SENECA COUNTY JUVENILE AND PROBATE COURT



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

JUDGE JAYA. MEYER

It is an honor and privilege to serve the citizens of Seneca County.

FROM JUDGE MEYER:

The Seneca County Juvenile and Probate Court is guided by the mission and promise to "serve the citizens of the community with dedication, integrity and professionalism. We will strive to assure the safety, security and best interests of those we serve to the best of our abilities."

I am incredibly proud of the positive impact that the Juvenile and Probate Court continues to have on our community every day as we remain dedicated to our Mission described above. It has been a true honor and privilege to serve the citizens of Seneca County as Judge of the Juvenile and Probate Court since February 9, 2009. Despite significant challenges such as the COVID-19 Pandemic, my Court Team remains steadfast in our passion and desire to serve our community every day.

2024 was another great year for the Juvenile and Probate Court. We have grown and strengthened our community partnerships and internal programs. We have also focused on developing our team so that they remain more than ready to meet the everchanging needs of those we serve. Our goal will always be to exceed the expectations of our community and serve those who enter our doors with experience, professionalism, empathy, and integrity.

As the need for our services increase in our community, so to do the costs associated with providing quality services to meet those needs. The Seneca County Juvenile and Probate Court has always prioritized the responsible use of the financial resources we receive to support our Court services, and we will continue to do so moving forward. My Court Team and I pledge to remain good stewards of our support funding – we will work diligently to keep our costs down without sacrificing the excellent services we provide to our citizens.

I invite you to review this report and our website at <u>www.senecajpcourt.com</u> for more information. If you have additional questions, please feel free to reach out via the contact information found on our website.



THE BENCH

The Honorable Judge Jay A. Meyer was first elected by Seneca County Voters to serve as their Juvenile and Probate Judge in 2008. He was re-elected in 2014 and 2020 for his second and third terms. Judge Meyer is a graduate of Tiffin Columbian High School. He received both his BA and Juris Doctor degrees from Ohio Northern University. Judge Meyer came to the Bench following his service with the Seneca County Prosecutor's Office, Child Support Enforcement Agency, and the Department of Job and Family Services, along with over ten years of experience in private practice in Seneca County. Judge Meyer supports Seneca County youth, families, and the Court's Mission.

Magistrate

Donald S. Bennett was appointed as Magistrate by Judge Meyer in June of 2009. Magistrate Bennett received his Juris Doctor degree from the University of Toledo College of Law.

Prior to his appointment, Magistrate Bennett was in private practice for 20 years, concentrating in the areas of juvenile, domestic, and criminal trial practice.

Magistrate

Tiffany E. Cavanaugh was appointed as Magistrate by Judge Meyer in January of 2016. Magistrate Cavanaugh received her BA and Juris Doctor degrees from Ohio Northern University.

Mediator

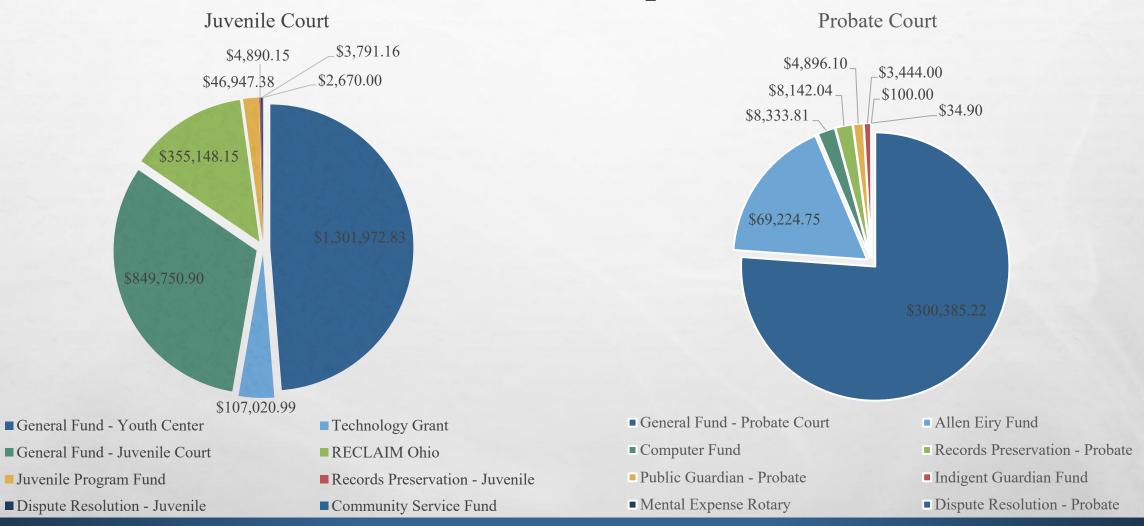
Ms. Cavanaugh also serves as the Court's Mediator, a position she has held since May of 2013. Ms. Cavanaugh is a qualified Mediator with experience in mediating complex Juvenile and Probate matters. Stacy Wilson – Court Administrator Cathy Bean – Administrative Clerk

