



Protect yourself, your family & your community from the flu. **Get vaccinated.**



News Opinion Sports Entertainment Classifieds Records Discussions Community



Contact Neighbors

Digital Edition Local National & World Business & Tech Politics Fracking Food Society Education Health & Home Religion Travel

Login Digital Edition Print Edition



JOB



HOMES



WHEELS



CLASSIFIEDS

< News Home

Youths incarcerated at Cuyahoga offered education, parent training

Comment Email Print

Tweet 0 +1 0 Recommend

Published: Wed, September 19, 2012 @ 12:00 a.m.

By Ashley Luthern

aluthern@vindy.com

HIGHLAND HILLS

The 16-foot fence gives it away.

As visitors approach Cuyahoga Hills Juvenile Correctional Facility, a large brick building, basketball courts and sizable garden give it the appearance of a high school campus instead of a youth prison.

That is, until one notices the sizable fence surrounding the secure facility.

Cuyahoga Hills is one of four youth prisons operated by the Ohio Department of Youth Services. Only the serious offenders, who have been adjudicated delinquent, the juvenile equivalent of being found guilty, are committed, or sentenced, to DYS.

Cuyahoga Hills is a minimum-to-medium security facility and recently won the Barbara Allen-Hagan Award as the top juvenile correctional facility in the country. The Vindicator visited Cuyahoga Hills in July. Its population that day was 162 youth males with an average age of 18.

Superintendent Katie Needham, a Struthers native, has worked in DYS for 26 years and in that time has seen many changes.

“We do a lot of advanced verbal strategies, which we didn’t do when I started

Advertisement for National Foundation for Infectious Diseases with text: 'Protect yourself, your family and your community from the flu. Get vaccinated. LEARN MORE'

Most Commented Most Emailed

Popular

- Obama: Our path...'leads to a better place' (48)
- President earned another term (48)
- Group protests local fracking in Youngstown (46)
- Strickland, Castro, first lady wow delegates at DNC (40)
- Campbell ex-mayor tries to lure fuel plant (40)

VINDY HOMES

Cortland
Residential
3 bedroom, 1 bath
\$51000

Columbiana
Commercial
bedroom, bath
\$1850000

Browse | Find an Agent | Open Houses

- Advertisement -

with the department,” she said. “Instead of resorting to trying to force the kids to do it, it’s more about managing them verbally.”

Cuyahoga Hills is divided into eight open-dormitory style living units. Youths are divided into units depending on their risk score.

In 2011, the facility logged 10,922 seclusion hours. The state’s highest was Circleville Juvenile Correctional Facility, which houses the highest risk offenders and logged 102,949 seclusion hours.

Cuyahoga has the lowest number of assaults and “substantial unusual incidents,” which could be anything from disruptive behavior to menacing threats, gang-related problems or general security issues. The Cleveland facility had 487 of those incidents in 2011, compared to a high of 5,118 at Circleville.

But even though Cuyahoga tends to be the least dangerous facility, it still has had problems: Two years ago, an 18-year-old pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter in the death of a facility guard, who died when a punch to his midsection caused his heart rhythm to malfunction, according to authorities.

Some of the youths have noticed a change, too. Evan, 20, from Youngstown, even characterized it as “dramatic.”

To protect the youth’s identity, The Vindicator is using a fictitious name.

“When I first got here it was a lot rougher. The institution had more young men who were a lot more aggressive. There were a lot more bigger kids. When I first got up here, there were 40 kids to a dorm, the lowest was 30-some kids and now we’re down to 20 in a dorm. It’s not really as bad as it used to be,” he said.

Evan said the staff at Cuyahoga is very supportive. Last February, he was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s lymphoma. He was treated at the DYS Central Medical Facility in Delaware, Ohio.

“The superintendent, she gave me a lot of support; she really supports the kids. When I was down there sick, she came and saw me and brought me gifts. She didn’t have to do that,” Evan said.

Evan will remain in DYS until next year when he turns 21. He’s served more than three years for charges related to a robbery.

Every day is similar for Evan and other youths incarcerated at Cuyahoga Hills. They wake up at 5:30 a.m., get to the cafeteria about 6 a.m. and return to their rooms until about 8:30 a.m.

They attend class from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. School is on a year-round schedule with students attending for 10 weeks, then having a three-week break, Needham said.

