

# YOUTHSTORIES

use her incarceration to better herself. Prior to commitment, Laura had received her high school diploma. She focused on furthering her education and enrolled in the Distant Learning Program through Burlington County College.

The remainder of Laura's commitment was marked by her dedication to her studies and, upon her release to juvenile parole status. Laura continued to attend college and held down a full-time job at JC Penneys. Laura was granted a full academic scholarship after her first semester in college and was inducted into the National Honors Society.

Today, Laura lives on her own, maintains a 4.0 grade point average and continues to work full-time. She completed parole on January 19, 2005. Laura's career goal is to be a sports medicine therapist; her ultimate goal is to reach the stars!

## Warren Residential

Antonio became involved with the juvenile justice system when he was sentenced to a one year commitment for aggravated assault. Antonio, however, knew that he wanted a better life for himself so, upon his arrival at the JJC's Warren Residential Community Home, he began attending weekly Bible study classes presented by Carmen Ministries. Antonio became very involved in church activities and rose to a leadership position at Warren.

Upon his release from the JJC, Antonio stayed involved with the mentors at Carmen Ministries and became active in the church. Antonio returned to high school and received his diploma. He enrolled at Monmouth University where he made the honor roll.

Antonio was selected for the Inroad Program that provides educationally talented minorities with internships at major corporations. Antonio completed his summer internship program with Verizon. Antonio now works for Verizon while attending school full-time. Antonio's goal in life is to be the most positive role model he can for his child. He is well on his way to accomplishing that goal.

## Southern Residential

Daniel was a 16-year-old when he was involved in an incident that resulted in someone's death. Daniel was arrested, convicted and sentenced to ten years in the juvenile justice system. He was sent to the New Jersey Training School in Monroe Township to serve his time. Due to circumstances surrounding his case, a variance was approved by the sentencing judge which allowed Daniel to attend Southern Residential Community Home, a JJC community program in Egg Harbor City.

Daniel was a model resident. He earned his GED, and thanks to the trust he earned from the staff, was allowed to attend Atlantic County Community College two to three times a week. Additionally, Daniel worked at the local Wawa convenience store. During his incarceration, Daniel's family maintained close contact with him, which proved invaluable to his growth and successful return to the community.

Daniel was paroled from Southern Residential in February, 1996. Daniel made it a point to stay in touch with the staff who touched his life during his commitment. He would periodically stop in for advice and direction from his former superintendent. Daniel also volunteered to serve as a guest speaker for Family Day events and Teen Parenting Program meetings at Southern Residential. Daniel earned his degree from Atlantic County Community College and secured a position with the Atlantic County Special Services School District. As a teacher's aide, he embarked on a career working with troubled youth. Daniel's dream, though, was to work with the JJC. After six and a half years of seeking an opportunity, Daniel was hired by the JJC as a Youth Worker at the facility where he formerly resided - Southern Residential. Since that time, Daniel has been promoted to Senior Youth Worker and is a strong role model for the residents who now seek him out for guidance and direction.

In 2004, Daniel married his long-time girlfriend. They reside in Atlantic County with their seven-year old son. At the ripe old age of twenty-eight, Daniel personifies what can happen when a young person receives the love and guidance he or she requires.

## Life Skills and Leadership Academy

As a teenager, Yasin began having problems with the law. He joined his older brothers in the streets of Elizabeth and began selling drugs at a young age. Yasin witnessed the death of his older brother, who was shot. The death of Yasin's brother affected him a great deal, causing him to develop an even greater "I don't care" attitude toward life. Soon, Yasin's behavior brought him into contact with the juvenile justice system. He was placed on juvenile probation and assigned to the JJC's Albert Elias Residential Community Home. Yasin quickly adapted to the program and obtained a leadership position. He completed the program, returned home and soon fell victim to the streets once again. By the age of 17, Yasin had been committed to a three-year term of incarceration with the JJC.

Yasin was selected for the JJC's Life Skills and Leadership Academy. He entered the program with a positive attitude and, once again, quickly obtained a leadership position. Due to his past program experience, Yasin excelled in many areas, but still had problems dealing with his anger. He felt as though he was untouchable and could do no wrong. This led to conflicts with his peers, and ultimately, a physical altercation resulted in his removal from the Life Skills and Leadership Academy.

Yasin, however, did not give up. Following repeated requests to return to the Academy, Yasin was granted one last chance. He knew the pressure would be turned up by the staff, yet Yasin was eager to rise to the challenge because completing the program was part of his plan. His persistence paid off and, according to Yasin, "the third time was the charm." Yasin graduated from the Life Skills and Leadership Academy with the 54th Team. He represented his team by serving as valedictorian at the ceremony. In addition to the numerous awards that Yasin received upon graduation, he also obtained his high school diploma. Yasin's plan was truly in motion.