JUVENILE COURT	PROBATE COURT
Gina Reuter – Chief Deputy Clerk	Dana Eborg – Chief Deputy Clerk/ Investigator
 Chloe Seislove – Deputy Clerk 	 Amy Littlejohn – Deputy Clerk
 Melissa Bowers– Deputy Clerk 	 Nicole Johnston – Deputy Clerk/Investigator
 Dana Englund – Deputy Clerk 	 Angela Seifert – Deputy Clerk/Investigator
 Alison Schubert– Deputy Clerk 	 Jay Rishty – Public Guardian
 Zoe Markey – Deputy Clerk 	

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2024 Court Expenses



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Probate Court

Pursuant to the first Ohio Constitution of 1802, the Court of Common Pleas maintained exclusive jurisdiction over all probate matters. The updated Ohio Constitution of 1851 shifted this power, however, by creating a separate Probate Court in each of Ohio's 88 counties.

Seneca County's Probate Court was established in 1851. William Lang served as the first Probate Judge from 1851 – 1855. He wrote *History of Seneca County: From the Close of the Revolutionary War to July 1880.* Judge Meyer is Seneca County's 21st Probate Judge.

Probate Court handles wills, administration of estates and trusts, adoptions, marriage licenses, name changes, civil commitments, conservatorships, and appointments of guardians for minors and incompetent adults. [See Ohio Revised Code (R.C.) Section 2101.24]

Judge Meyer serves as Judge for both the Seneca County Probate and Juvenile Courts.



Probate Court Case Breakdown 2024

	OPEN	CLOSED
Marriage Licenses Issued	326	
Estates	284	292
Minor Guardianships	3	0
Incompetent Guardianships	32	29
Trusts	0	4
Civil	22	11
Adoption	22	27
Mental Illness	9	9
Minor Settlement	12	5
Name Change	20	18
Conservatorship	0	2
Wrongful Death	1	1
Delayed Birth Registration	7	5
TOTAL	738	403

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DESCRIPTION OF

Probate Court Year in Review

Projects implemented/completed during the year:

- Court records continued to be scanned by Court staff. This is a continuing effort to preserve and retain Court records in accordance with the Records Retention Schedule.
- Naturalization Records were scanned and added to the Case Management System and can be viewed online
- Updated the Probate Court Case Management System

Goals for 2025:

- □ Continue the preservation of Probate records through scanning
- □ Implement E-filing
- Complete the Guardianship Handbook



Over the past year, the Seneca County Guardianship Program has proudly provided 24/7, 365-days-a-year guardianship services to indigent Seneca County residents aged 55 and older who have been declared legally incompetent or who struggle with a medical or mental disability. To better serve our participants, the Program has partnered with multiple Seneca County agencies to provide life-saving and life sustaining services. For example, the Public Guardian teamed up with the Allen Eiry Senior Center, the Mental Health &Recovery Services Board of Seneca, Ottawa, Sandusky, and Wyandot Counties, Firelands Counseling and Recovery Services, Sojourn of Seneca, and Flower Hospital to provide the resources needed to keep many of our most vulnerable population safe.

In 2024/25, the Public Guardian served 29 individuals in Seneca County. He also assisted other families who do not qualify for the Program locate appropriate guardians. Additionally, on a daily basis, the Guardian monitors client health and safety, arranges client transportation, accompanies clients to appointments, helps clients apply for benefits and pay bills, guides clients with medical and financial decisions, and connects clients with appropriate resources so that they can live the happiest and most independent lifestyles possible.

