Lake County Juvenile Court program honored

By Staff report editor@news-herald.com   Nov 30, 2018   Comments
The Lake County Juvenile Court has received statewide recognition for a program aimed at addressing low self-esteem in young women involved in the juvenile justice system.

The court received the 2018 Ohio Department of Youth Services Community Recognition Award for its New Voices, according to a news release.

New Voices was launched in January 2010 under the direction of Juvenile Court Judge Karen Lawson. The self-esteem group is cognitive behavioral based, “teaching girls to use their voices to speak for themselves and recognize that they can make positive choices in their lives,” according to the release.

The New Voices group size is limited to eight girls each session and runs for nine weeks. Weeks one through eight are educational in nature and week nine is graduation night.

Topics covered range from personal values, relationship issues, family issues, peers, bullying, Internet safety, decision making, personal goals and one’s journey ahead. The group is held once a week for three hours in the evening during which a light dinner is provided. These dinners help teach social skills that in turn improve the girls’ self-esteem.

Group activities include readings and discussion and art projects such as painting and collage. Guest speakers address individual goals and present their own journey to becoming successful community leaders. All group work stresses core values and how they affect the girls' choices and decisions in life.

Another component of the program is the modeling of positive behavior, according to the release. Lawson and many female court staff volunteer to add material to the curriculum based upon personal experiences they believe would be helpful to the girls.
In addition to court staff, volunteers from the community have contributed their own stories and successes. This community partnership includes all aspects of functional and positive living.

Community partners include the Western Reserve Junior Service League, Lake Erie College, Partners with Paws and many women community leaders.

“These awards go to each and every one of the wonderful staff at the Court as well as the youth who work so hard in these programs,” Lawson said in a statement. “All of them contribute so much to making this Court such a great place to do the work we do….. helping to rehabilitate the youth of Lake County.”

In partnership with the Governor’s Council on Juvenile Justice and the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges, the ODYS Community Recognition Award is given annually to a program to recognize the outstanding contributions of a community organization that provides needed programs and services to youth.

The award is also given to a youth that has participated in the program and has worked hard to make positive changes in his/her life.

“In addition to the New Voices program being recognized, the Department of Youth Services is also recognizing one girl who successfully participated in the New Voices program,” Lawson said. “We are extremely proud of her and her family.”

The New Voices program is the third court program to win this award. The court’s Alternative School won the award last year while the Intensive Community Rehabilitation program was honored in 2013.
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