit them only to react to crisis, not to address the underlying symptoms in a thoughtful, consistent and sustained manner that will make a difference.

The “windows” are broken for children in many of our communities. To fix them, we must work together. All sectors -- families, communities, public and private organizations, and government at every level -- must recognize their roles in creating safe and healthy youth and communities. Individual citizens have the obligation to be informed of the facts and myths of youth violence, to insist that policymakers and legislators fund effective ways to attack the real problems and, most important, to promote wise use of our resources.

Little of this is glamorous, and none of it is easy. But we need to muster the will. Communities across the nation are taking on this tremendous challenge, but many more must join them. We have tens of thousands of new community police officers, new funds for correctional programs, a renewed focus on prevention and early intervention and a reinvigorated spirit of volunteerism.

We even have the recent and encouraging downturn in violent juvenile crime. Today, more than ever, we know how to reduce juvenile crime even further, and we must seize the opportunity. Only then can we open the windows of opportunity for all our children and make this a safer and better nation for us all.

For information about effective and promising programs to reduce juvenile delinquency, violence and victimization, call the OJJDP Clearinghouse at 1-800-638-8736.

\*Article reprinted with the author's permission.

## Juvenile Probation Officer Makes A Difference in the Life of a Teen

The following is a thank you letter that was sent to Juvenile Probation in recognition of the great work and intervention on the part of Juvenile Probation Officer Frank Gutierrez.

*“ In March of this year our son decided to sneak out of our home and get into some mischief causing vandalism damage.*

*Although we have raised our son with higher standards, it was very difficult to imagine he had done this and very disappointing. When it comes to the court system I think everyone thinks of ‘Judge Judy’ and absolutely dreads having anything to do with the process.*

*Our son had the fortune, if you will, of getting Frank Gutierrez as his probation officer. Frank made a very emotional and stressful situation much easier to handle and deal with, through his commitment to our son’s case. He was excellent in explaining everything.*

*Frank really goes above and beyond his call of duty. I know he has a tough job. But he didn’t treat my son like a ‘criminal’ he was very forthright with him. We really appreciated this as parents. Frank also went the extra mile in several instances to help our son. For example, he hand delivered some documents to the company which our son was part of vandalizing to get this all done with. He showed up on his day off to make requests to the judge on our behalf. It was for our son’s benefit that he made these requests. We really appreciated him doing that for us.*

*Our son has definitely learned his lesson and we don’t feel you’ll be seeing him in your system again. To a degree it was worth him getting into trouble because it was a wake up call and thankfully it was nothing more serious or fatal.*

*In conclusion, I feel that Frank should be recognized for his above and beyond and extra mile efforts. In this day and age, you usually just hear complaints from people when something isn’t done right. I’m a firm believer when someone has gone to the other extreme and deserves recognition in letting someone know about it. Thank you for your time in this matter.*

*Thankfully Yours.”*

---

# Intervention - A Kid's Look at Prison Life

---

The endless walls of the privately operated prison stretch along a desolate stretch of a two-lane highway near Florence. The warm sun bounces sharply off the masses of barbed wire that define the boundaries of the complex.

"These walls will kill," warned Anthony, an inmate who graduated to this penal institution after a two-year bout with the juvenile system failed to convince him a life of crime was a dead end. "We don't want to see you up in here."

His audience consisted of juveniles brought to the facility to see the reality of prison life. As they gathered in a courtyard on the prison's grounds, a group of inmates greeted them.

"This is my family," said Anthony, pointing to the other prisoners who are involved in the program called Concerned Offenders for Youth Awareness (COYA). "All we wish is that you listen, that's the name of the game. Listen and you might just learn something."

That is the hope for Juvenile Probation Officers Brad Geeslin and Carol Wedge. Twice a month, they are joined by a team of other Maricopa County juvenile probation officers and supervisors, who drive juveniles on probation to listen to the prisoners' stories of how they "fell" and the reality of prison life.

"If this reaches just one kid today," said Geeslin, "it will be a success."