The Public Guardian is excited for the upcoming year and has set challenging but very achievable goals to make the Program even stronger. As always, the Public Guardian will strive to provide the best possible personal service to each ward. For example, when meeting with a new client last week, the client asked the Guardian, "What can you do for me?" The Public Guardian responded with, "I do something different for everybody." The Public Guardian recognizes that each client has very specific and varying needs. So, he will continue to develop individualized plans to keep clients safe while simultaneously giving them the opportunity to live the happiest, healthiest, and most independent lifestyles possible.

Seneca County Guardianship Program

Juvenile Court

• The Seneca County Juvenile Court handles the filing and processing of the following types of matters:

- Juvenile Delinquency and Unruly
- Juvenile Traffic
- Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency
- Paternity
- Custody and Child Support
- Some Adult Criminal Cases

• The Juvenile Court System was created in 1902. The Honorable Hal W. Michaels served as Probate Judge during this time. When the Juvenile Court System was created, the Probate Judge assumed responsibility for Juvenile Court as well. At age 29, Judge Michaels was the youngest Judge elected as Seneca County Probate Judge and served from 1903-1909. Judge Meyer is Seneca County's 11th Juvenile Judge.



Juvenile Court Cases 2024

	FILED	CONCLUDED
Delinquent	220	230
Traffic	170	166
Abuse/Neglect/Dependency	42	41
Unruly	44	48
Adult	53	51
Permanent Custody	7	7
Change of Custody	193	197
Support Modification	302	323
Parentage	13	14
UIFSA (Uniform Interstate Family Support Act)	6	7
Other	15	15
TOTAL	1,065	1,099

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Juvenile Court Year in Review

2024 Highlights:

- We completed the upgrade of our Case Management System through the 2023 Technology Grant from the Supreme Court of Ohio to help streamline case processing, reduce paperwork, improve case tracking, and generate accurate reports, as well as to support electronic filing and online payment processing.
- We installed new servers and related IT components, including new desktop workstations and scanners which were also funded through the Technology Grant.
- The Court clerks and magistrate delivered IV-D contract services for the Seneca County Child Support Enforcement Agency (CSEA), helping to return nearly \$236,000 to the County's General Fund.
- All Clerks attended the Supreme Court of Ohio's Juvenile Court Clerks' Conference where they gained additional knowledge on current laws, rules, and best practices specific to juvenile courts.
- We updated our hallways and conference rooms to reflect the Court's values and mission, and to encourage open communication and cooperation while helping create a professional, yet welcoming atmosphere for our court patrons and attorneys.
- We completed a substantial review of our Court's Local Rules and made appropriate revisions for the upcoming year.

2025 Goals:

- Launch the eFiling platform within our upgraded Case Management System to provide basic electronic filing capabilities for juvenile court case management.
- Review and make improvements to our billing policies and protocols for the collection of outstanding Court costs and fines.
- Finalize our implementation of the online payment portal to make payment of Court costs and fines more convenient for our court patrons.
- Provide notary services to court patrons by enabling all our clerks to obtain their notary commission.
- Continue to organize and reduce storage space by eliminating paper files where appropriate.
- Continue the cross-training and professional development of our court staff to ensure our court patrons' needs are met at all times.



MEDIATION

► The Seneca County Juvenile and Probate Court offers Mediation Services to help parties attempt to resolve certain disputes on their own.

► Mediation is a problem-solving process in which a neutral mediator helps facilitate communication between parties so that they can work toward a mutually acceptable resolution. Mediation puts the power back in the hands of the parties by empowering them to come up with their own solutions and offering them the opportunity to resolve their issues together.

MEDIATION WORKS BECAUSE:

- ▶ Both sides have the opportunity to be heard
- ▶ The parties are in control of the agreement
- Multiple ways of solving problems are explored
- ▶ The final agreement is acceptable to the parties
- Communication is clear and specific

► In 2024, the Court Mediator mediated 17 civil mediations and 14 truancy mediations.

