



Family Service Association of Wyoming Valley

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"...working with children, individuals, families and communities to achieve their potential."

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 23, 2010
Wilkes-Barre, PA

Wilkes University Students Meet with Luzerne County Juvenile Justice Task Force

On April 21, 2010, local members of the Luzerne County Juvenile Justice Task force met with 20 students of Wilkes University's Juvenile Delinquency class. Students were seated in a courtroom at Penn Place and provided insights into the local juvenile justice system by Honorable David Lupas, Juvenile Court Judge, District Attorney Jackie Musto Carroll, Juvenile Public Defender Cheryl Reedy, Juvenile Assistant District Attorney Mary Phillips, Juvenile Assistant District Attorney Matthew Muckler, Juvenile Probation Intake Officer Anthony Piazza, Deputy-Chief Probation Officer John Johnson, Juvenile Probation Supervisor Angela Zera. The class was coordinated by Theresa Kline, Luzerne County Juvenile Probation Office and Dr. Ebonie Stringer, Wilkes University. Other local members of the Task Force in attendance were First-Assistant District Attorney, Jeff Tokach, Sarah Luvender of Victims Resource Center, Amy Freeman and Mike Zimmerman of Family Service Association of Wyoming Valley, Honorable Tina Gartley, Court of Common Pleas and Joe Devizia of the Luzerne County Office of Human Services.

The open forum provided the students with an understanding of the juvenile justice process from post arrest to case disposition, focusing on the interplay between juvenile rights and the criminal act. Differences between adult and juvenile justice systems were highlighted. Cassandra Confer, a class participant, stated "Today provided a better understanding of the whole juvenile court process. Kathryn Gushanas noted "it was great that everyone took the time to explain the justice system to us." While the courtroom has been open to students for the past ten years, emphasis was placed on the positive changes within the local system over the last year.

The Luzerne County Juvenile Justice Task Force, comprised of local and state members, was formed in May 2009 to restore faith in the judicial and social service system through effective programs. The Wilkes University class participation is one of many efforts the Task Force has undertaken to achieve its goal through open communication. A report detailing efforts by the local member agencies of the Task Force was submitted to the Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice through the Office of the Victim Advocate, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, on April 19. Among the items in the report are the development of a Juvenile Delinquency Roundtable hosted by Judge Lupas, an increased amount of court time allocated to the Juvenile Court, an examination of diversionary programs, development of a Juvenile Community Service Program, assignment of 2 Assistant District Attorneys specifically to juvenile matters, a community outreach video, legal representation offered for all juveniles through the Public Defender's Office, training opportunities for Assistant District Attorneys and Assistant Public Defenders, activation of a Juvenile Justice Support Group through the Advocacy Alliance and Children's Service Center, addition of a Counselor/Advocate at the Victims Resource Center to conduct outreach and provide specialized services to victims of those crimes recently vacated/expunged from Juvenile Court, and 24 hour availability of community resource information through Help Line, and supportive efforts of the High Risk Youth Reentry and Family Strengthening program offered by Family Service Association of Wyoming Valley.

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