

SENECA COUNTY JUVENILE AND PROBATE COURT



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

JUDGE JAY A. MEYER

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It is an honor and privilege to serve the citizens of Seneca County.

FROM JUDGE MEYER:



The Seneca County Juvenile and Probate Court is guided by the mission and promise to “serve the citizens of the community with dedication, integrity and professionalism. We will strive to assure the safety, security and best interests of those we serve to the best of our abilities.”

I am incredibly proud of the positive impact that the Juvenile and Probate Court continues to have on our community every day as we remain dedicated to our Mission described above. It has been a true honor and privilege to serve the citizens of Seneca County as Judge of the Juvenile and Probate Court since February 9, 2009. Despite significant challenges such as the COVID-19 Pandemic, my Court Team remains steadfast in our passion and desire to serve our community every day. With the continued support of our wonderful community partners, the Juvenile and Probate Court is stronger than ever and proud to continue our tradition of providing the quality and reliable services that our community expects and deserves.

As the need for our services increase in our community, so to do the costs associated with providing quality services to meet those needs. The Seneca County Juvenile and Probate Court has always prioritized the responsible use of the financial resources we receive to support our Court services, and we will continue to do so moving forward. My Court Team and I pledge to remain good stewards of our support funding – we will work diligently to keep our costs down without sacrificing the excellent services we provide to our citizens.

I invite you to review this report and our website at www.senecajpcourt.com for more information. If you have additional questions, please feel free to reach out via the contact information found on our website.

Respectfully,

Judge Jay A. Meyer

THE BENCH

The Honorable *Judge Jay A. Meyer* was first elected by Seneca County Voters to serve as their Juvenile and Probate Judge in 2008. He was re-elected in 2014 and 2020 for his second and third terms. Judge Meyer is a graduate of Tiffin Columbian High School. He received both his BA and Juris Doctor degrees from Ohio Northern University. Judge Meyer came to the Bench following his service with the Seneca County Prosecutor's Office, Child Support Enforcement Agency, and the Department of Job and Family Services, along with over ten years of experience in private practice in Seneca County. Judge Meyer supports Seneca County youth, families, and the Court's Mission.

Magistrate

Donald S. Bennett was appointed as Magistrate by Judge Meyer in June of 2009. Magistrate Bennett received his Juris Doctor degree from the University of Toledo College of Law.

Prior to his appointment, Magistrate Bennett was in private practice for 20 years, concentrating in the areas of juvenile, domestic, and criminal trial practice.

Magistrate

Tiffany E. Cavanaugh was appointed as Magistrate by Judge Meyer in January of 2016. Magistrate Cavanaugh received her BA and Juris Doctor degrees from Ohio Northern University.

Mediator

Ms. Cavanaugh also serves as the Court's Mediator, a position she has held since May of 2013. Ms. Cavanaugh is a qualified Mediator with experience in mediating complex Juvenile and Probate matters.

Stacy Wilson – Court Administrator
Cathy Bean – Administrative Clerk

JUVENILE COURT	PROBATE COURT
Gina Reuter – Chief Deputy Clerk	Dana Eborg – Chief Deputy Clerk/ Investigator
<input type="checkbox"/> Chloe Seislove – Deputy Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/> Amy Littlejohn – Deputy Clerk
<input type="checkbox"/> Melissa Bowers– Deputy Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/> Nicole Johnston – Deputy Clerk/Investigator
<input type="checkbox"/> Dana Englund – Deputy Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/> Angela Seifert – Deputy Clerk/Investigator
<input type="checkbox"/> Alison Schubert– Deputy Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/> Jay Rishty – Public Guardian
<input type="checkbox"/> Jillian Banks – Records Clerk – (Part-time)	

2023 Court Expenses

General Fund; Grant Funds; Court Funds – Total \$2,917,389



Probate Court

Pursuant to the first Ohio Constitution of 1802, the Court of Common Pleas maintained exclusive jurisdiction over all probate matters. The updated Ohio Constitution of 1851 shifted this power, however, by creating a separate Probate Court in each of Ohio's 88 counties.

