

Juvenile Court

of Clayton County, Georgia



Annual Report FY20

Clayton County Youth Development & Justice Center

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Executive Summary

The last few months have witnessed one of the most profound periods in modern history. The second half of the fiscal year, which ended on June 30, 2020, witnessed dramatic changes affecting the world, our nation, the state of Georgia, and the Clayton County community. A global pandemic fundamentally changed our lives and how we work. Resulting economic turmoil created additional challenges for our citizens and impacted government's ability to respond and provide services. Incidents of police brutality and civil rights abuses led to nationwide protests and demands for change. As the fiscal year drew to a close, it was obvious that many citizens distrust our systems and business as usual is no longer tenable.

Clayton County Juvenile Court has been at the forefront of juvenile justice reform for nearly two decades. We have changed our system from one focused on the offender's actions and punishment to one incorporating trauma-informed approaches, offering alternatives to detention, utilizing restorative justice practices, and one that utilizes evidence-based approaches to help build on youth and family strengths to reduce recidivism. Our School-Justice Partnership has disrupted the School-to-Prison Pipeline in Clayton County, and we have reduced racial and ethnic disparities in our juvenile justice system. All of our reform efforts have been strategically geared toward improving the lives of the children and families that we serve and enhancing the safety of our community by reducing the likelihood that these children will reoffend or continue into the adult criminal justice system.

While we are certainly proud of what we have accomplished, we recognize that we cannot rest on our successes. There are still too many children entering our juvenile justice system whose underlying issues are driven by undiagnosed or misdiagnosed mental health problems. Poverty, abuse, and other traumas are still the primary driver of many of the children coming through our intake. Too many of the children coming before the court are youth of color. These issues are complex and will be difficult to impact, but we remain committed to reforming our system and working with our children, families, and community partners to resolve these problems in a way that helps ensure equitable and fair treatment for those that come before the court. We are committed to giving the children of Clayton County their best chance at becoming healthy, productive adults.

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Vision and Mission

The Vision of CCJC is a safe and secure community that utilizes prevention and treatment services in collaboration with families and other organizations to ensure the wellbeing of children.

Our mission is to endeavor to protect and restore the children of the county as secure and law-abiding members of society, and to strengthen families and reduce the need for further intervention by the prompt treatment, rehabilitation, and supervision of delinquent children and children in need of services, and the decisive processing of dependency cases.

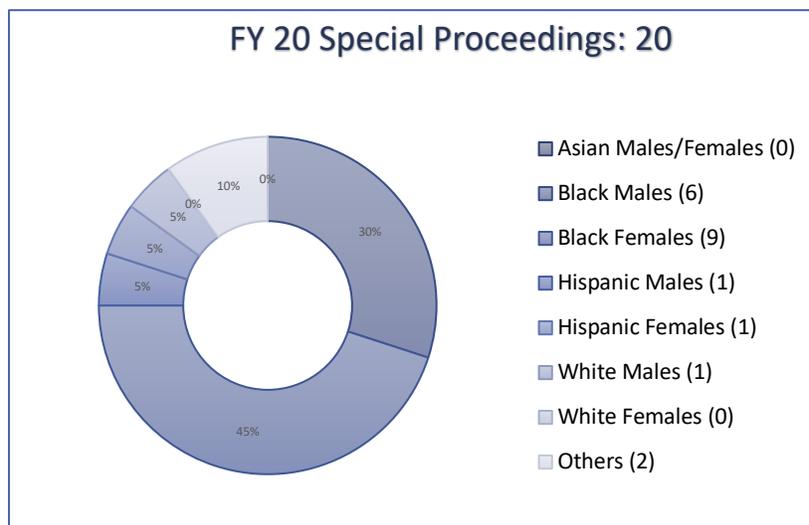
Jurisdiction

Generally, we have jurisdiction over children in Clayton County who are alleged to be delinquent, in need of services, or dependent. The age limits of our jurisdiction for these matters varies. For detailed information on juvenile court jurisdiction, please refer to the [Official Code of Georgia Annotated \(OCGA\) § 15-11-10](#).

