

# DUTCHESS COUNTY

## J-FIRE

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Juvenile Firesetter Intervention, Response, and  
Education Program



# Program Development Timeline

- **April 2014:** First meeting at DCSO with various stakeholders
- **May 2014:** Steering Committee formed for program research & development  
Monthly meetings conducted thereafter
- **April 2015:** DA allocated asset forfeiture money for training
- **June 2015:** County Legislature passed resolution authorizing formation of J-FIRE Program under DCDER, to enter into IMAs and seek grants.
- **August 2015:** IMAs signed by all participating agencies
- **Sept 2015:** SOGs finalized; Intervention Specialist I training completed
- **January 2016:** J-FIRE Program “Goes Live”
- **April 2016:** Intervention Specialist II training completed.

# Steering Committee Members

- **Dave Alfonso:** DC Department of Emergency Response
- **Shawn Castano:** DC Sheriff's Office
- **Karen DeSimone:** DC Probation & Community Corrections
- **Linda Fakhoury:** DC Department of Law

# Participating Agencies

- Dutchess County Department of Emergency Response
- Dutchess County Sheriff's Office
- Dutchess County Department of Law
- Dutchess County District Attorney
- Dutchess County Office of Probation and Community Corrections.
- Dutchess County Department of Behavioral and Community Health
- Dutchess County Department of Community and Family Services
- Astor Services for Children and Families
- City of Poughkeepsie Police
- Town of Poughkeepsie Police
- Town of Hyde Park Police
- Town of East Fishkill Police
- Lagrange Fire Department
- Fairview Fire Department

# What is the Mission of J-FIRE?

- The mission of the Dutchess County J-FIRE Program is to provide a comprehensive, non-punitive multi-disciplinary approach to address the problem of juvenile fire setting through early identification, assessment, education and intervention in an effort to protect lives and property.

# Why do children start fires?

- ***Curious / Accidental:*** does not understand consequences
- ***Cry for help:*** stress, depression, draw attention
- ***Delinquent:*** vandalism, crime concealment
- ***Cognitively impaired:*** developmentally disabled or impaired
- ***Social / Cultural:*** socially motivated, riots
- ***Pathological:*** Severely disturbed, psychotic, delusional, personality disorders

# Myths

- Firesetting is a common, normal part of a child's development
  - “It's just a phase”
- Kids who start fires are obsessed with fire, or have “uncontrollable urges”
- Older children start more dangerous fires than smaller children
- If you talk to kids about fire, it will encourage them to light more

# Facts

- Annually, fire play causes an averages of:
  - 80 deaths
  - 860 injuries
  - \$265M in damages
  - Fires caused by lighters or matches = 83% of civilian deaths
- 83% of structure fires caused by males
  - 43% of those fires caused by children younger than 6

# But it's *MY* Child...

- Parents want the best for their children
  - Protective
  - Fear of legal consequences
  - I don't want my child to have a "record"
  - Fear for child's safety – and their own
  - Concern for child's future
- It's also the whole family

# Legal Consequences

- J-FIRE is NOT:
  - A way to punish children
  - A route into the juvenile justice system
  - A way to avoid accountability or obtain immunity
- Legal Protections
  - If the juvenile justice or adult criminal systems are involved, J-FIRE waits until the fact finding phase is complete
  - Protects the child's legal rights
  - Considered juvenile records (and where considered Youthful Offender records), therefore held to the strictest confidentiality rules

# Process

- Referral
  - Call J-FIRE Hotline **845-486-3994**
  - Email [jfire@dutchessny.gov](mailto:jfire@dutchessny.gov)
- The J-FIRE Coordinator assigns the case within 48 hours
  - Minimum of two Intervention Specialists
  - Typically one fire, one criminal justice (police or probation officer)
  - Right of first refusal given to jurisdiction where incident occurred/child resides

# Process

- Intervention Specialists contact the parents within 48 hours to schedule meeting
  - Child's home, whenever possible
  - J-FIRE office at Department of Emergency Response
  - Other appropriate location
- Meet with the child and parents separately
  - Assessment tool
  - Assess fire safety in the home

# Process

- “Juvenile With Fire” Assessment Tool
  - Oregon State Office of the Fire Marshal
  - Evidence based
  - Used nationwide
  - Assess the child and family for educational and other intervention needs
- Once assessment complete, Specialists scores the tool, completes report and determines best approach

# Focus on Safety

- Tailor the educational approach to meet the needs of the child and the family
- Assess for fire risks in the home
- Mitigate harm in case the child continues their firesetting behavior

# Education

- J-FIRE uses a library of educational materials
  - Tailor the program to each child's individual needs
  - “Cafeteria” style approach
- Education for the whole family
  - Fire science that is age appropriate
  - Education for the parents that is informed by child's developmental status
  - Fire safety for each member of the family

# Mental Health Partners

- Sometimes, education isn't the whole story
  - May be other, underlying problems
  - Comprehensive approach to wellness
- Children learn:
  - Good decision-making skills
  - Good self-regulation skills
  - Healthy coping mechanisms
- Sometimes children require counseling

# Mental Illness

- Mental illness is a medical condition
  - Diagnosis
  - Treatment
  - Recovery
- Stigma prevents parents from reporting
  - “Just a phase”
  - Unsure of developmental stages
  - Denial
  - Fear of what others will think
    - About them
    - About their child

# Mental Illness

- Not all children who set fires are mentally ill!
  - Not everyone who goes to counselling is mentally ill
  - Tailored approach
- With appropriate treatment, recovery is not only possible, it is expected
- Intervention Specialists facilitate process of family seeking help from private clinician or services through DC Dept of Behavioral and Community Health.