Seneca County's Probate Court was established in 1851. William Lang served as the first Probate Judge from 1851 – 1855. He wrote *History of Seneca County: From the Close of the Revolutionary War to July 1880*. Judge Meyer is Seneca County's 21st Probate Judge.

Probate Court handles wills, administration of estates and trusts, adoptions, marriage licenses, name changes, civil commitments, conservatorships, and appointments of guardians for minors and incompetent adults.

[See Ohio Revised Code (R.C.) Section 2101.24]

Judge Meyer serves as Judge for both the Seneca County Probate and Juvenile Courts.



Probate Court Case Breakdown 2023

	OPEN	CLOSED
Marriage Licenses Issued	272	
Estates	304	311
Minor Guardianships	5	1
Incompetent Guardianships	22	27
Trusts	3	1
Civil	11	15
Adoption	15	17
Mental Illness	19	21
Minor Settlement	5	4
Name Change	28	28
Conservatorship	0	0
Wrongful Death	1	1
Delayed Birth Registration	3	4
TOTAL	688	430

Probate Court Year in Review

Projects implemented/completed in 2023:

- ❑ Probate Court Staff continue to prepare Court records for microfilming and scanning by the Bowling Green State University Center for Archival Collections. This is a continuing effort to preserve and retain Court records.
- ❑ Probate Court Staff also prepared Naturalization Records to be scanned and microfilmed by the Bowling Green State University Center for Archival Collections.
- ❑ Strategic Solutions scanned 765 old Docket Books. Those scanned images were then added to the Court Case Management System.

Goals for 2024:

- ❑ Continue the preservation of Probate records through imaging and/or microfilm.
- ❑ Update the Court network to add Naturalization Records and attach the scanned images from the Bowling Green State University Center for Archival Collections.
- ❑ Update the Probate Court Case Management System.



Seneca County Guardianship Program

The **Seneca County Guardianship Program** provides 24/7 guardianship and conservatorship assistance to indigent Seneca County residents aged 55 and older who have been declared legally incompetent or struggle with a medical or mental disability.

In 2023, the Public Guardian provided guardianship and conservatorship services to 32 individuals in Seneca County. The Public Guardian's efforts help ensure that our community's most vulnerable seniors are safe. The Public Guardian monitors client health and safety, arranges transports, accompanies clients to appointments, applies for benefits on a client's behalf, pays bills, makes educated medical and financial decisions, and connects clients to community resources. The Public Guardian also serves as a trusted friend and confidant to his clients. The Public Guardian's help is invaluable to clients who often have little to no other support.

The Public Guardian is extremely proud of the Program's strong history of collaboration with its community partners and service providers. This life maintaining and life sustaining Program would not be possible without the very generous support and grant funding provided by the Allen Eiry Fund and the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Seneca, Ottawa, Sandusky and Wyandot counties.

Moving forward into 2024, the Public Guardian intends to increase the number of clients served and promote more family involvement in the Program. The Public Guardian will continue to encourage families to maintain a strong relationship with the client by helping to facilitate visits and coordinating monthly telephone and video conferences when in-person visitation is not possible. No matter what, the Public Guardian will continue to utilize Program resources most effectively and efficiently so that he can be there for Program participants when and where they need him.

Juvenile Court

- The Seneca County Juvenile Court handles the filing and processing of the following types of matters:

- Juvenile Delinquency and Unruly
- Juvenile Traffic
- Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency
- Paternity
- Custody and Child Support
- Some Adult Criminal Cases

- The Juvenile Court System was created in 1902. The Honorable Hal W. Michaels served as Probate Judge during this time. When the Juvenile Court System was created, the Probate Judge assumed responsibility for Juvenile Court as well. At age 29, Judge Michaels was the youngest Judge elected as Seneca County Probate Judge and served from 1903-1909. Judge Meyer is Seneca County's 11th Juvenile Judge.



