

THE COURT REPORT

*Court & Community: Working Together Today
For A Better Tomorrow*

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The mission of the Ottawa County Probate and Juvenile Court is to provide efficient, fair, and quality services to the people of Ottawa County. We are committed to protect the rights and safety of our citizens, to work cooperatively with all community resources, and to improve the lives of children and families.

Common Pleas Court Juvenile & Probate

Judge

Kathleen L. Giesler

Court Administrator

Lori Clune

Director of Probation Services

Jay Faris

Probation Officers

Julie Bowman

William Lehr

Mike Reynolds

Stephanie Weeks

Specialized Dockets Coordinator

Cheryl Seigley

Diversion Officer

Elizabeth Holland

Chief Deputy Clerk

Robin Wahlers

Deputy Clerk/Intake Officer – Juvenile

Kay Kroeger

Deputy Clerk/Fiscal Officer – Juvenile

Gloria Shenkel

Deputy Clerk – Probate

Linda Chapman

Deputy Clerk – Probate/Juvenile

Sue Jenkins

Deputy Clerk – Probate/Juvenile

Jennifer Simpson



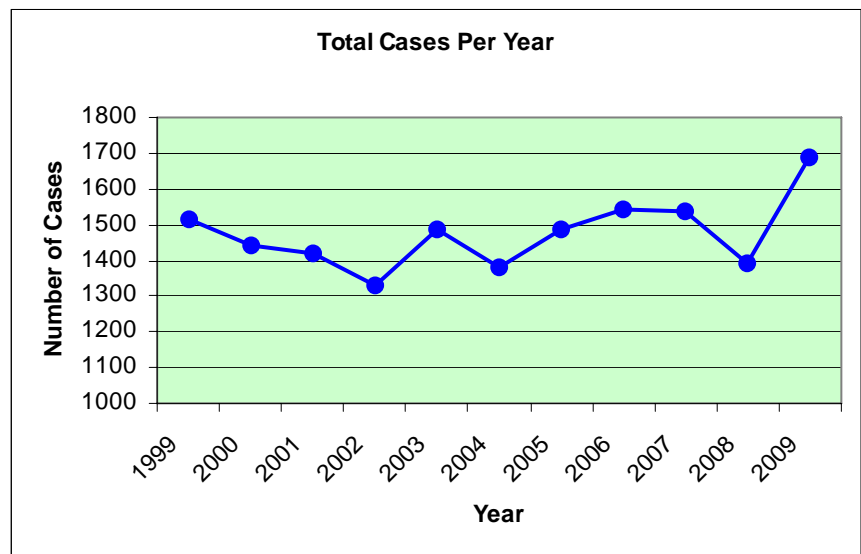
A Message from Judge Giesler

The Court of Common Pleas, both Juvenile and Probate Divisions, has been involved in a strategic planning process for almost two years. This process has given us the opportunity to look back at what has been accomplished over the last few years and to plan for the years ahead.

Through that process, it became apparent and important to the Court to strive for more open communication with the people of Ottawa County, to be more accountable and to gain valuable insight from the people we serve. In order to accomplish those objectives, we will endeavor to keep the citizens of Ottawa County abreast of the latest happenings at our Court through our quarterly newsletter.

For our annual report, we compared statistical information over the last five years. We were then able to project what kinds of services will be needed in the future. We also scrutinized existing programs, added new programs and removed programs that were no longer in keeping with our strategic plan.

There was a dramatic increase in the number of new and transferred-in cases for the year 2009. From a low of 1,330 in 2002 to a high of 1,688 in 2009, the chart below compares total cases over the last ten years, including juvenile and adult cases.



ABUSE, NEGLECT, DEPENDENCY

2151.03 – Neglected Child - A neglected child has been abandoned or lacks adequate parental care.

2151.031 – Abused Child - An abused child includes any child who exhibits evidence of serious physical or emotional injury, not accidentally inflicted, or who is the victim of sexual abuse.

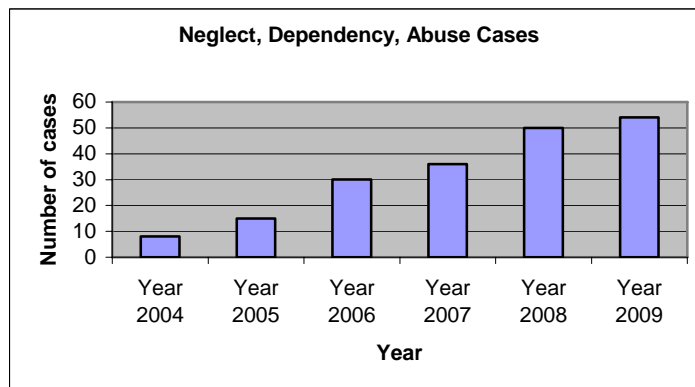
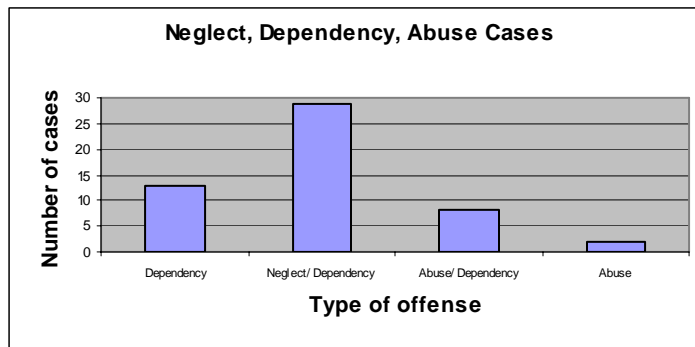
2151.04 – Dependent Child - A dependent child is homeless or destitute or without adequate parental care, through no fault of the child's parents, guardian or custodian. This child may also reside in a household in which a member of the household abused or neglected a sibling of the child, thereby endangering the child who has not yet been abused or neglected.

