

A milestone has been reached in service to the youth of Belmont County, as the Concentrated Conduct Adjustment Program, known as CCAP, is in its 25th year of programming. Judge Davies explained, “The goal of the program has always been to assist youth in becoming responsible young adults while being held accountable for any negative actions. CCAP provides an alternative to detention that involves a strong supportive foundation for youth thereby increasing their potential for positive accomplishments in their lives.”

Beginning in 1995, under the direction of Belmont County Common Pleas Court Juvenile Judge, John J. Malik, in cooperation with Harrison County Common Pleas Court Judge, Steven Karto, the Belmont County Juvenile Court created programming which established a new option for youth sentencing. Funding was made available through the Ohio Department of Youth Services under “Reclaim Ohio” so as to work more closely with youth in their home communities. According to Judge Davies, “Reclaim grant programming has continued throughout Ohio and has led to a significant decrease in juvenile detention across the state over the past 25 years.” Judge Davies stated, “The Belmont County Juvenile Court has continued to use the Reclaim Ohio funding source to support CCAP and other programs. Although the funding is never guaranteed and has fluctuated greatly, the Juvenile Court always puts forth its best effort to keep the program funded because of the proven successes seen in the lives of our youth and the strong community support the program has received for now 25 years!”

Judge J. Mark Costine became the Juvenile Judge in 1998 and worked with staff to expand CCAP roles and connections in the community with the beginning of the CCAP Alternative School. Said educational programming was established through a federal grant beginning in 2001. Judge Davies said, “Working to stay up with current trends in Juvenile Justice, over the years,

Judge Costine and his staff molded the program and understood the importance of transitioning from a military atmosphere to more community service, evidence based therapeutic program. With an increase in counseling services, independent living skills, and recognized programming such as Skills Streaming, Thinking for a Change and PREP (Personal Responsibility Education Program), CCAP continues to work with youth in an atmosphere which can also provide one on one support to youth and families with a high level of accountability.”

The program originally was under the Direction of Mike Vavra. Director Vavra created an atmosphere of accountability and focus on achieving goals. Lance Mehl took over the role as Director in June of 1997 until May of 2017. Jennifer Shunk, Court Administrator, said “Lance had an ability to connect and communicate with youth and families over his 20 years as director that made kids understand the court staff offered support to avoid detention and help to overcome difficult obstacles they were facing in their lives. It was not uncommon for Lance to work side by side with the kids during community service projects in Belmont County, such as cutting grass at cemeteries and community clean ups. Lance was not just telling kids to behave but showing and teaching kids to be productive members of our community. He always believed in the youth he worked with and positively encouraged everyone.” Today, Noah Atkinson serves as the third director of CCAP since its inception. “The integrity of the program is a testament to the hard work of staff and the supportive, ongoing belief by our Judges over the years that we can make a difference in the youth we serve. The community support, including the local schools, in working with staff and youth, in my experience as the Director, has been appreciated and builds positive connections to serve some very vulnerable youth residing in Belmont County who are in great need of services.”

CCAP was originally designed with more of a military atmosphere as at the time the push was for boot camp programming. With annual populations of close to 50 juvenile participants for the first several years, compared to approximately 20 new juveniles entering the program annually for the past 10 years, CCAP has served over 1,000 Belmont County juveniles. Chief Probation Officer, Kelly Carter said “it is not uncommon for a probation officer to be approached by an adult that remembers the program and thanks them for the change it made in their lives. We have several probation officers over the years that have assisted or worked the program including Probation Officer John Markus, who had served in the United States Army and began his career with the Court originally working as a CCAP instructor.”

CCAP typically operates 4 days a week in the summer with youth required to attend 8 hours a day and on Saturdays twice a month during the school year. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program has operated virtually all summer and plans to continue to do so at the start of the upcoming school year. The CCAP Alternative School will operate according to the schedule and guidelines at the Belmont Harrison Joint Vocational School. “Thankfully, the summer program has been successful with about 12 youth participating in online programming. One piece we have missed is the community service projects as they not only provide a service throughout the county but also teach our youth the value of hard work and socialization skills. Staff still do weekly home visits checking on youth outside on porches and sidewalks. We are keeping up to date on all youth and families and hope to return to traditional programming next summer,” said Director Noah Atkinson.

Judge Davies hopes to continue CCAP programming for many years to come as he is a firm believer that CCAP not only provides a consequence for bad behaviors and actions but also provides

valuable services. Participating youth typically improve their reading abilities, address basic math skills that can help them learn how to manage money as an adult, receive life skills such as how to change a tire on a car, and often receive much needed counseling and supportive services to address family dynamics having a negative influence on their lives. All of this is accomplished in conjunction with the use of curfews, drug screens, court orders and consequences for failing to follow the same. In closing, Judge Davies indicated, "I am grateful for and indebted to my predecessors, Judge Malik and Judge Costine, for their foresight and willingness to create and develop what has been a very successful program for our children and families here in Belmont County. I am proud to have the opportunity to continue and oversee the CCAP program and look forward to doing so for the youth and residents of our community."