Juvenile Court Cases 2023

	FILED	CONCLUDED
Delinquent	286	308
Traffic	132	141
Abuse/Neglect/Dependency	50	70
Unruly	43	53
Adult	55	59
Permanent Custody	12	10
Change of Custody	201	187
Support Modification	345	313
Parentage	14	15
UIFSA (Uniform Interstate Family Support Act)	11	10
Other	7	7
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>1,156</i>	<i>1,173</i>

Juvenile Court Year in Review

2023 Highlights:

- ✓ Completed IV-D Contract work with the Seneca County Child Support Enforcement Agency (CSEA) to secure over \$218,000 in payments to the County
- ✓ Applied for and was awarded a Technology Grant from the Supreme Court of Ohio for \$105,522.00 to upgrade our Case Management System
- ✓ Completed in-depth review of our Court's Local Rules and made appropriate revisions for the upcoming year
- ✓ Made revisions to call flow to improve our Court's efficiency when handling incoming phone calls from the public
- ✓ All Clerks attended the Supreme Court of Ohio's Juvenile Court Clerks' Conference
- ✓ Continued work on the Court's plan to add displays in our common areas to include historical items and artwork from area youth
- ✓ Continued scanning old records to eliminate paper, reduce the cost of storage space, and increase ease of access

2024 Goals:

- ❑ Install new servers and related IT components to keep up with current and future technology demands
- ❑ Complete the upgrade of our Case Management System
- ❑ Implement an online payment portal to make payment of Court costs and fines more convenient for the public
- ❑ Continue to provide additional training resources for all Court Staff
- ❑ Cross-train Clerks to provide flexibility and encourage collaboration among staff



MEDIATION

▶ The Seneca County Juvenile and Probate Court offers Mediation Services to help parties attempt to resolve certain disputes on their own.

▶ Mediation is a problem-solving process in which a neutral mediator helps facilitate communication between parties so that they can work toward a mutually acceptable resolution. Mediation puts the power back in the hands of the parties by empowering them to come up with their own solutions and offering them the opportunity to resolve their issues together.

MEDIATION WORKS BECAUSE:

- ▶ Both sides have the opportunity to be heard
- ▶ The parties are in control of the agreement
- ▶ Multiple ways of solving problems are explored
- ▶ The final agreement is acceptable to the parties
- ▶ Communication is clear and specific

▶ In 2023, the Court Mediator mediated 20 civil mediations and 17 truancy mediations.

▶ Of the 20 civil mediations, our Court continued to partner with the Seneca County Department of Job and Family Services to conduct 9 mediations addressing non-financial/parenting time issues at no charge for families following their administrative child support hearings.

Tiffany Cavanaugh-Mediator



TIME TO INVEST

Time to Invest (“TTI”) is an alternative to detention developed by Judge Meyer and the Seneca County Juvenile Court and Youth Center Staff to address the criminogenic needs of our youth by efficiently and impactfully improving their educational, vocational, therapeutic, and socialization deficiencies. TTI uses intervention philosophies that align with nationally recognized evidence-based models to provide intensive services for youth likely not available to them at their home schools. TTI participants receive individualized behavioral health services, cognitive behavioral therapy concentrating on changing the criminogenic thinking of youthful offenders, vocational training, and opportunities for workforce development and independent living. Youth also participate in service-learning community service programs.

Research evidence reveals that academic support, coupled with counseling, workforce development, case management, mentoring, and family interventions prevent recidivism and help youth develop a path to success. In Seneca County, we created TTI to offer this new line of thinking in our community, and we are proud of TTI’s positive results. In 2023, 12 youth successfully completed the TTI Program and were diverted from formal Court action. Successful TTI participants often return to their home schools academically ahead following the individualized assistance they receive during TTI.