On the ride to Florence the teens surrendered jewelry, wallets, money, combs and other possessions for safekeeping while in the prison. Those who have handed in packs of cigarettes and lighters are told these possessions will not be returned. The ride to the prison is quiet except for the radio.

Upon arrival at the prison, they enter a world ruled by inmates and prison guards. They quickly learn following the rules is mandatory.

One of the inmates, Sal, orders all of the juveniles to take off their shoes and socks and hand them over to COYA members. As they are piled in front of the audience Sal says: "It's the prisoner's property now."

He points to one of the teens, dressed in baggy, gang -style clothing, and orders him on his feet. Other COYA members surround the slightly built teen, as Sal explains the reality of prison life that can land an inmate in a situation of being ordered to kill another inmate.

"Whatever we tell you to do, you do it," Sal said of prison-life realities. "It's a no-win situation."

Sal, a muscular, imposing figure, moves among the teens asking those teens involved in gangs to raise their hands.



"Gangbangin' is gonna get you dead. If you're a real man you'll drop that pride and start asking your counselors and POs questions."

The COYA program was created after deadly rioting erupted in a New Mexico prison during the early 1980s. A group of inmates who survived the violence organized and created COYA, in the interest of getting juveniles turned away from criminal activity before ending up in prison.

The program eventually found its way to Florence when some of the original COYA members were transferred there. Geeslin and Wedge meet once a month with Jack Payne, the prison recreational supervisor and COYA members to make sure the program is meeting the needs of the juveniles. March 1999 was the one-year anniversary for the program at the Florence facility. Interest in the program snowballed last year after media attention publicized the project.

"We received tons of calls from concerned parents whether the kids were on probation or not," said Geeslin. Local school groups and other youth agencies have also participated but Geeslin and Wedge hope to incorporate COYA as a juvenile probation diversion program.

One thing they emphasize is COYA is not a scared straight program. Members emphasize mutual respect and participation. The COYA logo is two hands clasped in friendship superimposed on a tower being struck with a lightning bolt.

"Scared straight has not been proven to work," said Geeslin. "I think that as soon as a kid gets there, he or she is more worried about what's going to be said next and just building up their anger. COYA uses a little intimidation but the kids are given their dignity back and there is one-on-one conversation with the inmates and opportunities to ask questions."

COYA member Daniel bares his past as he asks the teens how many like to drink and how many like to drive.

# JUVENILE COURT NEWS BRIEFS



The Juvenile Court bid farewell to **Judge Armando de Leon** and **Commissioner Richard Aubuchon** recently upon their retirement.

Judge de Leon, who served 16 years on the bench, closed his judicial career with his Juvenile Court assignment which started in May, 1997. Judge de Leon also participated in numerous professional and community projects including the Arizona-Sonora Judicial Relations Project. He served in the United States Air Force and attained the rank of brigadier general. Judge de Leon also served as an elected member of the Phoenix City Council and was general counsel for the National Council of La Raza.

Commissioner Richard Aubuchon started his career in the juvenile justice system as a Maricopa County juvenile probation officer for six years before entering Arizona State University Law School. After graduation, he went into private practice, specializing in criminal, family and juvenile law. He became a Superior Court Commissioner in 1981, assigned to the Juvenile Court, which is where he stayed for the next 18 years until retirement. In his years on the bench, he twice served as presiding juvenile commissioner and was instrumental in expediting foster care adoptions.



The MEDALS program to help juveniles overcome substance abuse problems has been revived and in February four teens celebrated three months of success over their addictions. During a graduation ceremony each received a bronze medal to celebrate their success.

Juveniles at the Durango Juvenile Detention Facility received books from volunteers of the Greater Paradise Valley Reading Council through the "Hands on Program." This marks the second consecutive year these volunteers brought the gift of reading to juveniles in detention.

---

## Prison Life

Continued from Page 3

"Me too. I love to drive," then he asked, "How many of you have run from the police?" The juveniles admit to drinking and driving and fleeing police.

