

North Carolina Youth Development Centers

In my last post I highlighted the Juvenile Reentry Second Chance Project that serves youth returning to their communities from out of home placements. This post will focus on a juvenile's out of home placement in a youth development center.

What is a Youth Development Center?

A youth development center (YDC) is a secure residential facility authorized to provide long-term treatment, education, and rehabilitative services for juveniles committed to the Department of Public Safety, Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice (DACJJ). See G.S. 7B-1501(29). There are four state operated facilities in North Carolina: Chatham YDC in Siler City; Lenoir YDC in Kinston; Edgecombe YDC in Rocky Mount; and Stonewall Jackson YDC in Concord. The combined capacity of the facilities is 248. All YDC's serve males; Chatham County is the only facility that serves females.

The court may commit a juvenile who is at least 10 years of age to the DACJJ for placement at YDC. See G.S. 7B-2506. This is the most intensive and restrictive disposition available to the North Carolina courts for juveniles adjudicated delinquent. Commitment to DACJJ is indefinite with a minimum six month commitment. The term of commitment must end by the juvenile's 18th, 19th or 21st birthday depending on the offense. See G.S. 7b-2513.

According to the [FY2016-2017 Youth Development Center Annual Report](#), the statewide average length of stay (not commitment) is 322 days. The stay is not the same as the commitment because juveniles are committed to the DACJJ but may not begin their stay at YDC until later. They usually are in a detention center awaiting placement at YDC.

“Before Anything Else, Preparation is the Key to Success.” Alexander Graham Bell.

Attorneys, judges and other juvenile justice professionals are usually familiar with the law and how youth are committed to DACJJ and placed at YDC. However, they may not know how the facilities operate or what is required of youth while committed.

All juvenile justice professionals interacting with court-involved youth should learn the fundamentals about Youth Development Centers. For example, it's helpful for judges to know where youth development centers are located in relation to the juvenile's family, what services are available at the facility, and how the juvenile's needs can be addressed. This information could affect the court's decision about disposition. Depending on the juvenile's delinquency history level and offense classification, (disposition chart) the court has discretion to enter a level two disposition, which would not result in commitment to DACJJ and placement at YDC, or level three disposition, which would involve commitment. See G.S. 7B-2507 and G.S. 7B-2508 (d-g). If the disposition

chart prescribes a level three disposition, the court may impose a level two disposition if the court submits written findings of the juvenile's extraordinary needs. See G.S. 7B-2508(3). Disposition charts are provided on the [training materials](#) page on the North Carolina Office of the Juvenile Defender website.

Juvenile defenders should also become familiar with Youth Development Centers so they can prepare the family and juvenile for what to expect after commitment. For example, if the attorney can explain details such as the structure and daily routine at YDC, the juvenile will be better prepared to transition to YDC. Preparing the juvenile can give them confidence, help them perform better, and hopefully lead to a successful release and period of post release supervision. Although the juveniles' performance is ultimately the key to their success, attorneys have a critical role in preparing their clients.

Training

The School of Government includes training on YDCs as well as juvenile detention centers where youth are held waiting court appearances or placement. I accompanied the judges who visited the Chatham County Youth Development Center as part of their juvenile delinquency training program. We spoke with several staff members and toured the facility, including the classrooms, kitchen, common areas and individual sleeping rooms. At the end of the tour we met with youth currently confined to the YDC, along with the director and clinician. The youth openly discussed their experiences, lessons learned and goals for the future.

Juvenile defenders will receive training on YDCs at the upcoming annual conference on August 17, 2018. Directors from two Youth Development Centers will speak about preparing clients for the facility. They will also discuss how they prepare for the juvenile's admission. Juvenile defenders should contact [Tanya Jisa](#) to register for the conference.

For more details about youth developments centers, read the latest [Annual Report on Youth Development Centers](#).