The TTI Program is designed to accommodate up to twelve youth between the ages of 12 and 18 at any given time. The Program operates primarily in a designated and separate location inside the Seneca County Youth Center Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. until 1:45 p.m. during the school year. The program includes transportation to and from the youth’s home so that families do not have to worry about transporting the youth to and from TTI.

JUVENILE COURT INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Seneca County Juvenile Court works closely with area higher education institutions to provide internship opportunities and real-world work experiences for qualified students.

In 2023, one Heidelberg University student experienced 320 hands-on hours with the Juvenile Court. Our interns accompany Probation and Diversion Officers to schools and home contacts and attend meetings with Officers and families to discuss case plans. Interns also have the opportunity to accompany Probation Officers to multiple types of hearings and Youth Center contacts. We strive to introduce our interns to as many educational experiences as possible during their tenure with the Court.



Court Services Department

Kendra Shearer - Director

Linda Cohen *	Probation Officer
Jason French	Compliance/Probation Officer
Rob Swartz	Probation Officer
Abbi Norville	Probation Officer
Ali Hoch	Probation/Diversion Officer
Jim Jarrett*	Director of Community Outreach
*Paid by General Fund	

The Court Services Department helps connect youth and families with interventions and services available in our community upon their initial contact with the Juvenile Court and continues to do so throughout their Court involvement. Court Services houses and coordinates the following:

- Probation Program
- Diversion Program
- Community Outreach

Evidence-based practices and interventions, such as Motivational Interviewing techniques, the Carey Guide curriculum, and the Ohio Youth Assessment System provide Court Officers the tools they need to appropriately measure risk, provide intervention, set goals and objectives, and measure outcomes.

The Court believes in and applies the least restrictive setting required to protect youth and the community. This principle, supported by outcome measures and a large volume of research, suggests that more restrictive settings often do more harm than good to low- and moderate-risk youth. Accordingly, Judge Meyer and our Court Services team work together with community partners to help create individualized plans and services for each youth and family to establish the appropriate balance of accountability and assistance while simultaneously creating a safer and more secure community for all.

Court Services

The Department of Court Services is largely funded by RECLAIM Ohio.



WHAT IS RECLAIM OHIO?

RECLAIM stands for

Reasoned and Equitable Community and Local Alternatives to the Incarceration of Minors.
RECLAIM is a funding initiative which encourages Juvenile Courts to explore community-based options to meet the needs of juvenile offenders and youth at risk of offending.

RECLAIM Grant funds pay for the following programs:

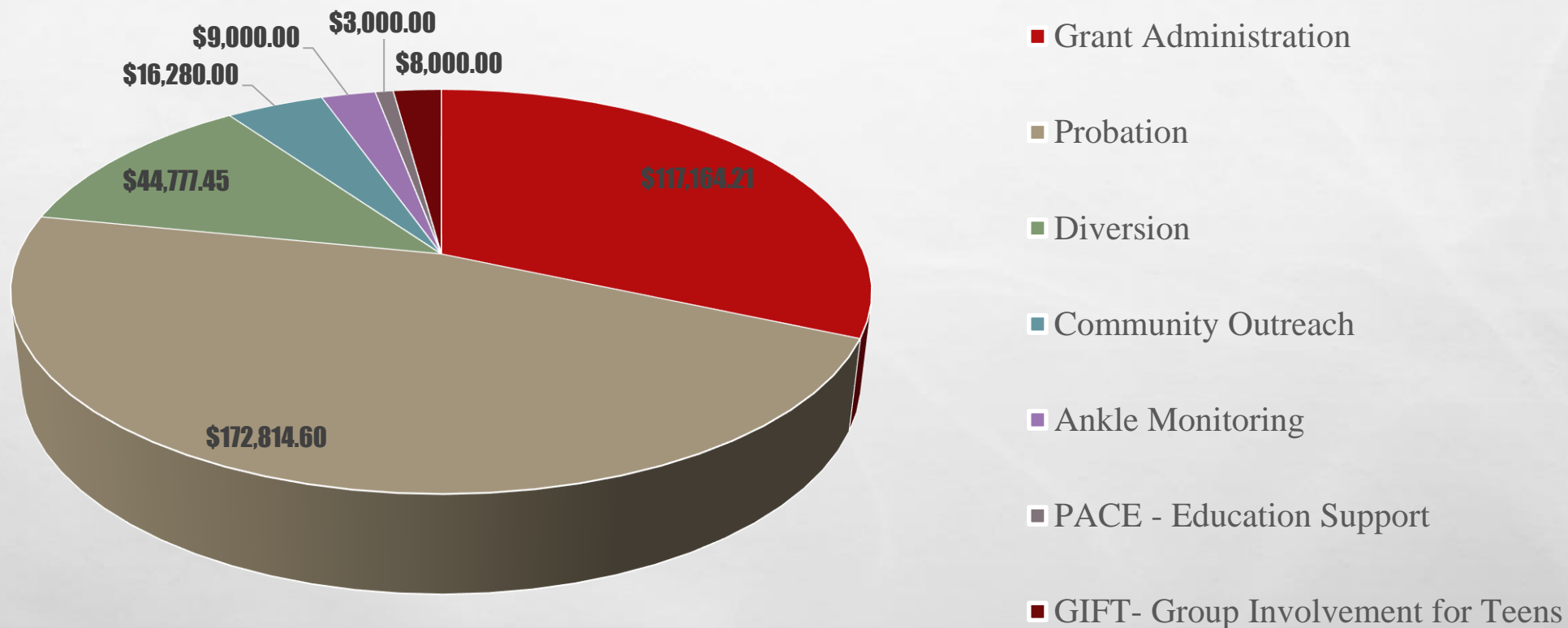
- Grant Administration
- Probation
- PACE- Educational Services
- GIFT- Group Involvement for Teens
- Community Outreach
- Ankle Monitoring
- Diversion

How We Used Our Reclaim Grant Funds In 2023

Grant Administration *7 staff received 552 hours of training in FY23	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supported Director of Court Services salary and benefits and 60% of the Administrative Clerk salary and benefits• Funded Motivational Interviewing training provided by Case Western Reserve University• Funded additional training for Court Officers
Probation *served 221 adjudicated youth in FY23	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supported 3 Probation Officer salaries and benefits<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Probation Officers provide supervision and case management services to adjudicated youth to reduce subsequent delinquent behavior• Funded Drug Screen Tests and Supplies
Diversion *served 154 youth in FY23	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supported 1 Diversion Officer salary and benefits• Funded Programing Supplies
Community Outreach * served 216 youth in FY23	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This program offers youth the opportunity to work off Court-ordered community service hours and restitution
Ankle Monitoring *served 71 youth in FY23	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Funded the purchase of ankle monitors to closely track youth who required intensive supervision as an alternative to detention
PACE * served 21 youth in FY23	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This program targets youth who are struggling in school by providing them tutoring services with Heidelberg University students
GIFT *served 10 youth in FY23	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth participated in a 10-session equine-assisted trauma group

RECLAIM Ohio Total FY 2023 Budget

\$371,036.26



Community Outreach

- Community Outreach is about giving and contributing. The Seneca County Juvenile Court offers this Program to help Court-ordered youth give back to the community through the completion of community service hours. This Program also provides youth an opportunity to pay Court-ordered restitution to victims through participation in the Work Program. The Work Program gives youth a chance to earn an hourly credit of \$10.10 (state minimum wage) to be paid to their victim(s) as restitution. Youth can earn up to a maximum of \$1,500.00 each.
- Since Judge Meyer took office in 2009, youth have completed more than 80,000 hours of community service resulting in more than \$158,000.00 paid to victims in restitution.



