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**Maryland**

DEPARTMENT OF  
JUVENILE SERVICES

## Department of Juvenile Services Customer Service Annual Report



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## Table of Contents

FY20 Highlights.....	4
Recognition Given to Employees .....	5
Leadership Analysis of FY20 and Summary of FY21 Approach .....	7
Detailed FY20 Results and FY21 Plans .....	10
Customer Service Survey Results.....	10
Status of Customer Service Training.....	10
Customer Inquiry Response Times and Overall Time-to-Resolution.....	11
Timeliness of Responding to Customer Inquiries .....	11
Best Practices .....	11
Plans for Improvement .....	11
Improving the Customer Experience from Multiple Perspectives.....	11
Making Agency Services Available Online.....	11
Processing Times for Customer Transactions .....	12
Adjusting Hours to Meet Customer Demands .....	12
Social Media Usage to Improve the Customer Experience.....	12

## FY20 Highlights

- In response to the restrictions on in-person meetings and interactions due to the COVID-19 virus, DJS implemented the for the first time virtual “Information Sessions” beginning in April 2020. Using YouTube’s platform, the Information Sessions were live streamed and reached hundreds of DJS staff and families. The Information Sessions were led by Secretary Sam Abed and a team of Executive staff, who answered questions from DJS staff and families sent via email.
- DJS’s Family Peer Support Initiative currently operates in five Maryland jurisdictions: Anne Arundel County; Baltimore City; Baltimore County; Prince George’s County; and Wicomico County. Through this customer-focused program, DJS youth and families in those jurisdictions are linked to “peer supports” to help guide them through the juvenile justice process and connect them to services in the community. Since the program’s inception in September 2018, 428 families have been referred to the Family Peer Support Initiative.
- In January 2020, DJS implemented its first Statewide DJS employee awards program. Developed and administered by the DJS Employee Recognition Committee, this program has recognized 30 DJS staff over the course of 8 months for their outstanding work and commitment to DJS families, the agency and the State.
- DJS continued to use its website and social media platforms to promote events, job postings and recognize staff.

## Recognition Given to Employees

### **DJS Employee of the Month Award**

- January – Cory Hanlin – Backbone Mountain Youth Center
- February – Kristen Salter – Western Maryland Children’s Center
- March – Ena High – Baltimore City
- April – Robin Strozier – Baltimore City
- May – Nailah Queen – Baltimore City
- June – Angelina Diaz – Western Maryland Children’s Center
- July – Jemime White - Headquarters
- August – Keeona Marshall – Alfred D. Noyes Children’s Center

### **DJS Hero Award<sup>1</sup>**

- April – Kendra Foster – Headquarters
- Kathleen Lester – Headquarters
- Dacia Jarvis – Thomas J.S. Waxter Children’s Center
- Brent Williams – Cheltenham Youth Center
- Jens Rygh – Upper Marlboro
- Donavin Vinson – Green Ridge Youth Center
- Rachael Hoppe – Baltimore City
- May – Vivian Iheanacho – Charles H. Hickey School
- Justine Buckingham – Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center
- Jose Baez – Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center
- June – James Vaughn - Transportation
- July – Kathy Miller – Victor Cullen Center
- August – Melissa Liszewski - Headquarters

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<sup>1</sup> Award implemented beginning in April 2020 to recognize the outstanding work of DJS employees during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

## **DJS Shining Star Award<sup>2</sup>**

April – Donna Orwig – Eastern Shore

May – Gary Wilson - Maintenance

June – Antoinette McNair – Baltimore City  
Heather Hibbard - Frederick

July – Billy Reams – Green Ridge Youth Center  
Stephanie Clise – Cumberland  
Lynn Johnson – Headquarters

August – Lauren Jenkins – Headquarters  
Renita Statler - Hagerstown

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<sup>2</sup> Award implemented beginning in April 2020 to recognize the outstanding work of DJS employees during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

## Leadership Analysis of FY20 and Summary of FY21 Approach

### **DJS RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 VIRUS PANDEMIC**

When the COVID-19 virus arrived in Maryland in March 2020, DJS implemented substantial reforms to its operations and practices in order to keep DJS staff, youth and families safe.

