

Juvenile Defenders Spend Time at a Juvenile Detention Center

Every other year the School of Government and Office of Indigent Defense Services hold a multi-day skills training for juvenile defenders in North Carolina. The first day of this year's intensive training was held at the Guilford County Juvenile Detention Center in Greensboro, NC. The juvenile defenders first heard sessions on adolescent brain development by Dr. Ayesha Chaudhary, Forensic Psychiatrist at Duke University, and detention advocacy by Mitch Feld, Director of Children's Defense at the Council for Children's Rights. This set the stage for the tour of the facility and conversations with the youth.

About the Guilford County Detention Center

A juvenile detention center is a secure facility where youths are placed temporarily if they are runaways or are alleged to have committed a delinquent act. Youths placed in detention may be held pending hearings in the case, disposition, or placement in a program or in a youth development center (YDC). YDCs and detention centers are both secure facilities. However, a YDC is an intensive dispositional option for juveniles who have a lengthy delinquency history or who have been adjudicated delinquent for a violent or serious offense. We chose to visit a detention center rather than a YDC because juvenile defenders have more clients locked up in detention centers than clients who are sent to YDC. For more information about the criteria for placing juveniles in detention (secure custody), see [North Carolina Juvenile Defender Manual](#) Ch. 8, Custody and Custody Hearings (UNC School of Government, 2008).

The Guilford County Juvenile Detention Center is the largest of eight detention centers in the state (six state and two county facilities). The original Guilford County Detention Center was designed to hold 24 juveniles but often held 30 to 35 juveniles with two juveniles in each room. The current facility was opened in 1998 and has 44 single occupancy rooms.

The Tour and Visit with the Juveniles

Along with other staff members, the manager, Doug Logan, led attorneys on a tour of the facility. Mr. Logan was a member of the committee that designed the current facility. In the mid-nineties, the committee visited a new detention center in Norfolk, Virginia. As a result, the new Guilford County Detention Center includes pods, which is an acronym for "principle of direct supervision." This model allows staff to supervise and interact with a small number of youth. Although federal guidelines require one staff for every twelve juveniles, the Guilford County Detention Center has one staff person for every eight juveniles. Mr. Logan believes it is important to have a lower ratio so that staff can keep the youth engaged and share frequent and meaningful interactions with the youth. The attorneys visited the pods where the juveniles share meals and engage in leisure activities such as games and watching television. They also stepped inside the small individual

rooms where they sleep.

The juvenile defenders admired Mr. Logan's commitment to addressing the needs of the juveniles and his efforts to create a positive and constructive environment. Yet, they could not forget that the youth are indeed locked up. The attorneys experienced the sound of heavy doors closing and locking as they moved from one room to the next. As they toured the detention center, they were relieved to see no bars (federal law does not allow bars on the doors or windows). However, all doors are always locked, and juveniles do not move anywhere without the supervision of staff. Many of the juveniles that are bound over to superior court for trial as an adult are held at the Guilford County Detention Center due to the level of security it provides.

After the tour, juvenile defenders had the opportunity to talk with male and female youth. They described the youth that they met as simply kids, with good hearts and full of hopes and dreams. The juvenile defenders talked with the youth about their plans for the future, education, and overall experience at the detention center. Some youth expressed frustration about the lack of consistent topics and, appropriate grade-level lessons in class. When they visited the classrooms, the juvenile defenders learned how teachers are challenged to meet the different academic needs of youth entering and leaving the facility, who range in age and educational level.

Spending the afternoon at the detention center definitely made an impression on the juvenile defenders. One juvenile defender even became distracted and uncomfortable with being in a locked room as she listened to the presentations. As she left the detention center, she expressed feeling anxious and uneasy. The experience reinforced the juvenile defenders zeal to provide quality representation, including advocating for release from detention when appropriate and for positive outcomes overall.

Keeping Juveniles Connected through Communication

Doug Logan expressed the importance of keeping the youth connected to their families and having access to their attorneys. To meet this goal, he is willing to explore innovative ways to ensure that juveniles can communicate with their families and attorneys.

Mr. Logan implemented video visitation at a local recreation center for family members who do not have transportation to the detention center. The facility is not located on the bus line; however, Mr. Logan is working to get the transit system to extend service to the detention center. Because the recreational center is in the community where a number of the youth live, most family members are able to walk or take a short bus ride to reach the recreational center. Mr. Logan worked with a community organization to provide the recreational and detention centers with equipment such as large monitors that would make the visitation more meaningful.

In-person meetings are essential to establishing and maintaining a relationship between the juvenile client and his or her attorney, but communicating with clients detained out of county can be

challenging. Mr. Logan will set up a meeting between attorneys and their clients via video conferencing. The juvenile is secured in a room alone, which should allow for confidential communications. However, staff maintains visual monitoring of the juvenile at all times. Video conferencing can be useful for attorneys to give periodic updates or check in with juvenile clients. It may not be appropriate for more substantive conversations about topics such as case strategy or plea negotiations.

One youth reinforced the idea that communication is critical. A juvenile defender asked him generally how attorneys could be better advocates. He has been detained for three years while awaiting resolution of his case transferred to superior court. He shared the following thoughts: "Maintain communications and always let us know what is going on in our cases. People tell us they are our lawyers, and they are going to help us. Then lots of times we don't hear back from them. Communication is key."

To arrange a meeting with their juvenile clients at the Guilford County Detention Center via telephone, video or in person, juvenile defenders can contact Doug Logan at dlogan@myguilford.com. Mr. Logan also welcomes judges, prosecutors and court counselors to contact him to schedule a tour of the Guilford County Detention Center in Greensboro, NC.