• Of the 17 civil mediations, our Court continued to partner with the Seneca County Department of Job and Family Services to conduct 7 mediations addressing non-financial/parenting time issues at no charge for families following their administrative child support hearings.

Tiffany Cavanaugh-Mediator



TIME TO INVEST

Time to Invest ("TTI") is an alternative to detention developed by Judge Meyer and the Seneca County Juvenile Court and Youth Center Staff to address the criminogenic needs of our youth by efficiently and impactfully improving their educational, vocational, therapeutic, and socialization deficiencies. TTI uses intervention philosophies that align with nationally recognized evidence-based models to provide intensive services for youth likely not available to them at their home schools. TTI participants receive individualized behavioral health services, cognitive behavioral therapy concentrating on changing the criminogenic thinking of youthful offenders, vocational training, and opportunities for workforce development and independent living. Youth also participate in service-learning community service programs.

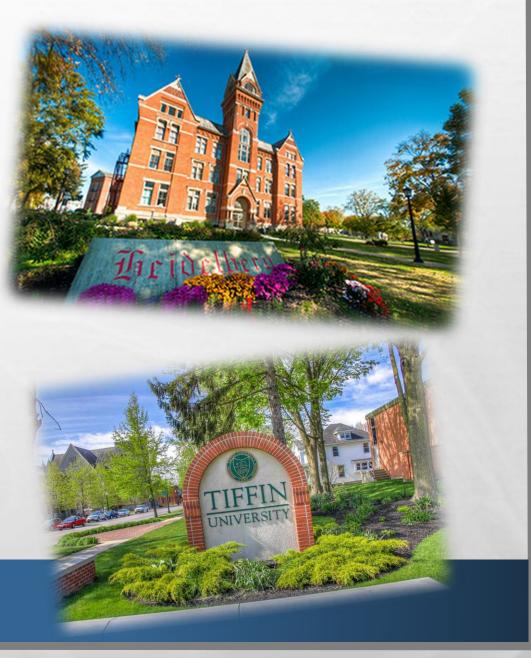
Research evidence reveals that academic support, coupled with counseling, workforce development, case management, mentoring, and family interventions prevent recidivism and help youth develop a path to success. In Seneca County, we created TTI to offer this new line of thinking in our community, and we are proud of TTI's positive results. In 2024, 12 youth successfully completed the TTI Program and were diverted from formal Court action. Successful TTI participants often return to their home schools academically ahead following the individualized assistance they receive during TTI.

The TTI Program is designed to accommodate up to twelve youth between the ages of 12 and 18 at any given time. The Program operates primarily in a designated and separate location inside the Seneca County Youth Center Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. until 2:15 p.m. during the school year. The program includes transportation to and from the youth's home so that families do not have to worry about transporting the youth to and from TTI.

JUVENILE COURT INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Seneca County Juvenile Court works closely with area higher education institutions to provide internship opportunities and realworld work experiences for qualified students.

In 2024, one Tiffin University student, one Heidelberg University student, and one Terra State Community College student experienced 400+ hands-on hours with the Juvenile Court. Our interns accompany Probation and Diversion Officers to schools and home contacts and attend meetings with Officers and families to discuss case plans. Interns also have the opportunity to accompany Probation Officers to multiple types of hearings and Youth Center contacts. We strive to introduce our interns to as many educational experiences as possible during their tenure with the Court.



Court Services Department Kendra Shearer - Director

Linda Cohen * **Probation Officer** Compliance/Probation Officer Jason French Rob Swartz **Probation Officer** Abbi Norville **Probation Officer** Ali Hoch Probation/Diversion Officer Jim Jarrett* Director of Community Outreach *Paid by General Fund

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The Court Services Department helps connect youth and families with interventions and services available in our community upon their initial contact with the Juvenile Court and continues to do so throughout their Court involvement. Court Services houses and coordinates the following:

- Probation Program
- Diversion Program
- Community Outreach

Evidence-based practices and interventions, such as Motivational Interviewing techniques, the Carey Guide curriculum, and the Ohio Youth Assessment System provide Court Officers the tools they need to appropriately measure risk, provide intervention, set goals and objectives, and measure outcomes.