In order to be more responsive to the needs of DJS's primary customers, ie. youth and families, and create transparency, a specialized page was created on the DJS website to provide the most recent COVID-19 information and statistics related to the agency's operations. Customers can access the COVID-19 page on the DJS website to learn about all of the agency's infection control measures and other reforms to its operations to reduce the risk among DJS staff and youth. Additionally, data related to COVID-19 positive results among DJS staff, youth, and private providers is provided on a daily basis. The DJS COVID-19 page can be found here:

<https://djs.maryland.gov/Pages/COVID-19.aspx>

### **DJS FAMILY AND STAFF LIVE STREAMS**

When the COVID-19 virus arrived in Maryland in March 2020, there was a critical need to share updates and information regarding the major changes occurring in DJS facilities and community operations. To reach DJS staff and families, DJS leadership leveraged the use of technology to disseminate information remotely and safely.

In April 2020, Secretary Abed and his team of executive staff began conducting DJS staff and family Information Sessions through YouTube. During those sessions with DJS staff and families, respectively, DJS executive staff and agency experts answered a variety of questions submitted via email. Questions ranging from how infection control measures like quarantine and medical isolation were being implemented in DJS facilities to personnel and fair practice issues were answered by DJS experts.

All of the Information Sessions for DJS staff and families, respectively, were live streamed and recorded on YouTube. Since April 2020, the Department has held seven staff live streams and averaged 378 viewers per session. During that same time period, DJS held six family live streams and averaged 121 viewers per session. The overall success of these live-streamed Information Sessions has convinced the DJS leadership to continue them on a monthly basis going forward into FY 21.

### **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

DJS works with many stakeholders within the juvenile justice system in Maryland, but its primary customers are youth and families.

In 2015, DJS created the Office of Family Engagement for the purpose of improving the experiences of youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system in Maryland.

For youth residing in DJS's secure facilities throughout the State, the opportunity to have regular and meaningful contact with family members plays an important role in the youth's overall well-being. In FY 2018, DJS's Office of Family Engagement distributed "toolkits" to DJS facility staff to provide a practical guide for implementing engaging family events. Whether through a yoga and meditation class exercise or a class that taught youth and families how to create a family budget and savings plan, DJS staff and outside volunteers provide more opportunities for youth and their families to having meaningful visits at DJS facilities.

Due to the arrival of the COVID-19 virus in Maryland, DJS had to implement infection control measures for the safety and well-being of DJS youth and staff in facilities. As one of the measures, DJS had to suspend all outside visitation to DJS facilities in March 2020, when the pandemic crisis started in Maryland. This was a difficult decision but necessary to reduce the likelihood that youth and staff would be exposed to COVID-19 from community members.

To compensate for the suspension of in-person family visitation, DJS increased the amount of contact youth could have with family members via telephone and, if feasible, video chat. Additionally, DJS provided cell phones to youth in medical isolation recovering from the COVID-19 virus. Generally, cell phones are considered contraband in DJS facilities but executive leadership relaxed that prohibition so that youth recovering in medical isolation could have as much contact with family members as they would like.

Going forward, DJS will continue to balance the importance of maintaining links to family and the safety and health of DJS youth and staff.

## **FAMILY PEER SUPPORT INITIATIVE**

In September 2019, DJS implemented the Family Peer Support Initiative in five Maryland jurisdictions. This initiative is a customer-focused program that helps guide DJS youth and families through the juvenile justice process. All of the staff who act as "peer supports" have had previous experience with the juvenile justice system, whether it was their own child or other family member. This shared experience helps build the rapport between the peer supports and the youth and families that they serve. Peer supports play an important role in not only guiding a family through the juvenile justice process but also connecting the family to services in the community that help with other issues related to social services, school resources and treatment providers. Additionally, peer supports work closely with DJS case managers who are supervising youth in the community. As seen in other human service agencies, family peer support



programs have been shown to reduce parental stress, increase the sense of empowerment, and motivate families to increase their involvement in the process.

The Family Peer Support Initiative continues to operate in five jurisdictions: Anne Arundel County; Baltimore City; Baltimore County; Prince George's County; and Wicomico County. At the time of this publication, 428 families have been referred to the Family Peer Support Initiative. These referrals have led to over 700 meetings between families and peer supports. Additionally, peer supports have connected families to 300 community resources, such as food assistance, job training and treatment.

