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LOCAL » JUVENILE DETENTION

Focus on rehabilitation drives down delinquency

Initiative offers monitoring and mentoring for at-risk youth

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Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative reduces juvenile detention and arrests

By **Scott McCabe**
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The number of District of Columbia juveniles who were detained for serious crimes has decreased by one-third and juvenile arrest rates have gone down 15 percent since 2005, thanks to the intervention of a coalition of judges, law enforcement officials and youth advocates.

Two years ago, the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative began to seek ways to move young people out of detention after stud-

ies showed that teenagers who spent time in pretrial custody were three times more likely to end up in prison.

By reducing the number of teens in detention, authorities could concentrate on more serious cases.

"Detention is a gateway to negative outcomes," said a member of the group, Jason Ziedenberg of the Justice Policy Institute.

The results of JDAI's 18-month effort will be unveiled today at a conference of law enforcement officials, criminal justice experts and young people.

The group collaborated to deter-

mine what types of youth would benefit from the alternatives, said D.C. Family Court Presiding Judge Anita Josey-Herring. They agreed to target teenagers who needed outside supervision, but who were not so far into delinquency that they would compromise public safety.

Among the strategies used by the group were electronic monitoring, such as ankle bracelets, and a drop-in center in Southeast Washington where teenagers were required to report for schooling, mentoring and counseling. Authorities hope to open similar centers in other parts of the city.

The group also focused on girls who were committing serious and violent crimes by provided them more mental health programs and self-esteem counseling.

Josey-Herring said she is pleased to see that the program is working. Between 2002 and 2004, before the start of JDAI, juvenile arrests increased 23 percent.

Of the 1,000 juveniles who were diverted from detention in the JDAI's first year, more than 90 percent were not arrested again and returned to court for their required hearings.

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