The Court believes in and applies the least restrictive setting required to protect youth and the community. This principle, supported by outcome measures and a large volume of research, suggests that more restrictive settings often do more harm than good to low- and moderate-risk youth. Accordingly, Judge Meyer and our Court Services team work together with community partners to help create individualized plans and services for each youth and family to establish the appropriate balance of accountability and assistance while simultaneously creating a safer and more secure community for all.

Court Services

The Department of Court Services is largely funded by RECLAIM Ohio.



WHAT IS RECLAIM OHIO? RECLAIM stands for

<u>Reasoned and Equitable Community and Local Alternatives to the Incarceration of Minors.</u> RECLAIM is a funding initiative which encourages Juvenile Courts to explore community-based options to meet the needs of juvenile offenders and youth at risk of offending.

RECLAIM Grant funds pay for the following programs:

- Grant Administration
- Probation
- PACE- Educational Services
- GIFT- Group Involvement for Teens

- Community Outreach
- Ankle Monitoring
- Diversion

How We Used Our Reclaim Grant Funds In 2024			
Grant Administration *7 staff received 315 hours of training in FY24	 Supported Director of Court Services salary and benefits and 40% of the Administrative Clerk salary and benefits Funded Motivational Interviewing training provided by Case Western Reserve University Funded additional training for Court Officers 		
Probation *served 200 adjudicated youth in FY24	 Supported 3 Probation Officer salaries and benefits Probation Officers provide supervision and case management services to adjudicated youth to reduce subsequent delinquent behavior Funded Drug Screen Tests and Supplies 		
Diversion *served 102 youth in FY24	 Supported 1 Diversion Officer salary and benefits Funded Programing Supplies 		
Community Outreach * served 183 youth in FY24	 This program offers youth the opportunity to work off Court-ordered community service hours and restitution Youth work in the community to reimburse their victims for any damages 		
Ankle Monitoring *served 43 youth in FY24	• Funded the purchase of ankle monitors to closely track youth who required intensive supervision as an alternative to detention		
PACE * served 15 youth in FY24	• This program targets youth who are struggling in school by providing them tutoring services with Heidelberg University students		
GIFT *served 14 youth in FY24	 Female youth participated in a 10-session equine-assisted trauma group Male youth participated in 8 session of life skills and cooking classes 		

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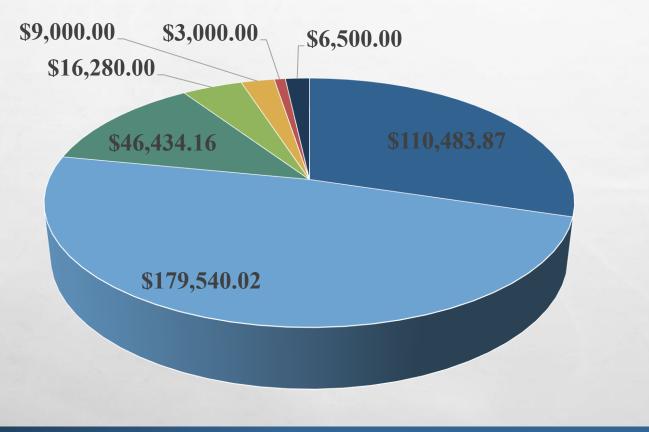
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RECLAIM Ohio Total FY 2024 Budget \$371,238.05



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Grant Administration

Probation

Diversion

Community Outreach

Ankle Monitoring

PACE - Education Support

GIFT- Group Involvement for Teens

Community Outreach

- Community Outreach is about giving and contributing. The Seneca County Juvenile Court offers this Program to help Court-ordered youth give back to the community through the completion of community service hours. This Program also provides youth an opportunity to pay Court-ordered restitution to victims through participation in the Work Program. The Work Program gives youth a chance to earn an hourly credit of \$10.45 (state minimum wage) to be paid to their victim(s) as restitution. Youth can earn up to a maximum of \$1,500.00 each.
- Since Judge Meyer took office in 2009, youth have completed more than 87,000 hours of community service, resulting in more than \$180,000.00 paid to victims in restitution.