## **EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS PROCESS**

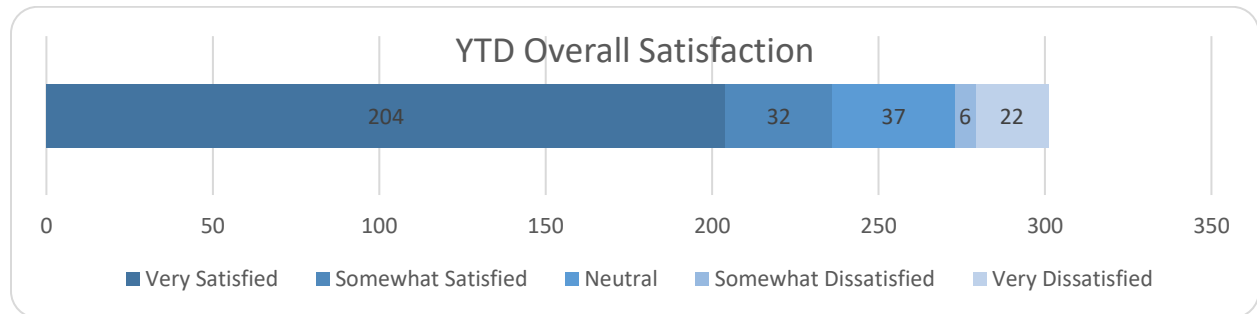
In March 2019, an Employee Recognition Committee (Committee) was formed to develop a formalized awards program for DJS employees. After several months, the Committee developed and drafted a formalized policy to recognize DJS employees across the State. In January 2020, the Committee began accepting nominations for the DJS Employee of the Month award. After considering many strong nominations, the Committee awarded the first-ever DJS Employee of the Month Award to a resident advisor who worked with DJS youth at Backbone Mountain Youth Center in Swanton, Maryland.

The Committee has continued to recognize DJS employees with the DJS Employee of the Month award through the present time. However, when the COVID-19 virus arrived in March 2020, DJS employees around Maryland went above and beyond their normal duties to provide essential services to DJS youth and families. At that time, the Committee decided to expand the award system in order to recognize additional DJS employees for their dedication, hard work and exemplary service during the pandemic crisis. Beginning in April 2020, the DJS Hero Award and the Shining Star Award were implemented and the Committee recognized several DJS employees through those awards. A complete list of winners for 2020 can be found in the "Recognition Given to Employees" section of this Report.

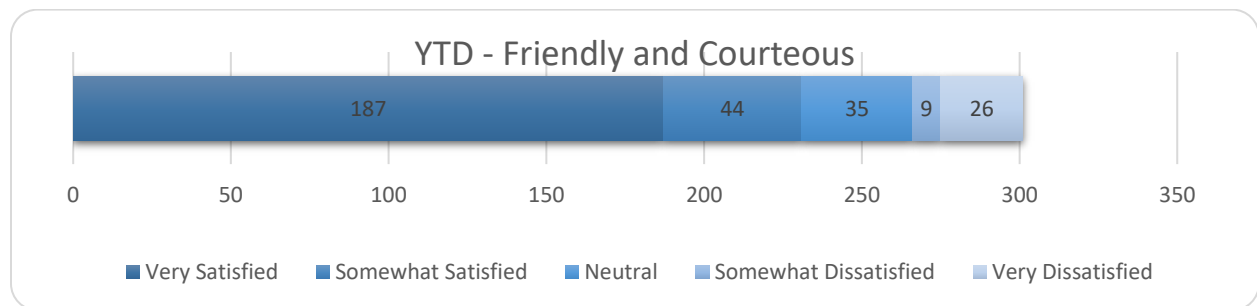
All DJS award winners receive a certificate of recognition signed by the Chief of Staff. Additionally, award winners are recognized through social media posts on Facebook and Twitter that include the winners' pictures and a brief description of their exemplary performance in service to DJS youth and families. These social media posts are typically seen by hundreds of people.

## Detailed FY20 Results and FY21 Plans

### Customer Service Survey Results



- From January 1, 2020 to September 21, 2020, 301 responses were provided to the overall satisfaction question. Of the 301 total responses, 236 or 78% indicated that the customer was satisfied.



- From January 1, 2020 to September 21, 2020, 301 responses were provided to the statement that the customer received friendly and courteous service. Of the 301 total responses, 231 or 77% indicated that the customer agreed that they were satisfied with the friendly and courteous service they received.

### Status of Customer Service Training

As of September 21, 2020, a total of 1,016 DJS employees have completed customer service training in 2020, which is 51% of the agency's workforce. This training includes both online and classroom training although most training went online in response to the

COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The department will continue its efforts to ensure that customer service training is ongoing for both new and seasoned staff.

