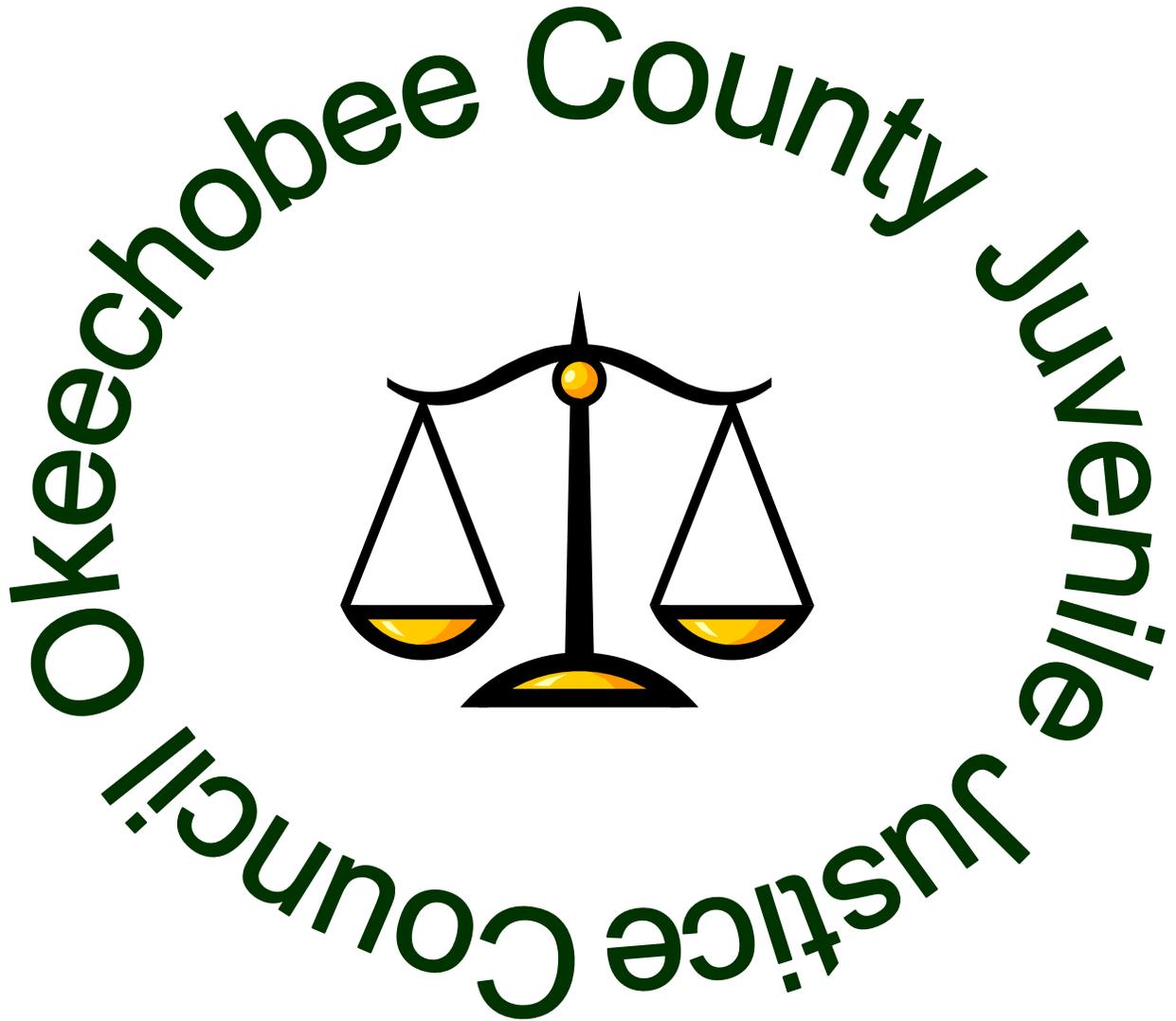


**Okeechobee County  
Juvenile Justice Council**



**Juvenile Justice Plan  
2010 – 2015**

## **Introduction**

According to Florida Statute (Chapter 985.664) The purpose of each juvenile justice circuit board and each juvenile justice county council is to provide advice and direction to the department in the development and implementation of juvenile justice programs and to work collaboratively with the department in seeking program improvements and policy changes to address the emerging and changing needs of Florida's youth who are at risk of delinquency. Each juvenile justice county council shall develop a juvenile justice prevention and early intervention plan for the county and shall collaborate with the circuit board and other county councils assigned to that circuit in the development of a comprehensive plan for the circuit. Juvenile justice circuit boards and county councils shall also participate in facilitating interagency cooperation and information sharing.

## **Mission Statement**

The purpose of the Okeechobee County Juvenile Justice Council is to encourage interagency cooperation and collaboration in addressing juvenile crime through partnerships with the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Children and Families, law enforcement, schools, elected officials, the judiciary, businesses, and other interested parties. The Okeechobee County Juvenile Justice Council provides a forum for assessing the local juvenile justice system, for developing a county juvenile justice plan, and for effectively utilizing community resources to prevent juvenile delinquency, truancy, suspension or expulsion from school, and gang activity.