Diversion Program

ORC 2151.18(B)

The Seneca County Juvenile Court's Diversion Program is an alternative to formal adjudication. Diversion limits youth involvement with the Court by diverting first time, low-risk unruly/delinquent offenders away from formal adjudication. This program holds youth accountable for their actions, but also minimizes their penetration into the juvenile justice system. Research shows that increased formal contact with the Court for low-risk youthful offenders does more harm than good.

In 2023, a total of 154 youth were joined and participated in the Diversion Program. While in Diversion, 109 youth were successfully diverted from adjudication, 17 youth failed to complete the program, and 27 youth carried their efforts over into 2024. Of the 154 Diversion participants, 28 of these cases were charges of habitual truancy. Of those 28 truancy cases, 21 successfully completed Diversion, 4 were unsuccessful and adjudicated, and 3 were carried over into 2024. There was a total of 35 habitual truancy complaints received by the court. Due to additional charges or pending court involvement, 7 of the truancy charges were automatically sent formal.

In Diversion, the youth and their family enters into a voluntary agreement to address the offense. Following the youth's successful completion of the agreement terms, there is no record of the complaint. In addition, successful Diversion saves the cost of Court-appointed counsel, which is conservatively estimated at \$250.00 per case. With 109 successfully completed cases in 2023, the Court experienced an estimated cost savings of \$27,250.00. In addition, each participating youth makes a food donation of at least \$5.00. In FY 2023, we collected 154 food donations for our community – a value of \$770.00.

Juvenile Court – Court Rehabilitation Programs

4-H CARTEENS Program

A teen facilitated traffic safety program for first-time juvenile traffic offenders in partnership with OSU Extension



3rd Millennium Classrooms

Offers online courses with evidence-based strategies for behavior change intervention



Carey Guides

Tools for Probation Officers to use to support behavior change and recidivism reduction

GIFT Program

Group Involvement for Teens -
An equine-assisted therapy program which teaches youth life and coping skills



Reality Works

Interactive technology used to educate youth on topics such as fetal alcohol syndrome, prenatal drug exposure, shaken baby syndrome, and pregnancy prevention



PACE Program

Academic tutoring offered to youth in partnership with Heidelberg University

Seneca County Youth Center

- The Seneca County Youth Center opened on February 7th, 2013. This new, modern facility replaced the 60-plus-year-old building that the youth center previously occupied.
- The Youth Center is a temporary holding facility for juveniles. It is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and exists for the purpose of safely and securely housing youth who are held pending further Court action or under a Court Order. Detained youth participate in positive and useful programming while being held accountable for their daily behavior through the use of an active behavior management system.
- The Youth Center also houses nearby out-of-county youth when a youth's home county lacks sufficient capacity for detention.



Youth Center Staff

Sarah Canalos– Director

Other Positions Include:

2 Detention Coordinators

1 Program Coordinator

2 full time Activities Supervisors

2 full time Head Supervisors

4 full time Shift Leaders

14 full time Juvenile Corrections Officers

Numerous intermittent Juvenile Correction Officers (based upon need)

Program Areas

Youth in detention at the Youth Center are kept active daily from breakfast until bedtime via positive and informative programming incorporated into their daily activity schedules. Youth Center Staff encourage youth to participate productively in approximately 20 hours of programming per week. The following are programming activities currently offered at the Youth Center and scheduled by the Director, Program Coordinator, Activities Supervisors, or designees:

- **Physical education** – Youth who are not exempt due to medical reasons perform daily exercises. Recreation opportunities are also provided year-round with an indoor, half-court gymnasium and a secure outdoor recreation area.
- **Living skills** – Youth are offered a variety of group activities designed to educate youth and improve their life skills. Activities involve lessons regarding self-esteem, victim awareness, thinking errors, anger management, peer pressure, trauma, drug and alcohol education/awareness, job application guidance, resume drafting, and other necessary life skills. During this reporting period, the Youth Center also participated in a creative writing program. In the summer months, the youth learn what it takes to cultivate a garden and share their garden's bounty with the community.



