



Douglas County Juvenile Assessment Center, Nebraska

OVER 20 YEARS OF IMPACT

Over the past 20 years, the JAC has fostered strong relationships within the community, bringing together Douglas County administrators, judges, attorneys, and service providers to celebrate its impactful work and milestone achievements.



The Douglas County Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) located in Omaha, Nebraska, is committed to enhancing the well-being of youth by providing support to youth and families who are engaged with, or at risk of involvement with, the juvenile justice system. With a belief in tailoring support to each individual's unique risks and needs, the JAC serves as a pivotal hub for evidence-based practices in juvenile justice youth diversion, primarily focusing on screening, assessment and connection to individualized supports.

Acting as the central point for conducting comprehensive assessments of youth referred to the Douglas County Attorney's Office (DCAO), the JAC aims to provide recommendations to the County Attorney for appropriate supervision

and supports, and to divert eligible youth from formal processing, while proposing interventions aimed at deterring further legal infractions and fostering positive youth development.

By adhering to evidence-based principles such as the risk/need/responsivity principle, the JAC ensures targeted referrals based on a standardized and objective screening and assessment process, and active engagement of both youth and their families throughout this process. Assessment results guide the JAC's response to each youth, with a focus on aligning individual needs with appropriate support, treatment, and case management to reduce the likelihood of re-offense and promote positive youth development.

The JAC makes referrals to service providers and programs which are aligned with youth and family needs and closely monitors the utilization and effectiveness of these services.

The JAC philosophy emphasizes early, effective, and frequent intervention to disrupt patterns of delinquency and encourage healthy development.

Additionally, collaboration with community agencies and service providers is prioritized to develop program capacity that addresses the diverse needs of youth and families, offering the youth and families a comprehensive range of support options.



Best Practices

Originally organized under the guidelines published by the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and now aligned under the framework promulgated by the National Assessment Center Association (NAC), the Douglas County Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) is a recognized Tier II Assessment Center, providing the cornerstone of best practices for juvenile justice youth services, particularly in screening and assessment.

The JAC is committed to aligning with national best practices. In 2023, the JAC completed the National Assessment Center Association's self-assessment process which allows Centers to examine, review, and reflect on their current operations and to what extent those operations align with the Assessment Center Framework. At the completion of the cohort, the Douglas County JAC developed an action plan and is currently in the process of implementing elements of that action plan to ensure best practice.

As a result of the self assessment and efforts to come into full alignment with evidenced based practices and philosophy, the JAC secured funding to expand staff capacity in 2024. This has allowed for substantial increases in client assessment time frames, escalated response times for youth screened out of detention, and more effective and hands-on case management.

JAC IN THE PRESS:

According to a late 2023 article by the Nebraska Examiner ([CLICK HERE to read the article](#)), the Douglas County JAC is reported to save taxpayers by diverting youth who have interacted with law enforcement away from the court system and incarceration. In an interview, Director Johnson mentioned that approximately 77% of the youth served at the assessment center do not become repeat offenders.

"JAC saves taxpayers between \$1.4 million and \$4.5 million annually in part by reducing the need for more intensive case management services."

Law Enforcement and the Community

The JAC Approach:

- All referrals to the JAC are made by the Douglas County Attorney's Office (DCAO).
- Youth is cited with law violation or referred to JAC with a status offense.
- Youth are assessed using standardized, objective assessment instruments to identify risk of re-offense, needs, education-related problems, strengths and protective factors.
- Youth and family input are crucial components of the assessment process.
- Assessment results drive the justice system's response to the youth.
- JAC recommends a response to the DCAO that accounts for the youth's individual circumstances.
- DCAO reviews all JAC recommendations and provides final approval for Diversion Case Plans.
- Emphasis is on matching the youth's needs with treatment, rehabilitation, and supervision, which diminishes the likelihood of re-offense, and provides the youth the opportunity for growth and rehabilitation.
- Philosophy is to intervene as early, effectively and often as possible to disrupt the youth's unsafe or unhealthy circumstances, and to promote healthy development.
- Collaboration with Community Agencies and Service Providers to develop program capacity which gives the justice system a wide selection of options for youth to meet each individual's specific and unique needs.



Delivering Results: How the JAC’s Evaluation and Continuous Improvement Drive Youth Success



In 2020, the JAC completed an evaluation from an outside consulting firm; Category ONE Consulting. This intensive, two-year evaluation closely examined all processes from initial referral to the JAC past completion of diversion (recidivism). The group of consultants and stakeholders studied all youth characteristics, assessment results, youth needs, services and interventions, experiences and impacts, policies and procedures, and purpose of the JAC.

Feedback from youth and guardians served in 2018 about their experience at the JAC is generally positive (see pie chart above). Many appreciate the clear, supportive, and non-judgmental approach of the staff, although some express a desire for more follow-up.

A significant number of youth show improvements in various areas after engaging with the JAC, such as decision-making and attitude. About 75% of youth served by the JAC do not reoffend within a year! Data shows that completion of plans developed through the JAC process significantly reduces reoffense rates, indicating the positive impact of the JAC.

Recommendations from the evaluation have been fully implemented and further evaluated and analyzed through ongoing continuous quality improvement efforts.

Top Areas of Satisfaction

1. Clear and Transparent Process
2. Excellent Staff (helpful; no judgement)
3. Personalized Approach
4. Help & Support to Cope & Change
5. Eye-Opening & Gave Second Chance



“The JAC is in a unique and fortunate position to work, along with partners, to address youth needs and get them back on the right track so that they can be their best selves.”

-Shawne Johnson (JAC Director)



Trends & Expanding Impact

How Douglas County JAC Enhances Youth Services and Strengthens Community Safety

Over the past two decades, the JAC has worked closely with the Douglas County Attorney’s Office to ensure both community safety and the most effective and impactful service to youth. These two agencies have endeavored to expand referral criteria. Currently all youth who do not have an open Court Docket can be referred to the JAC for assessment. This includes youth with felony charges, youth presenting to detention but screened out, multiple repeating cases and former diversion and probation experience.

Along with expanding the referral base, the JAC has subsequently seen an increase in the level of needs youth are experiencing, specifically in the areas of personality and behavior, family circumstances and parenting, and education.

The JAC efforts to focus resources and supports on those youth with higher needs, and to continue to divert youth from the formal system have resulted in a current trend of 30% of youth being recommended for Informal Diversion, 60-65% of youth receiving recommendations for services and supports to include intensive gang intervention, therapy and in-home family support, and less than 10% of youth progressing with Court recommendations.

The JAC continues to utilize evaluation and assessment results, along with ongoing continuous quality improvement and data analysis, anchored by the NAC Framework, to examine and improve processes. The JAC is committed to using these resources to improve our services to youth and impact on youth families and the community.

Douglas County Juvenile Assessment Center

1111 S 41st St.
Suite 120
Omaha, NE 68105

[Click here to access the JAC website](#)