# Comprehensive Program

- Child and family followed up on by Intervention Specialists
  - Periodic outreach to ensure effectiveness
  - Ongoing relationship to provide support
- Other services
  - Skills
  - Support

# Program Summary

- **Multi-disciplinary**

- Fire
- Criminal Justice (Police/Probation)
- Mental Health

- **Non-punitive**

- **Educational**

- **Changes Behavior**

- Reduces risk of death, injury, and property loss
- Mitigates harm to others and self

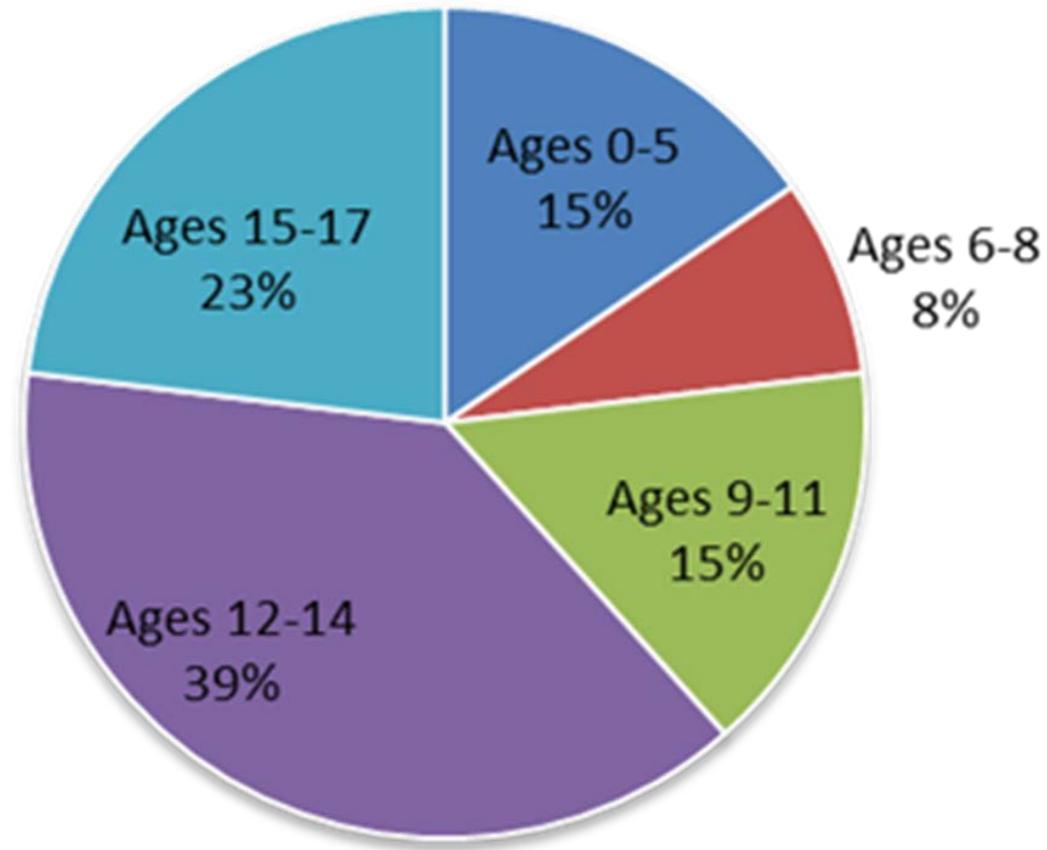
# Program Statistics for 2016

- Total Number of interventions conducted in **2016**:

**13**

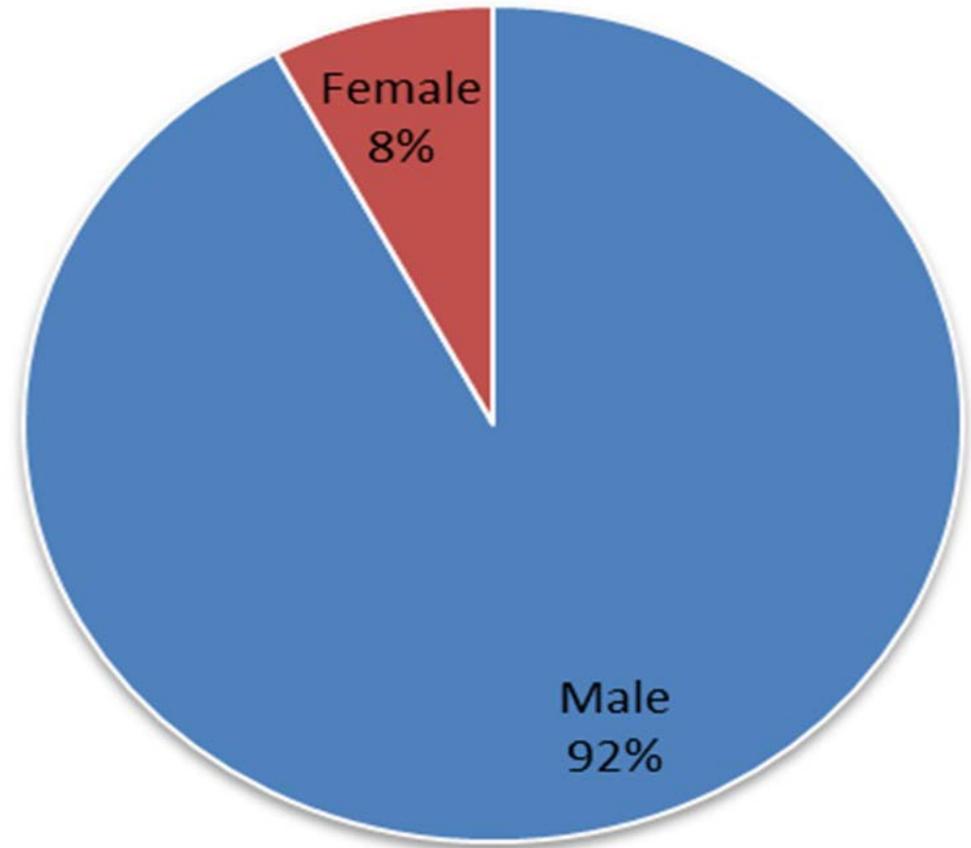
# Program Statistics for 2016

- Age 3-5: **2**
- Age 6-8: **1**
- Age 9-11: **2**
- Age 12-14: **5**
- Age 15-17: **3**



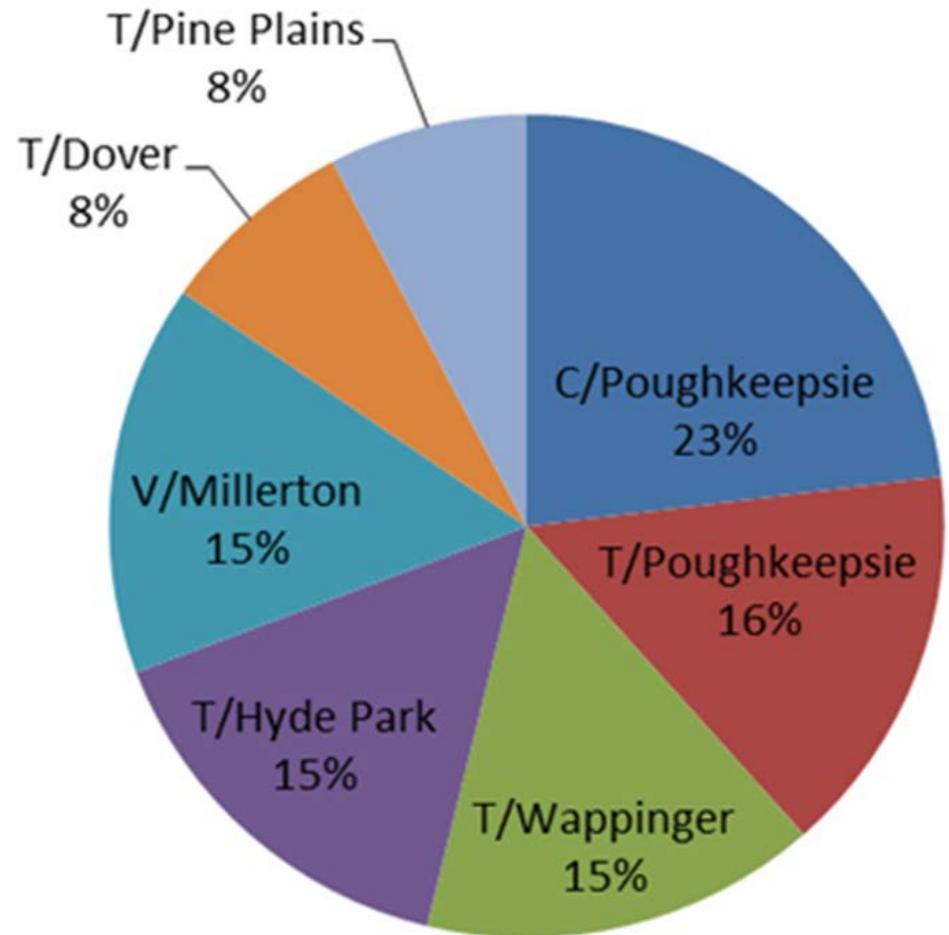
# Program Statistics for 2016

- Male: 12
- Female: 1



# Program Statistics for 2016

- C/Poughkeepsie: **3**
- T/Poughkeepsie: **2**
- T/Wappinger: **2**
- T/Hyde Park: **2**
- V/Millerton: **2**
- T/Dover: **1**
- T/Pine Plains: **1**



# QUESTIONS?

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