Program Areas



- **Arts and crafts** – Youth Center residents are taught to use their imagination, creativity, and hand/eye coordination to design pictures, sculptures, paintings, and hanging and/or wall-mounted designs.
- **Guest speakers** – Periodically, area community volunteers and professionals are invited to discuss their areas of expertise on subjects such as alcoholism, drug abuse/addiction, suicide prevention/help, AIDS/sexually transmitted diseases, breast cancer awareness, career planning, safe driving, military recruitment, and related public health and safety issues facing youth. The COVID pandemic initially limited connections with in-person guest speakers. Now, however, the Youth Center utilizes electronic conferencing, such as Zoom, to reach guest speakers both locally and outside of Seneca County.
- **School** – Since the 1999/2000 school year, North Central Ohio Educational Service Center (NCOESC) has served as the lead school operating the Youth Center classrooms. Detained youth are required to attend all scheduled school days while in detention. Classroom instruction is based on state academic content standards. Residents review basic English, Math, Science, and Social Studies skills via a digital online program. Youth Center teachers also assist the residents with individual work assignments from their respective home schools to ensure they stay current with their studies while in detention. Youth at the Youth Center for ten days or more take the Brigance Basic Skills Reading and School PLP Math assessments to determine their level of education/comprehension. This allows Youth Center teachers to provide additional individualized assistance for the residents. Youth attend 5.5 hours of school per weekday during the school year and 2.5 hours of school per weekday in the summer. Selected youth are also allowed to work on their school assignments throughout the evenings and the weekends to assist them in getting back on track and sometimes even academically ahead.

Counseling At The Youth Center

Residents have the opportunity to participate in mental health counseling during their time at the Seneca County Youth Center.

Funding for the Youth Center Behavioral Health Program is provided in part by local Seneca County levy funds from the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Seneca, Ottawa, Sandusky, and Wyandot counties.

Behavioral health services are provided by Firelands Counseling and Recovery Services of Seneca County and Wellness Counseling Solutions, LLC, dba Wyandot Counseling Associates.

Youth who received behavioral health services	Primarily MH Service Hours	Primarily AOD Service Hours	Successful Discharge	Unsuccessful Discharge
205	303	303	181	0

2023 Youth Center Intake Statistics



Felony Offenses	19
Misdemeanor Offenses	208
Other (status, tobacco, alcohol)	0
Seneca County Intakes	167
Other County Intakes	60
Seneca County Sentencing	131
Other County Sentencing	35
Annual Immediate Releases	3
Average Daily Population	11.03
Average Monthly Intakes	18.92
Average Monthly Immediate Releases	.25
Average Length of Stay (in days)	14.45

Partnerships and Relationships

The Seneca County Juvenile and Probate Court would like to thank the many wonderful partners who work closely with us for the benefit of Seneca County residents.

- Community Action For Reducing Substance Abuse (CARSA)
- Firelands Counseling and Recovery Services
- Seneca Mentoring Youth Links (SMYL)
- Tiffin Parks and Recreation
- Seneca County Park District
- Mental Health and Recovery Services Board Of Seneca, Ottawa, Sandusky, and Wyandot Counties
- Seneca County Department of Job and Family Services
- All Area School Districts
- Area Counselors and Counseling Services
- Heidelberg University
- Seneca County Commissioners
- Tiffin University
- Tiffin-Seneca Public Library
- First Call For Help
- Ohio State Extension Service
- United Way
- Ottawa Sandusky Seneca Solid Waste District
- Tiffin Community YMCA
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)
- St. Francis Earth Literacy Center
- Camp Glen
- Camp Fire NW Ohio
- Fostoria Community YMCA
- Patchworks House
- Seneca County Family and Children First Counsel