Child Abuse, Neglect and Dependency Cases

When a complaint is made concerning the welfare of a child, the Ottawa County Department of Job and Family Services is responsible for protecting that child. The role of the Juvenile Court is to determine whether or not the allegations are true. The Court must decide what is in the best interest of the child and approve a course of action to correct the problems.

If the Court determines that a child is in immediate danger, the Court will seek a responsible relative who is willing to provide for the child's care. If a relative is not available or willing, then the child is placed in foster care.

There were 54 cases of abuse, neglect and/or dependency that came before the Court in 2009. These children ranged in age from less than one year old to 17 years old. 29 cases involved children six years old and under. With 34 cases pending from the year before and 86 cases transferred in, the total number of abuse, neglect and dependency cases was 174.



Surovjak Retires From Juvenile Court



BJ Surovjak has retired from Juvenile Court. Surovjak came to Juvenile Court in February of 2006, after working for several years in higher education. Initially hired to coordinate the FACT program, her duties soon grew to include oversight of the Student Achievement Program, coordination of truancy mediation and community service, the development and editing of the court newsletter and the writing of the annual report.

When asked how she feels about retiring, Surovjak said, “This has been a dream job for me and, although I look forward to retirement, I will miss the challenges, the research, the writing, and especially my colleagues here at court and everyone involved with the Student Achievement Program. I leave Juvenile Court proud to have been part of a state-recognized program which has contributed to the successful educational goals of so many of the youth with whom we work.”

Community Service

The community service program is designed to serve youth who have been ordered to perform a designated number of community service hours. These hours must be completed at a public service work site and the youth receive no monetary compensation. Youth working community service hours realize an immediate consequence to certain negative behaviors. Currently, there are 22 different sites around the County available to youth. Youth serve in their own communities in order to instill in them a sense of belonging to that community along with responsibility for their community.

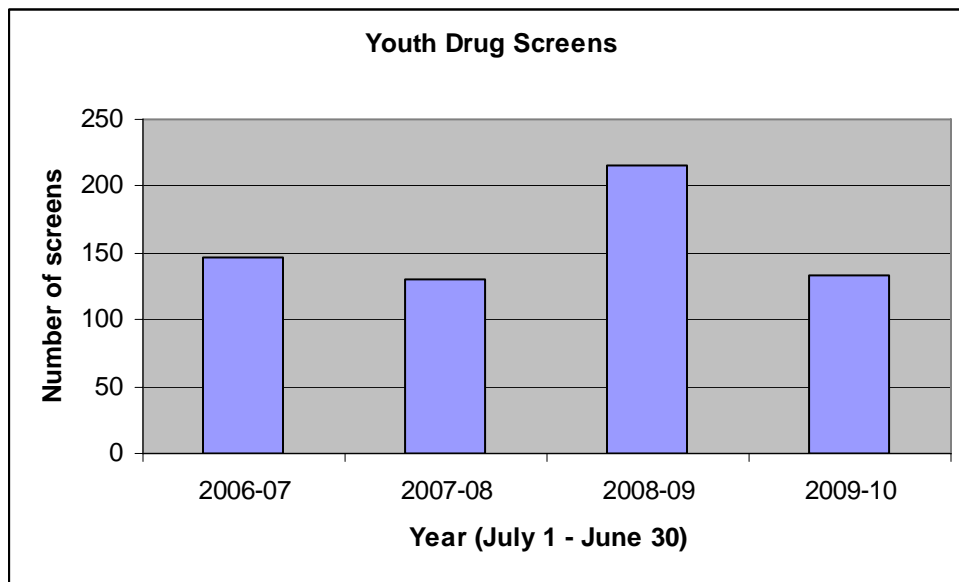
In 2009, 111 youth served a total of 3,654.25 hours of community service.

The court also partners with OSS Solid Waste District to clean up the county’s roadways. Ottawa County youth covered over 200 miles of roads and collected over 3,000 pounds of litter. At the request of the Put-In-Bay Township Trustees, they also spent a day picking up trash on South Bass Island.



Substance Abuse Testing

The substance abuse testing program is used to ensure that youth are not using drugs during the course of their probation. If the test is positive, a probation violation is filed. If the test is negative, that information is placed in the youth's file as proof of compliance. Cost of drug screens and equipment to conduct screens is about \$2,000.00 per year.



Diversion Program

We are excited about the new Diversion Program! As the Diversion Officer, Elizabeth Holland's duties include working with the youth and their families once they have been placed in the Diversion Program. The Diversion Program is a chance for youth, who are first time non-violent offenders, to correct their mistakes without having a juvenile record. Elizabeth will maintain a caseload similar to traditional probation. She will conduct a needs assessment on all youth and their families. She will prepare and explain a contract agreement for all youth in the program. Elizabeth will monitor these cases to ensure the contracts are being followed. She will also refer youth to any community resources necessary and will utilize mediation when appropriate. In 2009, 9 youth entered the diversion program. This program is supported by Juvenile rule 9(A) that states, "in all appropriate cases formal court action should be avoided and other community resources utilized to ameliorate situations brought to the attention of the court."