Soon after graduation, Yasin began employment with the AmeriCorps Program. A federally funded program operated jointly by the JJC and the NJ Commission on National Community Service, AmeriCorp accepts JJC residents who have successfully completed a residential program and will work as a mentor for other JJC residents. He also enrolled in Union County Community College to study business management. Yasin obtained a driver's license and purchased his own car. He recently obtained additional employment with Woodbridge Logistics. As if his schedule were not already busy enough, Yasin enrolled in courses at Lincoln Technical Institute as well. He used the funds earned from his service in AmeriCorps to help pay his tuition. Yasin began studying auto mechanics in August 2004, which was also the first anniversary of his graduation from the Life Skills and Leadership Academy.

Yasin matured into a positive young man with significant goals and plans for his life. Yasin looks back on his life and marvels at the obstacles he has overcome and the giant steps he has taken to realize his dreams. No doubt, there are bigger and better things to come.

Yasin is a happy child. She and her mother lived alone and enjoyed a close and nurturing relationship. Alexis was 14 when her mom died after a long illness and Alexis was placed with DYFS, where she lived with a succession of relatives and foster families. Soon, she began missing school and ignoring home curfews. Her older brother was charged with felony murder and sentenced to 20 years in a maximum security facility. Alexis was alone.

## Monmouth Day

Alexis was 16 when she entered the Monmouth Day Program charged with Possession of CDS. She resented being there and became disruptive in school. She was quiet and angry in group sessions, answering questions in monosyllables and ready to be aggressive at any time. She had no desire to share with the group. She thought, "I don't know them; they're nothing to me. I don't trust anybody. Why should I tell them about my problems?"

Alexis was recommended for individual and grief counseling. She was made foreman of the group and took her responsibility seriously. She began to share her problems with the group and to take an interest in their issues. Over time she developed an interest in helping others and applied to the AmeriCorps Program. She was accepted and worked part-time at Monmouth Day Program until adult vocational school started that September.

Since then, Alexis has pursued her education and worked at WaWa. She earned her GED, obtained her driver's license and purchased a car. She has her own apartment and applied to the state for a correction officer position. She also keeps in close touch with her brother.

Alexis' philosophy concerning life and her future is simple and direct. "They'll listen to me because I won't lie to them," she says. "I don't play around with people's feelings. I don't want them to go through the stuff I went through."



# SUCCESSSTORIES



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## Introduction

A major goal of the juvenile justice system is the rehabilitation of young people who have committed delinquent acts. On a daily basis, system personnel and community service providers work to abate the seemingly endless stream of children in trouble. The general public rarely hears about the positive aspects of juvenile rehabilitation, but rather focuses on delinquent acts and punishment. In this context, it is often difficult to see the positive rehabilitative effects that so many people work so hard to achieve. The Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) and its partners, the 21 County Youth Services Commissions and the Governor's Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Committee, are proud to present this publication, devoted to sharing the **SuccessStories** of youth and families served through community-based programs and services, and through JJC programs.

Based on the belief that local communities have a unique understanding of their own youth populations, the JJC has developed several funding initiatives and state-level services that encourage the development and enhancement of community-based services. These include delinquency prevention programs and alternative sentencing options for at-risk, court-involved and adjudicated youth. Funding areas include the State/Community Partnership Grant Program, the State Incentive Program, federal block grant funding through the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Program and the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant Program.

The JJC would like to thank the Governor, the NJ Legislature, the Attorney General, the Department of Law and Public Safety, the members of the Governor's JJDP Committee, County Youth Services Commissions, and community providers for their support of these programs and services. This support enables us to work together to ensure that young people in trouble have a chance to turn their lives around, before they "graduate" to an adult criminal career. **SuccessStories** shows that these programs and services positively affect many young lives, and remind us that court-involved youth can be and are being rehabilitated every day.

## Letter from a Youth



To Whom It May Concern:

Hi, my name is Deebow (taken from the movie Friday starring Chris Tucker and Ice Cube). They call me Deebow because I was the bully of the Township of Neptune. I really didn't have to commit any crimes because I had young silly boys and girls committing crimes for me. What most people consider unusual and criminal behavior, I considered the norm. I lived with my mother, who loved me but couldn't control me (I even believe she was afraid of me).