Diversion Program ORC 2151.18(B)

The Seneca County Juvenile Court's Diversion Program is an alternative to formal adjudication. Diversion limits youth involvement with the Court by diverting first-time, low-risk unruly/delinquent offenders away from formal adjudication. This program holds youth accountable for their actions but also minimizes their penetration into the juvenile justice system. Research shows that increased formal contact with the Court for low-risk youthful offenders does more harm than good.

In 2024, a total of 118 youth participated in the Diversion Program. While in Diversion in 2024, 65 youth were successfully diverted from adjudication, 23 youth failed to complete the program, and 30 youth carried their efforts over into 2025. Of the 118 Diversion participants, 32 of these cases were charges of habitual truancy. Of those 32 truancy cases, 23 successfully completed Diversion, and 9 were unsuccessful and adjudicated. There was a total of 39 habitual truancy complaints received by the court. Due to additional charges or pending court involvement, 7 of the truancy charges were automatically sent formally.

In Diversion, the youth and their family enter into a voluntary agreement to address the offense and behaviors. Following the youth's successful completion of the agreement terms, there is no record of the complaint. In addition, successful Diversion saves the cost of court-appointed counsel, which is conservatively estimated at \$250.00 per case. With 65 successfully completed cases in 2024, the Court experienced an estimated cost savings of \$16,250.00. In addition, each participating youth makes a food donation of at least \$5.00. In FY 2024, we collected 118 food donations for our community, with a value of \$590.00.

Juvenile Court – Court Rehabilitation Programs

4-H CARTEENS Program

A teen facilitated traffic safety program for first-time juvenile traffic offenders in partnership with OSU Extension



<u>**3rd Millennium Classrooms</u>**</u>

Offers online courses with evidence-based strategies for behavior change intervention

<u>GIFT Program</u>

Group Involvement for Teens -An equine-assisted therapy program which teaches youth life and coping skills <u>Carey Guides</u> Tools for Probation Officers to use to support behavior change and recidivism reduction

PACE Program

Academic tutoring offered to youth in partnership with Heidelberg University

Reality Works

Interactive technology used to educate youth on topics such as fetal alcohol syndrome, prenatal drug exposure, shaken baby syndrome, and pregnancy prevention



Seneca County Youth Center

• The Seneca County Youth Center opened on February 7th, 2013. This new, modern facility replaced the 60-plus-year-old building that the youth center previously occupied.

• The Youth Center is a temporary holding facility for juveniles. It is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and exists for the purpose of safely and securely housing youth who are held pending further Court action or under a Court Order. Detained youth participate in positive and useful programming while being held accountable for their daily behavior through the use of an active behavior management system.

• The Youth Center also houses nearby out-of-county youth when a youth's home county lacks sufficient capacity for detention.



Youth Center Staff

Sarah Canalos– Director January - September Jason French – Director November - December

Other Positions Include:

1 Detention Coordinator

1 Program Coordinator

2 full time Activities Supervisors

2 full time Head Supervisors

14 full time Juvenile Corrections Officers

Numerous intermittent Juvenile Correction Officers (based upon need)

Program Areas

Youth in detention at the Youth Center are kept active daily from breakfast until bedtime via positive and informative programming incorporated into their daily activity schedules. Youth Center Staff encourage youth to participate productively in approximately 20 hours of programming per week. The following are programming activities currently offered at the Youth Center and scheduled by the Director, Program Coordinator, Activities Supervisors, or designees:

- <u>Physical education</u> Youth who are not exempt due to medical reasons perform daily exercises. Recreation opportunities are also provided year-round with an indoor, half-court gymnasium and a secure outdoor recreation area.
- Living skills Youth are offered a variety of group activities designed to educate youth and improve their life skills. Activities involve lessons regarding self-esteem, victim awareness, thinking errors, anger management, peer pressure, trauma, drug and alcohol education/awareness, job application guidance, resume drafting, and other necessary life skills. During this reporting period, the Youth Center also participated in a creative writing program. In the summer months, the youth learn what it takes to cultivate a garden and share their garden's bounty with the community.



Program Areas

<u>Arts and crafts</u> – Youth Center residents are taught to use their imagination, creativity, and hand/eye coordination to design pictures, sculptures, paintings, and hanging and/or wall-mounted designs.