CCJC served
2,489
children in FY20.

In FY20,
25/29
Termination of
Parental Rights
cases resulted in
the severance of
parents' rights.

CCJC held
1,586
court hearings in
FY20.



Funding

The majority of CCJC’s funding comes from the Clayton County Board of Commissioners, and more than half of it is dedicated to the salaries and benefits of the court’s more than 70 employees. The remainder is devoted to operational costs. Programs and treatment services are funded through cooperative relationships with partners and through grant funding.

CCJC’s operational budget for
FY20 was

\$4,596,527

CCJC collected

\$5,725 in

Supervision Fees during FY20

CCJC received

\$614,024 in

grant funding during FY20

Office of the Clerk

The Clerk’s Office is responsible for making and maintaining a record of all juvenile traffic citations, petitions, motions, orders, and other legal processes filed with the court. Deputy clerks assign court-appointed attorneys, schedule hearings, issue summons, schedule interpreters, prepare court dockets, and record case dispositions. They also attend all court hearings and provide the judges with administrative support during those hearings.

Tara Barfield was appointed Clerk of Juvenile Court in FY20 after serving for several years as Judicial Secretary. Matthew Cormier continued to serve as Assistant Clerk during FY20.

Fees Collected by the Clerk’s Office in FY20

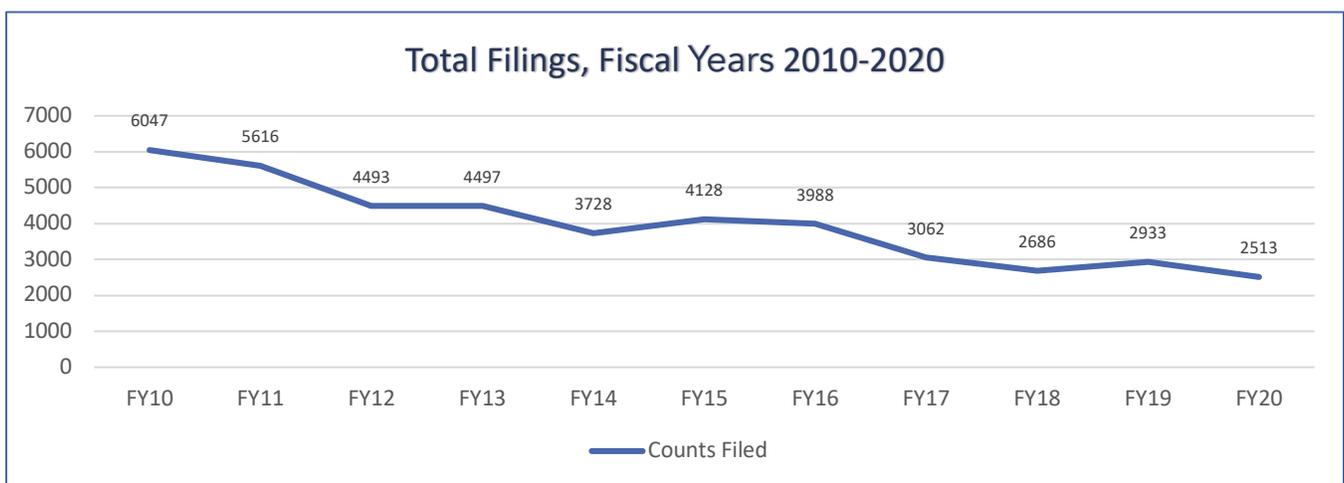
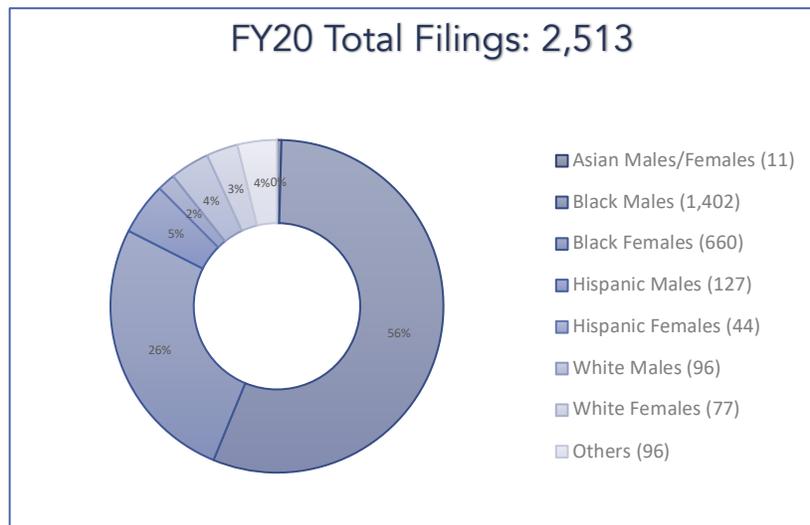
Type of Fee	Amount Collected
Copy Fees	\$765.50
Miscellaneous	\$1,000.00
Publication Fees	\$3,200.00
Supervision Fees	\$5,365.00
Traffic Fines	\$1,975.88
Transcript Payments	\$2.50
Total Fees Collected	\$12,668.88