I smoked marijuana, drank Hypnotic and experimented with ecstasy. I used to carry a .22 automatic daily for protection and robbed cab drivers and other drug dealers for money. The first time I was arrested, it was for simple assault on two boys. This crime was immediately dismissed on account it was my first offense and I played harmless and innocent to the judge. My second charge was for stealing a car and weapons possession. For that, the court ordered me to the Youth and Family Detention Diversion program run by Mr. Tony Irby. I was 16 years old.

Mr. Irby was the first person that I ever met who saw potential in me and wouldn't accept anything less. The program is completely based on respect and being honest with yourself and others. The program subjects all participants to the victim impact panel. This simply forces an individual to understand the impact that his or her crime has had on not just the victim but the victim's family. The program also forced me to look in the mirror and question whether I wanted to be loved or feared.

Today, I am an eighteen year old, drug free, Toys-R-Us stock clerk. I no longer desire people to be afraid of me. I just hope that people will like me. My self esteem has improved, and I will be receiving my GED sometime this month. I am a role model to my little brother and his friends, and I volunteer occasionally at the program to assist other tough guys. It feels really good to know that my mother now loves me and does not fear me. I thank the program for all its assistance. I now believe that I will live past twenty one.

Thanks  
Miracle No. 101

D... (no longer Deebow)



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## YOUTHSTORIES

### Gloucester County

Joe, 16, was referred to the Community Mental Health Center (now known as New Point Behavioral Center) in the Family Court Counseling Program. He was on probation for criminal mischief and possession of a weapon, after stabbing someone in a fight. He has a background of emotional and physical abuse at the hands of his father. His mother is chronically ill.

Joe made a sincere effort to attend his counseling sessions—in fact, he had asked his probation officer where to get counseling in the first place. His grades

improved, and he graduated from high school, where he was a featured speaker at graduation.

At 19, Joe has bought his own home and located a full-time job. To support his daughter, he took on an extra job at Kids-R-Us. He chose to work there so she would be able to have the benefits of the discounted merchandise he gets through his employment. Joe would like to go to college, but cannot yet afford to go. He rents out a room in his home so that he can pay double payments on his mortgage so it can be paid off sooner.

Joe still stops in to see his counselor and is self-referred to an anger manage-

ment class. He is hoping to be able to use his experiences to give back to others.

### Salem County

Korry was a senior at Salem High School who had met all of the graduation requirements, but unfortunately got into trouble with the law. He was sentenced to two years probation for a firearms offense. He enrolled in two of Salem County's Youth Services Commission programs, Cognitive Skills Building and Project IMPROVE (Initiating Motivation Productivity Responsibility Obtain Valued Education/Employment), offered by SODAT (Services to Overcome Drugs & Alcohol Abuse Among Teenagers). His instructors, as well as his probation officer, confirm that there has been a tremendous improvement in his attitude and punctuality. When he graduated from the program, his parents expressed that these programs have clearly enhanced Korry's growth and development.

Korry has successfully recorded a CD and is currently working to develop his own clothing line. His judge, probation officer and SODAT's Director of Prevention all agree that these programs have made a significant difference towards improving this young man's life.

### Monmouth County

Jesse was placed on probation for aggravated sexual assault. He broke into his former girlfriend's house and assaulted her. He was ordered into the Probation Offender Program (POP) in Monmouth County. At that time he was not in school or working. When speaking with him, it was easy to see the anger built up inside of him. He began sex offender-specific treatment on a weekly basis. He also participated in anger management through the POP program. Over time, with one-on-one counseling, anger management and substance abuse education, Jessie was able to obtain employment and attend Adult Night School. The POP program also engaged his parents in family counseling, proving to be helpful in bridging the communication gap between Jesse and his parents.

By the end of his term, he was doing well at his job and earning promotions. He did so well at school that he served as a student representative and was asked to give a speech during graduation.

### Cumberland County

In Cumberland County, a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) referral was received requesting services for Ahmed, a 14-year old boy who was set to be sent away to the JJC unless the State



Incentive Program's Individual Offender Funding (IOF) intervention could be sought. Ahmed was raised by his grandmom, who was overburdened with the care of Ahmed and his siblings. Ahmed's dad was in prison and his mother slowly die of AIDS.

Ahmed had committed many burglaries – tons! Many professionals exclaimed he had a long "rap sheet." Strangely enough this young man had NEVER been referred for social service intervention of any sort, but was standing on the doorstep to juvenile incarceration. His referral was immediately acted upon by the MDT. The local therapeutic shelter agreed to take his case on an outpatient counseling basis. Ahmed received a multitude of services including:

individual and family counseling, attention to grief issues, respite in the shelter if needed, and mentoring - all provided by the same agency. The MDT felt that Ahmed should receive services from one agency that might be able to wrap him in intensive therapy and assistance.

