DUTCHESS COUNTY

J-FIRE

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@dutchesnyny.gov](mailto:jfire@dutchesnyny.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?