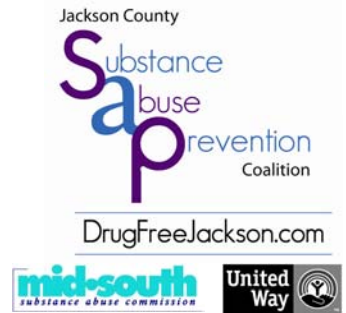


# PRESS RELEASE

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **One Step at a Time to a Better Brighter Future**

JACKSON (August 3, 2009) – Ever wonder about some of the ways our community is helping keep our youth on the right track toward a bright future? Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Jackson County Juvenile Court and the Jackson County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition work together to reduce substance abuse risk factors for our community's youth.

Big Brothers Big Sisters' vision is to provide successful mentoring relationships for all children who need and want them, contributing to brighter futures, better schools, and stronger communities for all. Currently Big Brothers Big Sisters serves more than 126 active matches and has more than 90 children in the program who are "On Deck", waiting to be matched with a mentor.

Researchers found that the involvement of a Big Brothers Big Sisters mentor in a young person's life for a year, reduced first-time drug use by 46 percent, school absenteeism by 52 percent and violent behavior by a third. Young people with mentors were more likely to perform well in school and relate better to family and friends and were less likely to start using alcohol.<sup>1</sup> The strong connection between risky behaviors and mentoring has lead Big Brothers Big Sisters to partner with the Jackson County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition and other community agencies to all strive to build bright futures for our youth.

When our community disregards our high risk youth until they become adults, there is a cost to our community not only in court costs and incarceration but family breakdowns as well. With Michigan's prisons, jails and youth institutions overflowing, we must address the youth of our community. The sobering reality is that it is much harder to address substance abuse problems, the older one gets. There is no silver bullet; however the Jackson County Juvenile Court is working hard to make sure the youth they serve are given the opportunity to make the necessary changes to get their lives back on track.

One such program is called FTOP; First Time Offenders Program. FTOP is facilitated by Family Services and Children's Aid. FTOP offers petitioned youth the opportunity to have first time petitions of tobacco, alcohol or marijuana remain suppressed from their permanent criminal record. The Care Coordination Center (CCC) completes an initial assessment determining if treatment needs. If eligible for FTOP, the petitioned youth, and a parent must successfully complete a six-week education class. If the youth is assessed to have more extensive problems an appropriate referral is made. The Juvenile Court is truly committed to see these youth make the changes necessary to remain a law-abiding citizen.

Together these agencies are committed to helping our youth remain drug and alcohol free.

<sup>1</sup> Tierney, J.P., Grossman, J.B., and Resch, N.L. (1995) [Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters](#). Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures