

The Court Reporter

[A Message from Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio](#)

I was so thrilled for the members of the Court's Probation Transformation Team when they received the Tony Panzino Award for JDAI Excellence from the Department of Youth Services at the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges Annual Meeting. The honor is a result and a testament of the diligence they showed when the Court embraced the task of reshaping the methods it uses to work with Court-involved youth. What I appreciate most is that the structure of the new approach entailed staff members to change the way they have operated for years. That type of professionalism is a microcosm of the entire Court staff, and the acknowledgment they received is richly-deserved.



The story in this newsletter about the pro-social activities offered our probation and detention youth is an example and an extension of the changes the Court has brought to its Probation Department and the JDAI model. It is heartening to see how the youth have responded to those activities and it is my hope that what they have learned can be utilized long after their involvement with the Court has ended.

[Court's Probation Transformation Team Earns Statewide Honor](#)

Teamwork.

There are many ways to define that term, but the Probation Department staff at the Summit County Juvenile Court have uniquely applied that very concept to re-purpose its Probation and Intake departments. That commitment to accept the challenge of change received statewide recognition. The Probation Transition Team was the recipient of the Tony Panzino Award for Excellence in JDAI at the Department of Youth Services (DYS) Community Recognition Awards in Columbus in late 2023. The award ceremony was part of the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges Annual Meeting.

JDAI is the acronym for the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative created by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 1993. It is devoted to building a better and more equitable juvenile justice system. The Summit County Juvenile Court was one of five counties in Ohio invited to serve as a JDAI model. That occurred in 2009. It is a partnership that has thrived. The Court was also one of 26 counties nationally to be recognized as a JDAI deep-end state which seeks to help juvenile justice jurisdictions safely and significantly reduce youth confinement and enhance system reforms. The latest partnership occurred when the Court was asked to become a Probation Transformation site in 2020.



Shown are the members of the Probation Transformation Team after receiving the DYS Tony Panzino Award for Excellence in JDAI. From left: Justin Burton, Jennifer Bond, Katy VanHorn, Lisa DiSabato-Moore, award namesake Tony Panzino, Kevin Floyd, and Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio.

The Court enthusiastically embraced the concept. It has created a team approach to addressing issues that confront youth and families when they become Court-involved. While each team has a decidedly different client base, there is a common goal for each one: to work with the youth and their families to provide support and evidence-based interventions that will further prevent a trajectory of involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Communication is a key element to the success of the Probation Department. Teams meet every week to track youth progress and rely on each other to problem solve the most difficult situations. It is a priority to include the family voice, and work with parents/care givers/guardians and youth to gather comprehensive, vital information so the Court worker can make an informed recommendation to the Judge or Magistrate hearing the case.

The staff also eliminated references to law enforcement, such as removing badges and titles that could be identified as law enforcement. This is done in hopes of engendering trust between the youth and staff and, as a result, more easily open lines of communication.

The results have been impressive. The Court has seen a 66% reduction in delinquency filings, from over 4,300 in 2009 to just over 1,400 in 2022, as well as a 76% reduction in dispositions to formal probation, from over 500 in 2009 to just 122 in 2022. Recent data also reflect that the Summit County Juvenile Court has one of the lowest rates of probation violations in the nation.

Those results were acknowledged by DYS and the person who called members of the Probation Transformation Team forward to receive the award was the man for whom the award was named. Recently retired, Tony Panzino was widely regarded as the leader of the Ohio JDAI movement in his role as Chief for the Bureau of Community Reinvestment for the DYS.

Panzino noted the long-standing commitment the Summit County Juvenile Court has had with JDAI and pointed to Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio's leadership in advancing the JDAI model. He praised the Probation Transformation Team's achieving such success in a relatively short period of time.

"There is no greater testament to the dedication and resolve of the Juvenile Probation staff of the Summit County Juvenile Court than that," said Panzino. "The Summit County Juvenile Court is at the center of juvenile justice reform in Summit County. It provides accountability, programming, and services for Court-involved youth, victims, and families with the goal of habilitation and enhancing public safety."

[Probation Staff Offers Pro-Social Activities to Youth to Promote Long Term Success](#)

The Summit County Juvenile Court's Probation Department staff is always looking for ways to better interact with the youth on their caseloads. When the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) offered Juvenile Courts throughout the state to apply for a Competitive RECLAIM Ohio grant, the Summit County Juvenile Court jumped at the chance. Court Operations Administrator Kevin Floyd saw the promise of such an opportunity and, with Judge Teodosio's blessing, applied for the grant. In April 2023 the Court received a \$30,000 to underwrite purchases for such activities.

Probation Administrator Jennifer Bond took the concept to Probation staff and asked them to include the prospect of their caseload youth taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the grant. Probation Supervisors encouraged staff members to speak with youth to gauge their interests and, from that, seek ways to accommodate them.

Bond recognized that this was a perfect vehicle to advance the probation transformation effort where staff members strive to be more approachable to the youth with which they work. They assume a role more like a coach than a strict authority figure. By discussing these activities and displaying a willingness to link to them to such opportunities, it could only serve to enhance those lines of communication.

"Not only would activities promote that type of interaction, but it also presents youth with the chance to really think about things that interest them," said Bond. "The grant gives them the opportunity to realize that. We were genuinely pleased with the diversity of their choices."

The activities requested have been recreational and professional. One youth earned a scholarship to attend truck driving school, but needed help with transportation, so gas cards were purchased so he could attend classes. Among other requests have been equine training, sewing equipment, an entry fee to a youth basketball league, art supplies, and even a saxophone.

The program is in its embryonic stage, but the response has been encouraging enough to maintain the grant and recommend Court-involved youth to think about things beyond their current situation; that these types of activities could jump-start a meaningful hobby or even a career. But the most important aspects are communication and opportunity.

The desired outcome of providing pro-social activities is that it diverts them away from becoming Court-involved again, and to offer them opportunities to gain experience they can take with them in their everyday lives. In the coming months, the staff's goal is to increase participation and prospects. Establishing such a program is an example and an extension of the probation transformation initiative that the staff has adopted.

"The primary goal is to introduce to them resources in their community so they can be successful long after their probation experience is behind them," stated Bond. "This is a positive youth developmental approach, and we are hoping it continues to grow."