



MISSOURI JUVENILE JUSTICE ASSOCIATION EXCELLENCE IN JUVENILE COURT PROGRAM AWARD 2017

31st JUDICIAL CIRCUIT TEENS-N-TRANSITION PROGRAM

One of MJJA's many goals is to share information on new ideas and programming designed by Missouri's juvenile and family courts, which are truly beneficial to the children they serve. When MJJA created the Excellence in Juvenile Court Program Award in 1993, it did so with two purposes in mind: first, to acknowledge the outstanding work being done in juvenile and family courts throughout the state; and, second to inspire us all to creativity and excellence. From its inception, MJJA has chosen to recognize a program only if it has risen to the level, established through a judging process, to truly merit the label "EXCELLENT". While many good programs have been offered for consideration, one program was chosen by the Juvenile Court Program Award Committee to receive this year's Excellence Award.

The Teens-N-Transition Program (TNT) was created in early 2015 to improve outcomes for older youth exiting the foster care system in Greene County. TNT focuses on creating community connections and providing youth an opportunity for a stronger voice in their cases. TNT also works to create greater accountability for members of a youth's Family Support Team by ensuring youth are receiving and accessing resources.

Youth ages 16 - 21 who are under the jurisdiction of the court as the result of child abuse/neglect or a re-entry case are eligible for referral to TNT; the case worker, DJO or GAL may submit an application for acceptance.

One of the goals of TNT is to lower the number of youth exiting foster care without a job, education or housing. To that end, the 31st Circuit has instituted a court policy that older youth requesting an early release from court jurisdiction must first go before the judge, who helps ensure all options have been explored so youth do not leave care without stability.

TNT holds quarterly staffings, which typically include around 50 people. All FST members for the youth attend the staffing and youth are strongly encouraged to attend. Other TNT attendees include Chaffee services, CASA volunteers, and a large network of community

partners such as Missouri Job Center, representatives from area colleges – including admissions and financial aid specialists, career services, mentoring programs, and mental health services. Having community partners present and available for immediate referrals has cut down on months of waiting for youth to schedule and attend appointments and helped to fill a support gap.

TNT also emphasizes social activities and encourages youth to create a social network with each other. TNT holds events throughout the year, including hosting a hands-on cooking class at Hy-Vee, a trip to Silver Dollar City, a trip to Leadership Ranch, horseback riding, a back-to-school BBQ and an annual Christmas party.

In a letter of support for the TNT Program, the writer recognized the Juvenile Division in Greene County – in particular Judge Andy Hosmer, Chief Juvenile Officer Bill Prince and Deputy Juvenile Officer Justin Lockhart – for their vision and commitment to reach a segment of youth who often fall between the cracks of our current system. Another letter of support commended the TNT program for bringing the youth directly into the program in order for the court to hear from the youth’s perspective about their individual needs.

Congratulations to the 31st Circuit for being honored as the recipient of the 2017 MISSOURI JUVENILE JUSTICE ASSOCIATION “Excellence in Juvenile Court Program Award”.