Intake Operations

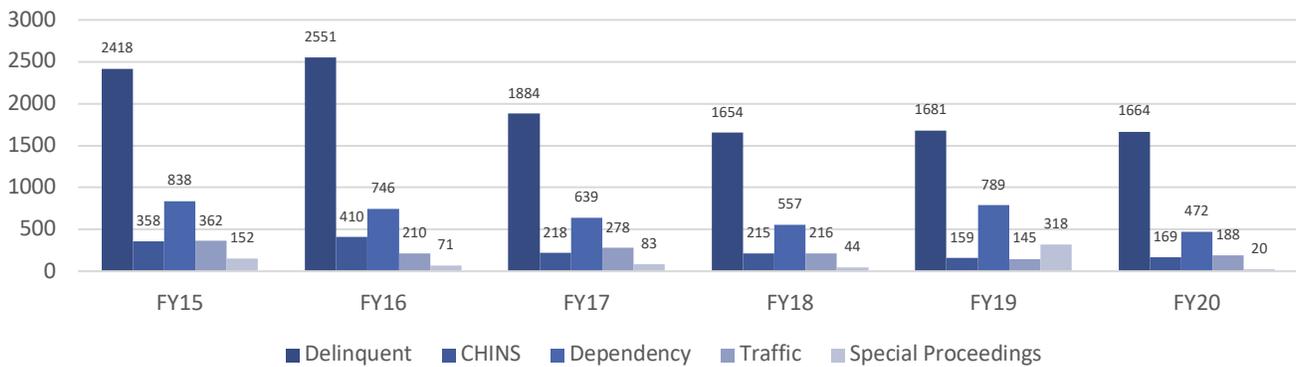
Intake Operations is responsible for receiving all referrals (known as “juvenile complaints”) from law enforcement, parents, school officials, the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), and private citizens. Intake is similar to the triage unit of a hospital: Intake officers make detention decisions for children

taken into custody by police on delinquency matters, decide on shelter care placement in dependency matters, and pre-screen complaints for their processing pathway (informal or formal).

Intake Operations made
357
 detention decisions and detained
190
 youth during FY20



Filings (Counts) by Category, Fiscal Years 2010-2020



Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice serves a vital role in the court, especially given the plethora of research that demonstrates that informal processes produce far better outcomes for youth who commit minor offenses than traditional formal justice processes. Georgia law endorses the use of informal processes for children who are alleged to have committed a non-serious delinquent act or who are children in need of services. We utilize pure diversion, informal adjustment agreements, and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) approaches, such as mediation.

