

# YOUTH ASSESSMENT CENTER

**JIM SWORDEN, LSW, LCDC-III, AC DIRECTOR**

The Juvenile Assessment Center was developed to divert low risk offenders from further involvement with the juvenile justice system and to provide community-based services for low level offenders. The Center's main goal is to ensure ***the right youth receive the right service(s) at the right time and place***. The Assessment Center and Court are committed to keeping the community safe through evidenced-based screenings, assessments, and meaningful interventions for each child and family. Research demonstrates that more harm can result when a youth is exposed to detention and high-risk offenders. Such exposure results in raising the risk level of the offender. The Assessment Center seeks to reduce or eliminate that potential harm through its referrals, linkage to services, and case supervision.

The Assessment Center is a non-secure diversion alternative to detention for low-risk offenders. Youth charged with offenses such as status offenses (unruly, alcohol, etc..) and other drug related misdemeanors, minor domestic violence/family conflict, simple assaults, property offenses, criminal trespass, and safe school ordinance violations (SSOs), are transported by police officers to the Assessment Center for processing. Each youth is screened by trained staff utilizing evidenced-based tools. The youth and family are linked to community-based services that meet the need of the youth and family. If the youth successfully engages in the required services, these cases can be diverted from official court proceedings.

In 2023, the Juvenile Court Assessment Center screened **570** unique youth while having **781** events. The Center continues to divert a majority of youth from detention while ensuring appropriate interventions and responses, while keeping community safety as our primary mission. This response continues to provide youth with a continuum of resources and opportunities that minimize a youth's involvement with the juvenile justice system.

**Assessment Center Events and Unique Youth 2018 - 2023**



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## TEN YEAR ANNIVERSARY

October 1, 2023 marked the 10 year anniversary of the opening of the Assessment Center. During this period of time over 7,800 events (total number of youth processed) have been screened while 50% of those cases have been diverted from being formally processed. A majority of these youth have been diverted from entering detention by returning them home, to an alternative family member or friend, or Safety Net, a local runaway/youth shelter. Additionally many families have been connected or reconnected with supportive services within the community.

Upon hearing the news of the 10 year anniversary, Scott Sylak, Executive Director of the Mental Health & Recovery Services Board of Lucas County, and a member of the initial executive team for the Assessment Center stated, *"Since its inception, Lucas County Juvenile Court's Assessment Center has been a tremendous resource for youth, their families, and our community. Evaluating and diverting youth from detention when appropriate ensures they connect rapidly with needed services while holding them accountable. The Assessment Center is a cost-effective use of the Court's resources that positively impacts our entire community."* Moving forward the Assessment Center will continue the directive of diverting youth from detention and linking them to community services while utilizing two key principles. One, the "My Child" principle, ensuring that youth brought to the Assessment Center are treated with respect and dignity as if they were our own children. And secondly addressing community safety and the needs of each unique youth consistently determining "The right youth, at the right time, at the right place."

The Assessment Center continues to use the following screening tools to guide case officers in working with youth and families in a collaborative process to strengthen existing resources and identify individual or family needs. These screening tools include: the Ohio Youth Assessment System (**Diversion OYAS**), Global Appraisal of Individual Needs Short Screener (**GAIN-SS**), Lucas County Juvenile Court Public Health Screener (**LCPHS**), Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression Screener (**SOGIE**), and the FOCUS Human Trafficking screening tool.

Assessment Center staff have also processed **60** referrals from Judges and Magistrates using the same aforementioned screening tools. This process allow staff to link youth and families to community based services that may assist in addressing youth and family needs, while also strengthening existing resources and positive community connections.

## GOALS FOR THE ASSESSMENT CENTER IN 2024:

- 1) To continue to build upon our relationships with our community partners such as, The Toledo Police Department, The Lucas County Sheriff's Department, Lucas County Children Services, Safety Net Runaway Shelter, Lucas County Jobs and Family Services, Spring Green Diversion Services, Toledo Public Schools, and other community stakeholders;
- 2) Staff training continues to be a focus specifically in restorative justice, JDAI, trauma, family violence, mental health and substance abuse disorders. Additionally, Assessment Center staff participated in community-based trainings that provide updated information on services within the community. ■