

County Commission Update: Youth Services

By Wade Mathews, Public Information Officer; with contributions from Nicole Cline, Economic Development Director

As part of their commitment to the citizens of Tooele County, our Commissioners are always looking for ways to fill needs in the community. One need they identified as a result of the extensive growth in the county was a youth support network. The Commissioners created the Tooele County Youth Services to meet that need.

The program was a result of the efforts of a collective group of organizations and individuals who met for approximately 15 years to address the increase in harmful and detrimental behavior exhibited by many youth in Tooele County. One study conducted with our youth population concluded that there was a lack of rewards for positive social involvement. The results were youth participating in rebellious actions, interaction with anti-social peers, high family conflict, low attachment to community and school, and a family history of approval of anti-social behavior.

Tooele County worked with Valley Mental Health and the Tooele County School District to secure Title V funding for a safe place where troubled youth can receive assistance. Services include licensed counseling through Valley Mental Health, educational tutoring through Tooele County School District, and court ordered intervention through law enforcement officers. Counselors work with the youth and their families to teach communication and stress management skills and methods. There is no charge for the services. Parents and guardians, and the youth themselves, can request assistance from Youth Services.

Commissioner Colleen Johnson was instrumental in establishing Tooele County Youth Services, and has oversight of the program. "I think it's a wonderful service for the youth of Tooele County. It is fulfilling its intended purpose of providing much needed assistance for some of our troubled youth. It is a resource for parents who are struggling with these issues and don't know where else to go for help," she said. "We are always looking for ways to continue funding this valuable program."

Youth in the program realize that learning is fun and have shown dramatic improvement in grades and an increased interest in learning. The program also helps youth look into specific careers, and the education and skills they require. Youth Services also works with local business owners to allow the youth to participate in a job shadow opportunity of their choice.

The best time to help young people who are engaged in inappropriate activity is before they get to the Juvenile Justice System. That approach increases the chance of success and saves a large cost. The state spends \$5.7 billion each year on youth imprisonment, according to a 2009

Justice Policy Institute report. It also stated that incarcerated youth have higher recidivism rates than youth who remain in their communities.

“Youth Services is a good, safe place for the youth to be, rather than a holding cell, while they are getting the help they need. It is a great benefit to the community,” said Commissioner Bruce Clegg.

Unfortunately there will still be youth that go into the Juvenile system, but hopefully through Youth Services, that number is less. Since Youth Services opened on May 4, 2009, 576 youth have benefited from the opportunities there. Tooele Youth Services provides the stability in the lives of the youth that can be a foundation for a better future.