Our Restorative Justice Division also manages our general programming. Over the years, the court has moved away from internal provision of programs in favor of collaborating with our partners in the community to provide programming for children involved with the court. Serving in the capacity of program manager, Court Officer II, [Keshia Johnson](#), coordinates with several different providers to design, schedule, and monitor programs for informal processes, our school-justice partnership, and probation.

[Clayton County's School-Justice Partnership a National Model](#)

The School Referral Reduction Program has been the target of much national attention for its innovative approach to addressing school disciplinary issues and minor school-related offenses. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and other influential organizations have identified Clayton County's School-Justice Partnerships Model as an evidence-based approach to dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline, the result of zero-tolerance policies that push students who commit minor school infractions into the juvenile justice system.

A team that includes key staff from the Juvenile Court, Clayton County Public Schools, Clayton County law enforcement, and the Clayton County System of Care have provided technical assistance on the model to more than 50 jurisdictions across the nation. This work has been supported by AECF and NCJFCJ.

During FY20, Restorative Justice screened

463

cases for informal processes and monitored

64

informal contracts for a period 90-180 days

During FY20,

235

cases were screened by ADR, and

31

children participated in mediated agreements

Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)

Our JDAI unit is named for the 25-year-old project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, one of the nation’s most effective, influential, and widespread juvenile justice reform initiatives. JDAI is primarily focused on the overuse of detention by juvenile justice systems. For more information on the national JDAI movement, please visit JDAI’s online community, [JDAIconnect](#).

Clayton County became a JDAI replication site in 2003, in response to tremendous stress on our juvenile justice system. Our JDAI Unit encompasses our detention review committee, the FAST Panel, our multi-disciplinary review panel, the Quad-CST, and our liaison with the Clayton County System of Care.



Drop in the Average Daily Population in Detention:

88%

Reduction in the Average Length of Stay in Detention:

63%

Drop in rate of Commitments to DJJ:

76%/70%

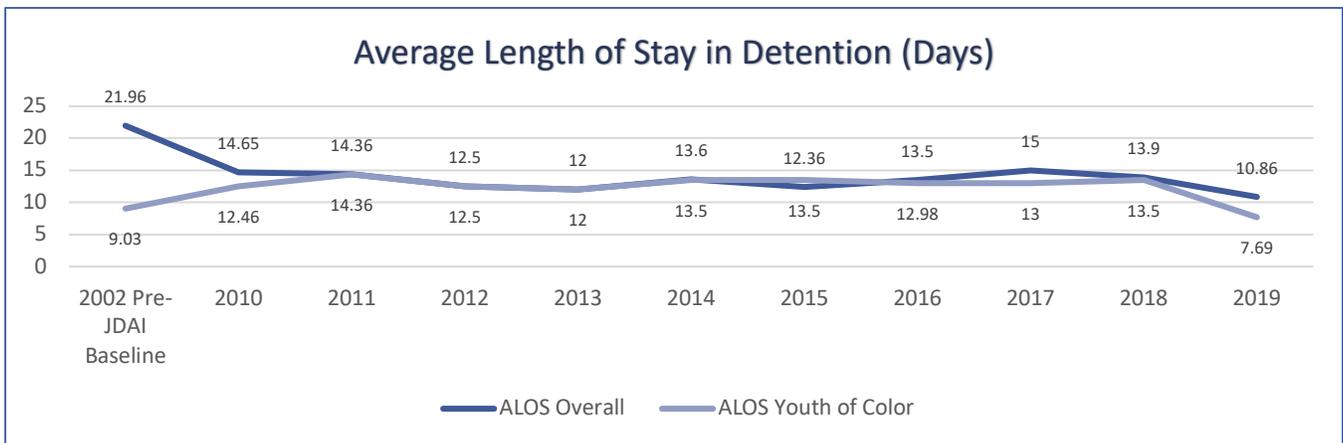
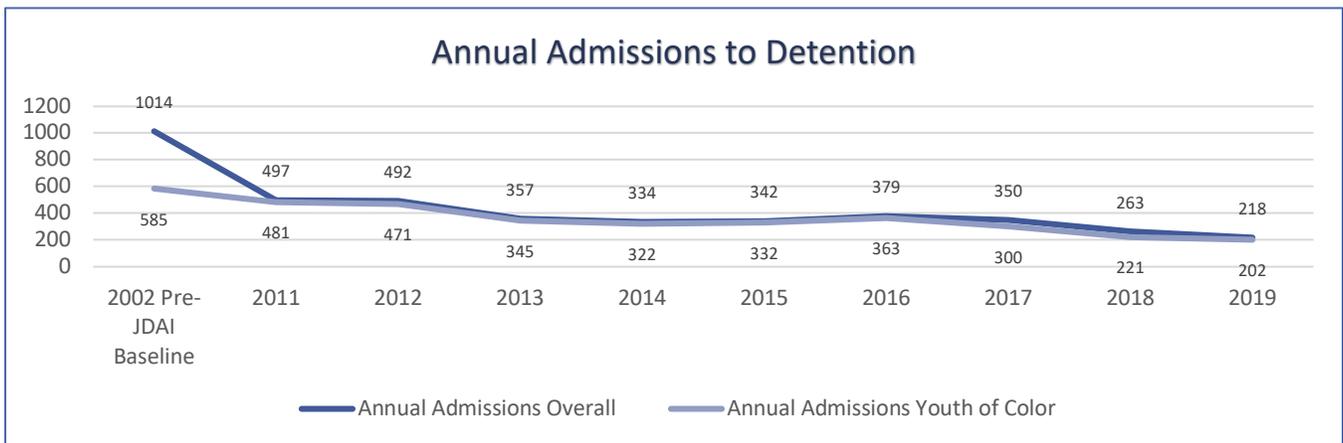
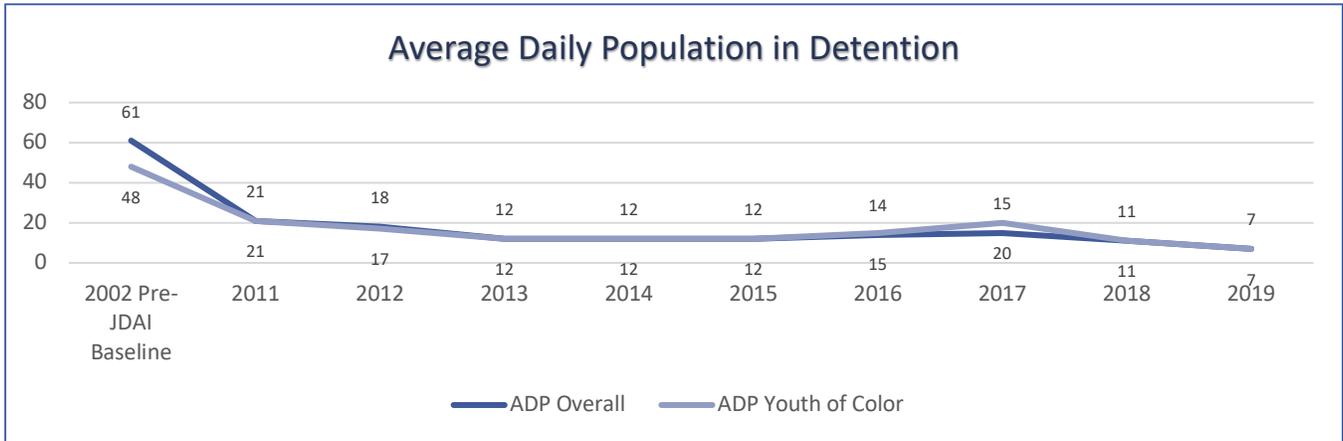
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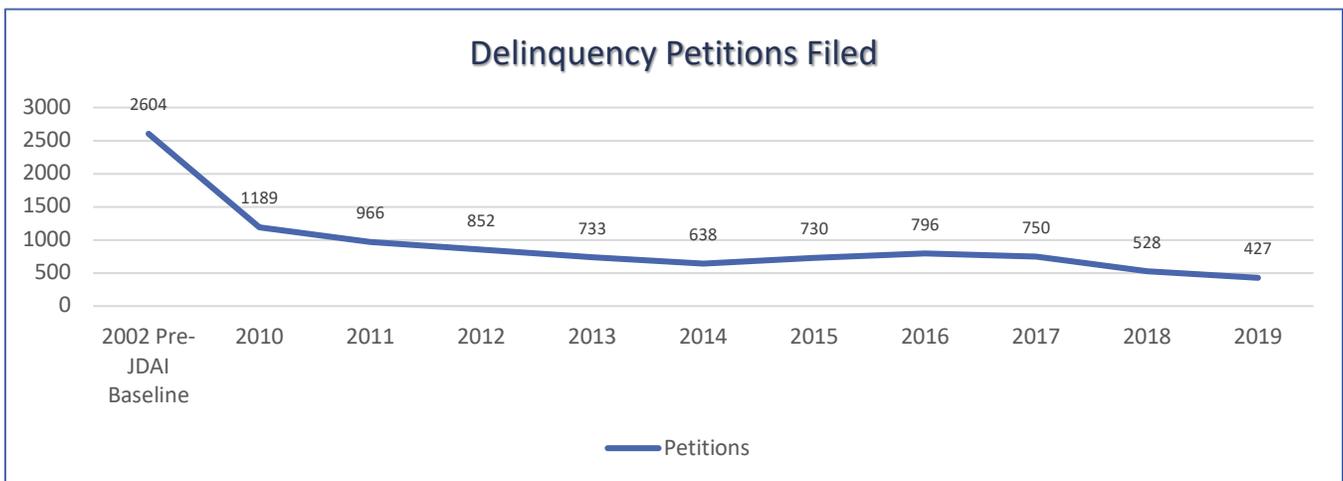
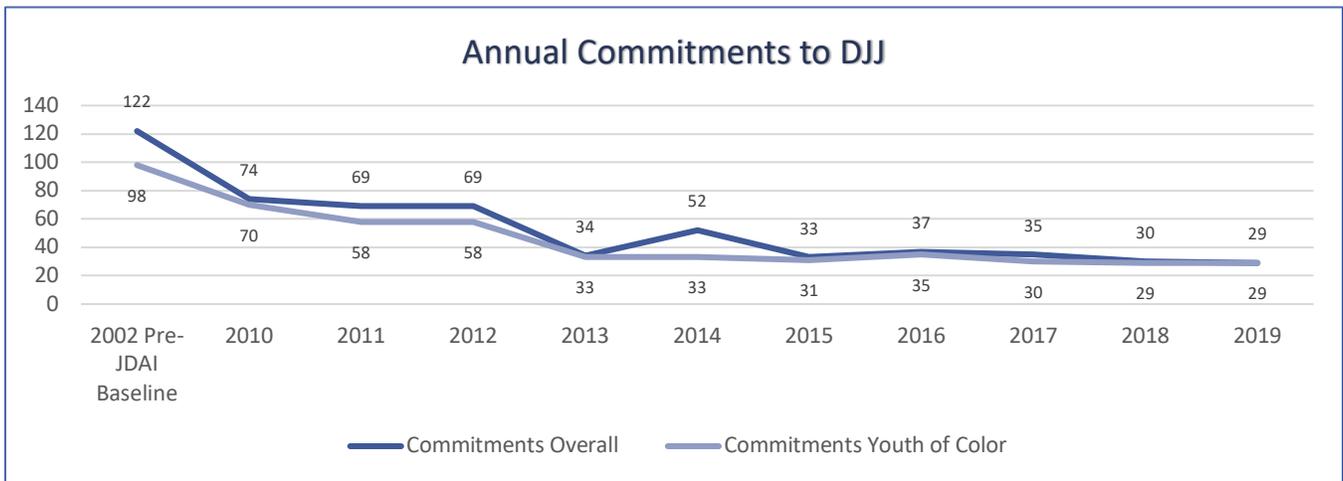
Rate of Failures to Appear and Rearrest for youth released on detention alternatives:

<1%

Reduction in the number of juvenile petitions filed in CCJC:

84%





Probation

We divide the probation function of our court into three units: Investigations, Field Operations, and Special Juvenile Justice Programs.

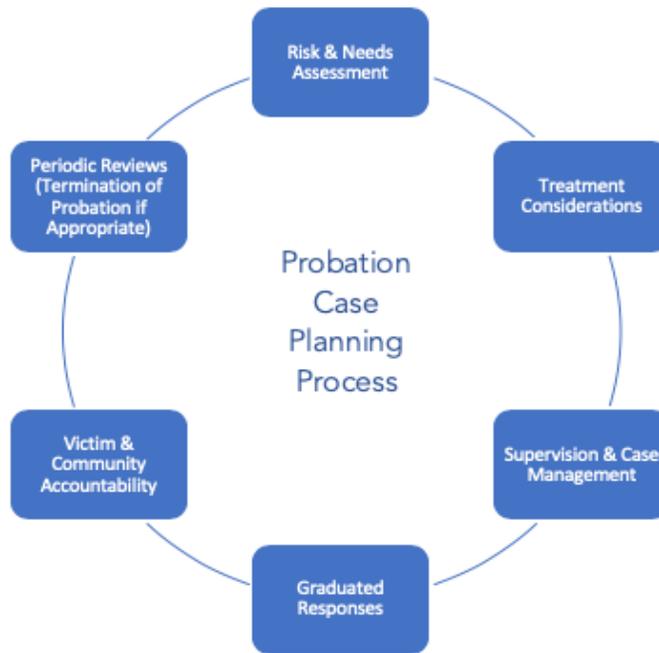
The Investigations Unit is responsible for conducting pre-disposition investigations, completing risk classification and needs assessments, preparing pre-disposition reports for the court, and supervising youth released on Community Detention Orders prior to disposition.

Field Operations performs the traditional probation function of supervising youth placed on probation by the court. They utilize a system of graduated responses to manage probated youth and work with the families to develop case plans that build on the child's and family's strengths, while holding them accountable to the terms of their probation orders.

Special Juvenile Justice Programs encompasses our “deep end” probation programs, including the Second Chance Court for designated felony offenders and the Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant programs for high-risk offenders, including the Enhanced Supervision Program (a collaborative endeavor with the Clayton County Sheriff’s Office), and the Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant Programs: Multisystemic Therapy and Aggression Replacement Training.

In FY20,
205
 cases were assigned to Investigations

1,822
 counts involving delinquency and CHINS were filed against
754
 children, and only
29
 were committed to DJJ in FY20



164
 children were assigned to Field Operations, and field officers initiated
1,284
 face-to-face contacts and
4,977
 collateral contacts with these youth in FY 20

In FY20,
16
 youth participated in the Second Chance Court

48
 high-risk youth were served with intensive, evidence-based services through the Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant in FY20

Child Welfare

Our Child Welfare Division is comprised of our Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and Judicial Citizen Review Panel (JCRP) programs.

CASA is a lauded national program that utilizes specially selected, screened, and trained volunteers to advocate for children who have been the victim of abuse and/or neglect and are in foster care, the custody

of relatives, or who are involved in custody disputes. In our court, CASA staff and volunteers serve as the child's *guardian ad litem* during Juvenile Court and certain Superior Court hearings to advocate in the child's best interests. To inquire about becoming a CASA volunteer, please contact our CASA Volunteer Training Supervisor, Griffin Shirley.