Ahmed eventually went on to receive step-down therapy, before discharge from Community Treatment Solutions shelter and has not reappeared in the juvenile system since!

### Cumberland County II

Four juveniles were placed for case management services with Cumberland County's Youth Advocate Program. These youth had been party to the torture and death of a neighborhood cat. The boys, ranging in age from 10 to 12, were taught the value of living creatures through the work of an advocate involved with show dogs. These boys worked with the advocate and grew to enjoy the interaction with the dog so much that they did not want to end their service with the advocate.

These first-time offending juveniles have not been involved with the system since this experience.

### Camden County

RJ is a 16-year-old Hispanic male raised in Camden. His mother raised him until the age of two and then lost custody due to her crack addiction. An uncle took RJ into his home and raised him as his own. There was significant family conflict as RJ never felt like he was treated the same as his aunt and uncle's biological children. RJ's mother had limited contact with him, and when visits did occur, the end result was usually violence on her part.

RJ and his uncle were very receptive to the help of the Juvenile Drug Court program, especially family sessions. RJ attended night school and earned his GED during the aftercare portion of the program. He obtained employment at a fast food chain, and then as an apprentice for a construction company. At a Juvenile Drug Court graduation, nearly a year after RJ's own graduation, he returned and spoke in front of over 100 people about his experience and his positive, drug-free lifestyle.

### Ocean County

Jackie is a 17-year-old female with extensive family problems and a lengthy record of contact with the juvenile justice system, as well as with DYFS. While family problems seemed to be at the root of Jackie's problem, she was charged with possession of CDS, various simple assaults and shoplifting. Jackie's resistance to treatment and her inability to stay out of trouble while on probation had her headed to the JJC for a stay at Valentine Residential Community Home.

Thanks to the State Incentive Program's Individual Offender Funds (IOF), an extensive combination of services was provided to Jackie. Jackie was well known to the local Youth Services Commission providers from previous attempts at in-home and family counseling. Counselors thought there was a lot of good in Jackie, but knew she had to get away from her family. A plan was put together to place Jackie in an in-

dependent living program and provide her with wrap around services. IOF provided a Therapeutic Mentor for Jackie and a fitness club membership. This allowed Jackie and her mentor structured time together and helped boost Jackie's self-esteem. In addition to services funded through the IOF dollars, a girls' group and individual counseling (PRIDE & DIRECTIONS) were provided by the Ocean County Multi-Disciplinary Team.

Even though things did not go smoothly at first, Jackie was placed in an apartment of her own, and she got a job. Jackie had difficulty with her parents, but with the help and support of a mentor and counselors, Jackie reconciled with her parents. Her parents recognized her success, as Jackie was making it on her own.

With the dedication of her mentor – who listened to her, cried and laughed with her, and did everything to point her in the right direction – and with her counselor, who acted as a case manager and who was important in intervening in crisis situations, Jackie was able to make it on her own. In the end, Jackie moved to Utah with her family.

Jackie's story is an example of how local systems work together to support kids and families in trouble. The skills Jackie learned through this experience provided the foundation for building a strong family relationship and a crime-free life.

### Mercer County

Lamar entered the Mercer County State Incentive Program (SIP) with an armed robbery charge. When he first came to SIP, he was failing most classes and was suspended from school on a regular basis. He offered limited participation in the program's activities at first. He gradually made tremendous progress. He had enrolled in the Isles Youth Build Program which teaches young people construction skills. He had excellent attendance, no reported behavioral problems, and worked diligently to address his academic needs. He also secured a part-time job and was recommended for a selective Youth Build summer work program in Princeton.

In addition, Lamar completed his court-ordered requirements, including a rigorous behavioral modification curriculum with the following components: communication skills, therapy, computer classes, money management, anger management, and life skills training. Lamar also won the SIP Money Smart Stock Market Competition facilitated by Johnson Enterprise.

Lamar's greatest accomplishment is that he grew from an timid young man

sitting in the corner into a leader within the SIP program. Today, he serves as a positive role model to others.

Lamar's dream is to work in the music industry. Along with some associates, he has produced a few songs and is working with a record producer on a demo CD.

Lamar has acknowledged his mistakes and persevered. He has learned to be his own advocate by utilizing services and resources to his advantage. Lamar exemplifies the vision of the SIP program, that although you have made mistakes in the past, and even if you fall again, you can always turn your life around for the better.

Lamar received the "Celebrate the Children Award" from Positive Atmosphere Reaches Kids (PARK) Program. This award is for children in the community who have overcome adversity and challenges in their lives.

