

Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana, Inc.

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Goodwill teams with Juvenile Court to provide alternative to detention

Having been expelled from two different high schools and on probation for criminal recklessness and disorderly conduct, JeJuan Hart's future looked bleak.

But thanks to a new service providing structured educational, life skills and job-training services to juvenile offenders as an alternative to detention, JeJuan has been given a chance to make some improvements in his life.

The Day Reporting Program, located at the Marion County Juvenile Annex, is a collaboration between Goodwill Youth Services, Marion County Superior Juvenile Court and Marion County Probation Juvenile Division.

Instead of being incarcerated, young people ages 14 to 18 who have committed delinquent acts and are suspended, expelled or have dropped out of school are court-ordered six days a week to attend the program as a condition of probation. Since its inception in November 2007, 141 youth have participated.

The Day Reporting Program was recently awarded a \$1 million contract over a two-and-a-half year period with the Department of Child Services. The program's goal is to serve 200 youth in 2009.

The program has made a difference to 18-year-old JeJuan.

When JeJuan started the program, he felt he did not need a diploma or GED. With the guidance of the program's advisors, he has made significant progress by raising his math from a fourth-grade to a 12th-grade level and his reading from an eighth-grade to a 12th-grade level. He also has passed four of the five sections of the GED and is currently studying to retake the math portion.

Additionally, JeJuan is one of seven students to find a job as a result of participating in Day Reporting's employment services. He has been employed for 90 days as a cashier at McDonald's.

"Juveniles just need help and attention to show them you care," JeJuan said. "One thing that I really like is that they never gave up on me."

Kevin Riley, Juvenile Probation's assistant deputy chief, has been amazed by the attendance rate of the participants each month, which currently stands at 77 percent.

"These kids are high-risk and have a history of being defiant, yet they are showing up," Riley said.

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“They are under a court order to attend, but the fact that Goodwill is here every day shows the kids that someone is there who cares for them and is a part of their lives.”

Goodwill’s staff works one-on-one with young people who will be returning to school to help them keep up with their classwork. Other youth work to prepare for the GED. Goodwill also provides instruction on social and life skills, focusing on anger management, team building, communications and community service, as well as job-readiness preparation and other employment services.

“Our goal is to make the classroom a friendly, inviting atmosphere where the young person can continue their education,” said program coordinator Kimberlie Green.

“We want to lower the recidivism rate, which is why we operate six days a week. If we can provide positive structured activities and monitoring, our hope is that these youth will not get into trouble again.”

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