The JCRPs are a program of the Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges. Their purpose is to assist judges in determining the most appropriate permanency plan for children in foster care. The panels are comprised of citizen volunteers who have been screened and trained by the Council and court and act in the best interests of the child. To inquire about volunteering to serve on a JCRP, please contact our JCRP Coordinator, Annell Graniela.

CASA volunteers and staff advocated for

1,529

children, logging more than

2,790

hours in the courtroom and

2,112

other hours advocating for children in
FY20

CASA volunteers and staff completed

110

home evaluations and spent

618

hours in training in FY20

JCRPs logged

32

hours in

18

panels, and

7/60

children achieved permanency

Court Leadership

The court is served by three full-time judges and a part-time associate judge. Chief Judge Steven Teske has served the court since 1999; he was appointed the chief judge in 2003. Judge Deitra Burney-Butler has served the court as judge since 2009. Judge Bobby D. Simmons has served the court since 2011. Associate Judge Salvia Fox was appointed to the juvenile court bench 2018. The Clayton County Superior Court reappointed our full-time judges to another four-year term in 2019.

The administration of the court is managed by the Director of Juvenile Court Operations, Colin Slay. Mr. Slay was appointed to this position 2018; his previous service, across multiple divisions of the court, dates back to 1998. Mr. Slay is assisted in his duties by the Chief of Staff, Tiffany Moen. Mrs. Moen served as the court's Chief of Child Welfare before being appointed to her current position in 2018.

Why it all Matters

Jacob was 16 years old when he came to the Juvenile Court's attention. While reviewing the case materials of his newly assigned case, Field Officer Christopher Thornton immediately noticed that Jacob was not in school. In fact, Jacob had not been in school since the sixth grade. Mr. Thornton began investigating the matter and found that Jacob and his family had been homeless for periods of time, often living out of their car. Knowing it would be difficult for Jacob to catch up, Mr. Thornton set about to assist Jacob in attaining an education, a key protective factor against delinquency.

Working together with the family, it was determined that pursuing Job Corps would be the best option, but Jacob's application was rejected—his mother's low-income job placed the family just over the federal poverty line, meaning Jacob was ineligible for Job Corps.

Mr. Thornton, Jacob, and his family regrouped and changed course—Jacob would pursue a GED (Graduate Equivalency Diploma). After months of study and several rounds of the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education), Jacob's reading levels advanced enough for him to enroll in GED classes. Mr. Thornton worked hard to keep Jacob engaged and encouraged, especially when his initial attempts at the TABE proved inadequate, and when after several months in the program Jacob failed his first attempt at the GED exam.

At the writing of this report, Jacob is nearing his 18th birthday, and he continues to work on his GED. Once he reaches his birthday, he will become eligible for Job Corps and plans to pursue that program.

It is through his hard work and determination that Jacob will overcome the obstacles he faced as a 16-year-old brought before the Juvenile Court for delinquency, and it is because of Field Officer Christopher Thornton's encouragement, advocacy, and accountability that Jacob has this opportunity at success.

The fact that Mr. Thornton was able to devote the time and energy into helping Jacob succeed is due to the reform work of CCJC over the past two decades. With reduced caseloads (the result of our reforms) and a focus on strength-based case planning, probation officers are in a position to make a meaningful difference in the lives of the youth that come before the court. A difference that will likely prevent further involvement with the criminal justice system for those youth with whom we work.

We would like to thank Mr. Thornton for sharing this story—Jacob's real name was changed to protect his identity.

This report was authored by Colin Slay, Director of Juvenile Court Operations, and covers the period of July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020. Most of the data presented in this report was generated through our JCATS case management system.

We are appreciative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation for their support of our reform efforts, but we acknowledge that any opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and may not necessarily reflect upon the opinions of the Foundation.