## **Trends and Conditions**

### **A. Delinquency Trends:**

A total of 249 Okeechobee County youth were charged with delinquency offenses during FY 2007-08. Statewide, 89,776 were charged; Okeechobee County youth made up 0.3% of the total.

During FY 2007-08 an estimated 4,624 youth ages 10-17 lived in Okeechobee County. Since FY 2003-04 the number of Okeechobee County youth charged with violent felony offenses (murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, felony sex offenses, robbery, aggravated assault, shooting or throwing a deadly missile, and resisting arrest with violence) has increased from 6.8 to 7.4 per 1,000 during FY 2007-08.

Between FY 2003-04 and FY 2007-08 in Okeechobee County, the number of youth charged with violent offenses increased from 29 to 34, a 17.2% change.

### **B. Other Trends:**

Okeechobee County is a rural county that has experienced some significant growth in population recently, which has in turn stressed existing services. Population figures for the county show growth from 29,627 in 1990 to 35,910 according to the 2000 U.S. Census. 2008 U.S. Census estimates Okeechobee County's population at 40,359.

According to the Okeechobee County website, the county's four largest employers are Raulerson Hospital, Walpole, Inc., Okeechobee County School District and Okeechobee County.

In Okeechobee County 7.0% of youth (or 102 students) dropped out of school during the 2007/08 school year (DOE), 37 youth were expelled in 2008/09. The percentage of children under age 18, living in poverty as reported in the Florida KIDS COUNT, Florida's Children at a Glance, 2009 was 24.0%.

While the number of Okeechobee County youth charged with violent felonies increased 17.2% over the last 5 years, the number of violent offense referrals has increased 7.9%.

In FY 2007-08 13.7% of the youth charged with delinquency offenses in Okeechobee County were charged with violent felony offenses. Statewide, 14.6% of all youth charged were accused of violent offenses during FY 2007-08.

In Okeechobee County there was an overall decrease of 5.7% in the number of delinquency referrals received. The number of white males charged with delinquency offenses decreased 17.2% from FY 2003-04 to FY 2007-08. During the same period the number of black males charged with delinquency offenses increased 31.6% while the number of white females decreased 31.7% and the number of black females decreased 7.7%. The number of Hispanic males referred decreased 25.0% and the number of Hispanic females increased 21.4%.

The number of teen pregnancies has decreased in Okeechobee County from 2007-2008. In 2007 the teen pregnancy rate for teen's ages 14-18 was 57% and in 2008 the rate was lowered to 44.1% (per 1000 population).

Okeechobee County went from being Florida's 4<sup>th</sup> highest County in teen pregnancy in 2007 to the 8<sup>th</sup> in the State in 2008.

During this same time frame several programs and organizations focused on this teen issue such as Healthy Start, Communities in Schools, the On Track Program, Teen Pregnancy Prevention Task Force, Okeechobee County Health Department, and Planned Parenthood. The On Track Too program was also implemented during this time and was Okeechobee County's only abstinence program. However funding for this program was eliminated in 2009 and the services are longer available.

From 2006 -2008 births in Okeechobee County to unwed mothers and to mothers with less than a high school education has steadily increased.

## **Goals**

The Okeechobee County Juvenile Justice Council is targeting two major goals in its efforts to reduce juvenile crime. The goals are:

### **Goal #1:**

To develop prevention and intervention programs and to promote the collaboration and partnerships necessary to address the needs of youth considered at-risk for delinquency in Okeechobee County.

### **Objectives:**

1. Promote and recruit membership on the Okeechobee Council to increase the number of people involved and to insure diverse representation including but not limited to representatives from county, city, and state government; business and community organizations and church leaders.
2. Develop and seek out implementation funding for delinquency prevention programs to address gender specific services, zero tolerance, Disproportionate Minority Contact and implement restorative justice focused programming and other delinquency prevention programs identified as a need in Okeechobee County.
3. Continue Okeechobee County Juvenile Justice council's active participation on the Shared Services Network Community Collaborative Council.
4. To increase public awareness and participation in the Juvenile Justice Council's efforts through the use of public meetings, print and electronic media, and networking.
5. Organize educational presentations at Council meetings to keep members informed about juvenile issues and programs.
6. Support activities for Juvenile Justice Week each spring.

### **Goal #2:**

Support the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice's efforts to successfully rehabilitate delinquent youth.

### **Objectives:**

1. Provide public input into various Department documents including the Agency Strategic Plan and the Legislative Budget Request.
2. Promote legislation in support of the Department and Council's goals.
3. Participate in the Partnership Grant review process to insure effective, high priority programs are funded.

4. Support the Department's various statewide initiatives (i.e. Faith Community Initiative, Business Partners for Prevention Initiative. Girls Initiative, Mentoring).

Revised 04/16/2010 by the Okeechobee County Juvenile Justice Council Strategic Planning Committee.