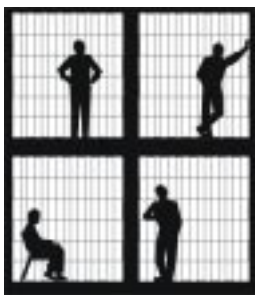
They quiet as Daniel reads them the news article printed about his sentence for the death of a 10-year-old girl and her mother, whom he killed while driving drunk and on the run from police. He displays pictures of the accident that he has mounted on a board for all the teens to see.

Roger is the COYA member with the longest, continuous sentence. He has been incarcerated for the past 17 years for first-degree murder.

"I'm not proud of that," he said flatly, "I'm embarrassed. How do you say 'I'm sorry' when you take someone's life? The hardest thing you'll ever face in prison is your own face in the mirror." He passes around two pictures of himself at

age 17, the last time he was on the other side of prison walls.

Roger has his fellow COYA members stand in back of him as they demonstrate through a show of hands that they're in prison because of addictions to drugs and



alcohol, no goals and no high school education.

"All of us had a lack of education, lack of a specific goal and drug and alcohol use."

He challenges each to set goals, passing out pens and paper to commit to writing what they hope to achieve. He instructs them after they take the document home that


they detail all of the steps to their goal on the back of the paper and hang it in a place where they can see it every day. As they achieve each step toward their goal, they are to check it off.

"When you reach your goal, go out and get a frame for your piece of paper and hang it proudly like any other certificate or diploma," he said. "You earned it."

Anthony, who greeted the teens to the prison yard, wraps up the session.

"You are all special and unique. Don't ever think that no one cares. Just look at the POs and counselors that took time on their weekend to come here with you. Don't disrespect them."

Once outside the white, electric fence of the prison wall, the teens begin to talk loudly and some shrug off the experience, except for the one who waits for the others to move out of earshot.

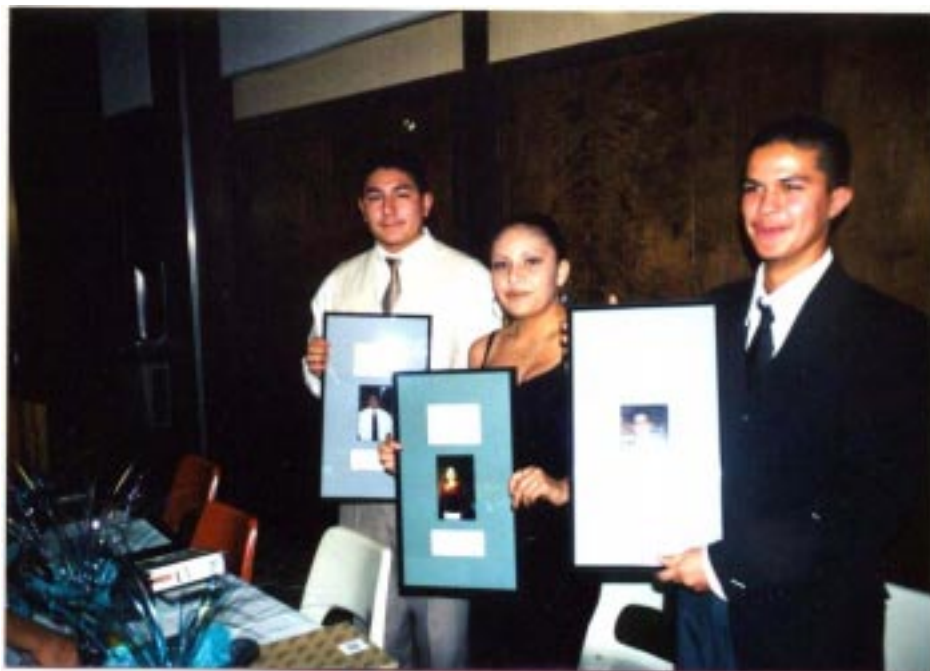
"That was really scary," he quietly murmured. 