## Nationally Recognized and Accredited Programs

### Camden County

The Camden County Fire Watch Program is recognized as a national and international model program. The program provides early identification of at-risk children and then responds with appropriate intervention services to address the behavior. The program has a 90% success rate in preventing repeat fire-setting behavior in children who complete the program.

Over the past several years the program has assisted many counties in fire-setting prevention and intervention program development. In 1996, program staff were invited to Great Britain to assist in the establishment of a Juvenile Firesetter Program. In August of 2004, the Camden County Fire Watch Program hosted an annual International Conference on Juvenile Firesetting in Cherry Hill.

### Monmouth County

The Monmouth County Youth Detention Center received accreditation from the American Correctional Association (ACA), the only national body involved in the development of standards for correctional facilities. The accreditation process is voluntary and can be applied to all types of correctional agencies. Accreditation offers the opportunity to evaluate operations against national standards, to remedy deficiencies, and to upgrade the quality of programs and services. The benefits

of accreditation include: improved management; a defense against lawsuits through documentation; demonstration of a "good faith" effort to improve conditions of confinement; increased accountability and enhanced public credibility for administrative and line staff; a safer and more humane environment for personnel and juvenile residents; and the establishment of measurable criteria for upgrading programs, staffing and the physical plant on a continuous basis. The accreditation represents the satisfactory completion of a rigorous self evaluation, followed by an outside review by a team of independent auditors.

### Bergen County

Since 1987, the Bergen County Juvenile Fire Prevention Program (BCJFPP) has served over 1,000 youth. This program was initiated by the county's local fire departments, as well as professionals in the mental health field who witnessed an increase in fires set by juveniles. They recognized that action was imperative in order to educate and treat those evaluated to be at high risk for future fire setting behavior.

By 2003, a total of ninety-nine juveniles had been referred to the BCJFPP and eighty-six fire-setting evaluations had been conducted. Of the 99 referents, 82% reported an increased knowledge in fire safety as evident by their test scores.

Outcome surveys are conducted at three month, six month, and one-year intervals. Ninety-eight percent of surveys returned by parents report that their children had not demonstrated any further fire-setting curiosity or behaviors after completing the BCJFPP.

The Bergen County program is one of four programs offered in New Jersey that evaluates and provides services for juvenile fire setters. The program has been recognized by the NJ Division of Fire Safety as "exemplary" in its provision of firesetting education and intervention services.

## Juvenile Justice Commission

### Female Secure Care and Intake Facility

Laura was sentenced to a three-year sentence for robbery by force. She was committed to the JJC and assigned to the Juvenile Female Secure Care and Intake Facility. Almost immediately, Laura took fate into her own hands and determined to

## The Good Samaritan

*This story demonstrates how a random act of kindness can influence the future of a young person involved with the juvenile justice system.*

*A therapist was working with a mom and her four children - one who was involved with the juvenile justice system - to try to obtain a security deposit for an apartment before the holidays. The therapist contacted a list of agencies that provided this kind of assistance. As the therapist dialed the first phone number, unknown to him, he misdialed. Not realizing it was a wrong number, the therapist left a message explaining the purpose of the call and that there was a mother with four children in need of assistance. The therapist contacted several other agencies but they were unable to help.*

*The therapist received a call from the gentleman who received the message on his voice mail. The therapist realized that he had left the message on his voice mail by mistake and that he was not the agency the therapist attempted to contact, but in fact was a local self-employed person who specialized in flooring. The therapist apologized to the caller, but was interrupted by the caller inquiring about the client's situation. The therapist described the services his agency provides, including advocacy for clients. Without revealing the client's name or town where she resided, the therapist explained his client's dilemma. The caller asked how much money was needed. He replied, "Is that all? I can give you that amount." The caller asked for the agency's location, and said he would be there within a half hour. The caller arrived as promised and gave the agency a check for the security deposit. The mother was contacted and told what happened. She began to cry right there on the phone. She asked to speak to The Good Samaritan and thanked him personally. The Good Samaritan shared that he has a son who was in a traffic accident and has severe brain damage. He continued further, stating that as much as he wants to, he cannot help his son, but here is a situation in which he can make a difference.*

*The Good Samaritan also provided the family with food for Thanksgiving and presents for the mother's four children at Christmastime. This act of benevolence and kindness would not have happened, if it were not for the services made possible through the therapist and the program. By finding a home, the child involved with the juvenile justice system greatly improved both academically and behaviorally. She also demonstrated a capacity to exercise better self-control when others around her became out of control, and her involvement in incidents of aggression and defiance in the school setting decreased dramatically.*