- <u>**Guest speakers**</u> Periodically, area community volunteers and professionals are invited to discuss their areas of expertise on subjects such as alcoholism, drug abuse/addiction, suicide prevention/help, AIDS/sexually transmitted diseases, breast cancer awareness, career planning, safe driving, military recruitment, and related public health and safety issues facing youth. The COVID pandemic initially limited connections with in-person guest speakers. Now, however, the Youth Center utilizes electronic conferencing, such as Zoom, to reach guest speakers both locally and outside of Seneca County.
- **School** Since the 1999/2000 school year, North Central Ohio Educational Service Center (NCOESC) has served as the lead school operating the Youth Center classrooms. Detained youth are required to attend all scheduled school days while in detention. Classroom instruction is based on state academic content standards. Residents review basic English, Math, Science, and Social Studies skills via a digital online program. Youth Center teachers also assist the residents with individual work assignments from their respective home schools to ensure they stay current with their studies while in detention. Youth at the Youth Center for ten days or more take the Brigance Basic Skills Reading and School PLP Math assessments to determine their level of education/comprehension. This allows Youth Center teachers to provide additional individualized assistance for the residents. Youth attend 5.5 hours of school per weekday during the school year and 2.5 hours of school per weekday in the summer. Selected youth are also allowed to work on their school assignments throughout the evenings and the weekends to assist them in getting back on track and sometimes even academically ahead.

Counseling At The Youth Center

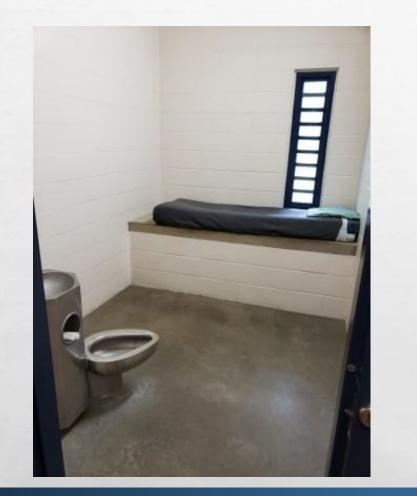
Residents have the opportunity to participate in mental health counseling during their time at the Seneca County Youth Center.

Funding for the Youth Center Behavioral Health Program is provided in part by local Seneca County levy funds from the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Seneca, Ottawa, Sandusky, and Wyandot counties.

Behavioral health services are provided by Firelands Counseling and Recovery Services of Seneca County and Wellness Counseling Solutions, LLC, dba Wyandot Counseling Associates.

Youth who received behavioral health services	Primarily MH Service Hours	Primarily AOD Service Hours	Successful Discharge	Unsuccessful Discharge
164	237	237	120	0

2024 Youth Center Intake Statistics



Felony Offenses	13
Misdemeanor Offenses	157
Other (status, tobacco, alcohol)	1
Seneca County Intakes	140
Other County Intakes	34
Seneca County Sentencing	124
Other County Sentencing	34
Annual Immediate Releases	0
Average Daily Population	9.75
Average Monthly Intakes	14.5
Average Monthly Immediate Releases	0
Average Length of Stay (in days)	22.26

Partnerships and Relationships

The Seneca County Juvenile and Probate Court would like to thank the many wonderful partners who work closely with us for the benefit of Seneca County residents.

- Community Action For Reducing Substance Abuse (CARSA)
- Firelands Counseling and Recovery Services
- Seneca Mentoring Youth Links (SMYL)
- Tiffin Parks and Recreation
- Seneca County Park District
- Mental Health and Recovery Services Board Of Seneca, Ottawa, Sandusky, and Wyandot Counties
- Seneca County Department of Job and Family Services
- All Area School Districts
- Area Counselors and Counseling Services
- Heidelberg University
- Seneca County Commissioners
- Tiffin University

- Tiffin-Seneca Public Library
- First Call For Help
- Ohio State Extension Service
- United Way
- Ottawa Sandusky Seneca Solid Waste District
- Tiffin Community YMCA
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)
- St. Francis Earth Literacy Center
- Camp Glen
- Camp Fire NW Ohio
- Fostoria Community YMCA
- Patchworks House
- Seneca County Family and Children First Counsel