---

# First Group of Teens Graduate Juvenile Drug Court

---



Drug Court Graduates (l. to r.) Manuel Dominguez, Lorena Arevalo and Edgar Albarran.

In a little over a year, Edgar Albarran, Lorena Arevalo and Manuel Dominguez went from gang-banging and drugs to being role models for peers and an inspiration to judicial officers. The trio is the first group of teens to graduate from Juvenile Drug Court.

The three teens were court-ordered to attend the Juvenile Drug Court program as a term of their probation. At the onset, each admitted they didn't think they could make it. But along the way, each made the decision to reclaim their lives, get clean and stay sober.

"You make our jobs worthwhile," said Juvenile Court Commissioner Margaret Downie addressing the three teens at the first Juvenile Drug Court graduation in December.

"These teens are proof that giving kids a second chance works. All three are now role models for peers and an inspiration for judicial officers."

The Juvenile Drug Court program

began in Maricopa County in the summer of 1996 without funding. The effort was infused with a \$390,000 federal grant in 1998 and will target over 200 juvenile participants over the next two years.

The Juvenile Drug Court program is designed as a transition from detox and treatment to a sober lifestyle in the community. Intensive supervision by juvenile probation staff, immediate consequences, frequent judicial review, community service, family participation and frequent drug testing are all vital elements of Juvenile Drug Court.

In addition, participation in school, vocational programs and employment are also required. Each juvenile is provided with additional services dependent upon individual therapeutic needs.

The Juvenile Drug Court team, judicial officers, family, friends and teens currently in the program gathered to celebrate the first graduation ceremony.

Juvenile Presiding Juvenile Judge Maurice Portley, Juvenile Drug Court Judge John Foreman and Chief

Juvenile Probation Officer Cheryl Townsend participated in the ceremony. Foreman gave each graduate a plaque and praised their decisions and determination to stay clean and sober.

"It's better to give kids a chance to change because everyone benefits; everyone wins," said Judge Foreman. "We hope there are going to be lots of winners in the future."

Jessica Smith made a presentation to the graduates on behalf of Students Against Destructive Decisions and Lyn Adams awarded each teen a plaque on behalf of the Juvenile Court's Community Advisory Board.

Juvenile Drug Court team members who also were present included: Veronica Sausedo-Castill, youth supervisor; Tim Bailey, program screener; Kathy Mead, private attorney; Suzanne Harward, deputy public defender; David Palmer, deputy county attorney; Laurie Walsh, drug court coordinator; and Ramon Villa, probation officer.



# JUVENILE COURT JUDICIAL OFFICERS

---

## Southeast Court Center

1810 South Lewis St.

Mesa, AZ 85210

## Durango Court Center

3125 West Durango

Phoenix, AZ 85209

Presiding Judge Maurice Portley	506-2306	Associate Presiding Judge Pam Franks	506-3528
Judge Rebecca Albrecht	506-3727	Judge Linda Scott	506-2610
Judge Kenneth Fields	506-2060	Commissioner Margaret Downie	506-5015
Presiding Comm. Penny Willrich	506-2502	Commissioner Alfred Fenzel	506-7080
Commissioner Elizabeth Arriola	506-1117	Commissioner Jesse Filkins	506-2501
Commissioner Bethany Hicks	506-2139	Commissioner John Trombino	506-3151
Commissioner Thomas Jacobs	506-4203	Commissioner Eileen Willett	506-3343
Commissioner Elizabeth Yancey	506-2040		

**Please Note:** George H. Foster, Jr., (506-3891) has been appointed a juvenile court commissioner. On May 11th, Judge Fields and Commissioners Filkins, Trombino and Willrich are rotating to Adult Court. Commissioner Hicks has been appointed to a judgeship. Judges Brian Hauser (506-6086) and William Sargeant (506-3663) and Commissioners Jane Bayham-Lesselyong (506-3445), Toby Gerst (506-7665) and James Padish (506-3652) are rotating to Juvenile Court.

---

**Superior Court of Arizona  
Juvenile Court  
1810 S. Lewis  
Mesa, Arizona  
85210-6234**

---