## Customer Inquiry Response Times and Overall Time-to-Resolution

### Timeliness of Responding to Customer Inquiries

DJS strives to accurately and timely respond to inquiries directed toward the agency. Most written inquiries directed to the agency's headquarters, whether they are public information act requests or general inquiries, are resolved within 2 to 4 weeks.

### Best Practices

The majority of customer inquiries received by DJS headquarters are public information act requests. The process of reviewing and responding to those requests is centralized under the agency's Director of Communication. Other customer inquiries are directed to the Chief of Staff, who is the agency's customer service lead. By centralizing the process of handling customer inquiries to headquarters between two individuals, the agency can be more efficient and consistent in the manner it works with its customers.

### Plans for Improvement

## **EXPANSION OF FAMILY PEER SUPPORT**

As a result of the initial success of the program in the five jurisdictions, the Office of Family Engagement is in the process of developing plans to expand the Family Peer Support Initiative statewide in FY 21. The department has started the procurement process and looks forward to making an award to start services by the end of year.

## Improving the Customer Experience from Multiple Perspectives

### Making Agency Services Available Online

DJS's website is continually undergoing improvements to enhance the user experience and ease of accessibility. Currently, DJS has online forms for customers to make a public information request. DJS has enhanced its website to help youth and families locate each of DJS's 34 community offices and 11 facilities around the State.

Additionally, the DJS website has a page that provides the menus and the food of the month for each of its 11 secure facilities. DJS also has a page that displays facility capacity through visual indicators to assist judges and magistrates in making court decisions.

Additionally, there is a family tab to for DJS families to obtain information about the juvenile justice system, the department's resources and community resources.

#### Processing Times for Customer Transactions

Intake is the first point of contact between the department and youth, who are most often brought to the department's attention through a juvenile complaint filed by law enforcement. At this critical junction, DJS intake staff must review the complaint and meet with the youth, family and other caretakers and the victim if possible to determine how the youth's case will proceed. A youth's case could be formally sent to the State's Attorney to potentially begin the court process or could be informally handled outside of the court through DJS or resolved at intake entirely.

In FY20, the rate of DJS intake workers finalizing juvenile intake decisions within 25 days and meeting the intake decision deadline was 81%. That figure increased to a 97% rate of intake resolution within 60 days. DJS is pleased with this result because timely case forwarding decisions at intake are critical to ensure justice, fairness and public safety for the community, victims and youth involved in juvenile offenses.

#### Adjusting Hours to Meet Customer Demands

DJS's primary contact with youth and families in the community are in the department's community offices throughout the State. These community offices are divided among six operating regions. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, DJS community operations had to adjust its operations to cease in-person visits between DJS staff and youth in its offices. Instead, DJS staff focused on remote contacts with youth either through cell phone or video chats. Moving into FY 21, DJS will look for safe, socially distanced ways to resume in-person meetings in the community.

#### Social Media Usage to Improve the Customer Experience

DJS saw an increase in Facebook likes of approximately 15% from September 2019 to mid-September 2020. For any messages or posts on Facebook, DJS' Communications Office responds within 24 hours. DJS utilizes Facebook to announce events such as its

Annual Day to Serve events, employee awards - especially in the time of COVID-19, distribute public health information, entry-level graduations, job recruitment listings, family engagement, and youth activities. Typically, DJS' Facebook posts reach an average of 350 people.

Similarly, DJS utilizes its Twitter account to promote various events that highlight the department's work with youth and employee recognition. DJS currently has 1795 Twitter followers, which is also a 15% increase from last year.

In FY 2021, DJS will continue to promote important events, employee recognitions and providing more information about the agency's reform efforts, initiatives, and explanations about the juvenile justice system generally. The department believes that social media can be a valuable tool to provide helpful information to its customers and better insight into how the juvenile justice process works in Maryland. In addition, social media is another resource for families, youth, employees, and the general public to engage with the department.

## Conclusion

As was the case for most State agencies and organizations throughout the U.S., the impact of the arrival of the COVID-19 virus in Maryland changed the way that DJS did business. In order to keep DJS youth and staff safe, DJS leadership acted quickly to implement strict infection control measures, internal contact tracing capacity and universal testing at all DJS facilities. In the community, DJS continued its 24/7 community detention operations and supervision through telephone and video contacts. In each county, DJS has identified at least one staff member to gather community-bases resources and supports to connect families to organizations that provide food, health resources, and crisis interventions. Going forward, DJS remains committed to provide the support to youth and families need to help them successfully navigate these challenging times.