Needham said from July 1, 2011, to July 1, 2012, 52 youths took the GED, with 83 percent passing. A new education wing recently was opened about a year ago that added 12 classrooms, staff offices, a small gym and clinic, she added.

After school, youths go to behavior therapy classes and then have recreation and dinner. They are in the dorm and ready for bed by 8 p.m. Needham said

five days a week, there's time offered for youths to complete community service.

Cuyahoga has a partnership with Ashland University for youths to take college courses. Evan is planning to attend Ashland when he leaves DYS.

"I probably want to study law. I think I could be a good advocate for youth or adults," Evan said, adding he wants to move after his studies.

"Youngstown, it's a small town; there's not very much in the town and there's a lot of trouble to get into in the town," he said.

Needham said youths like Evan, who have goals, is the outcome that a DYS stay is supposed to have.

"We're not punitive. And obviously as juveniles — the way I've always thought of them — there's hope. If I didn't think there was hope with them, I would take another career," she said.

Needham highlighted a new initiative that started this year called the Baby Elmo Parenting Program, which provides a series of 10 parenting seminars to incarcerated teens, which is followed by a visit with the child.

Marcus, 19, of Youngstown, is one teen taking advantage of the program. His daughter was born in January 2011 and every other week, the baby's mother or grandmother brings her to visit Marcus in Cuyahoga Hills.

"I enjoy seeing her," he said. "...We watch videos about parenting and how to help play to get to know your child more. ...[My daughter] wasn't all that attached, I really had to sit down and play games with her. But by the second and third time, she ran to see me and gave me a hug."

Marcus says the hardest part of incarceration is being away from his daughter and family.

"I was locked up when she was born. I hope our relationship [goes] real well. Not like me and my father; my relationship with him wasn't that good. ... I wasted the most important time in my daughter's life," he said.

The passage of time is something he didn't think about, he says, when he was making choices in Youngstown.

"When you're locked up, you have to have a strong mind. You're away from your family. You'll go crazy if you don't have a strong mind," he said.

Marcus will be released at the end of next year, on his 21st birthday.

His daughter will be nearly 3 years old.

Other stories of interest

- Undecided voters play decisive role this election
- Fewer youths confined in Ohio
- MetroParks board hires golf pro Dennis Miller as new director | Comments (10)
- Gathering at Steel Museum to remember Black Monday | Comments (1)

Comments

Use the comment form below to begin a discussion about this content.

Log in to comment

Username:

Password:

Forgotten your password?

Sign up

Your e-mail:

News

- Top 5 Most Wanted
- Digital Edition
- Local & Regional
- National & World
- Business & Tech
- PR Newswire
- Society
- Education
- Food
- Health & Home
- Outdoor
- Religion
- Travel
- Weather
- Government Watch
- Jim Traficant
- Oakhill
- InFocus
- Chevy Cruze Launch
- Broken Lives series
- Shale Sheet Fracking

Opinion

- Opinion
- How We See It
- Letters
- Bertram de Souza
- Todd Franko
- David Skolnick
- Ernie Brown
- Stirfy
- Louie Free
- Voting Guide
- Years Ago
- Submit a letter

Entertainment

- Entertainment News
- Entertaining Thoughts
- Valley24
- Dining Guide
- Movie Listings
- Restaurant Search

Sports

- Local
- Blitz High School Football
- Top Athletes 2011
- High School Basketball
- Greatest Golfer
- Jason Kokrak
- YSU Sports
- Penguins Insider
- Phantoms
- Kelly Pavlik
- National Sports
- Outdoor News

Marketplace

- Vindy Deals
- Advertise
- These Hundred Years
- Bridal Planner
- Ask the Expert
- Food tips
- Photo Store

Classifieds

- Place Ad
- Browse Classifieds
- VindyJobs
- VindyWheels
- VindyHomes

Records

- Search Stories
- Deaths
- Tributes/Obituaries
- Births
- Birthdays
- Engagements
- Marriages
- Anniversaries
- Online Archive

Discussions

- Talk of the Valley
- Local Sports
- Politics
- Outdoors
- Story Discussions
- Feedback

Community

- Newspapers in Education
- Bright Futures 2011
- Kidscoop
- Events
- Submit an Event
- Search Users

Help

- Contact Us / Feedback
- Staff Directory
- Terms of Use
- Privacy Statement

Forms

- Anniversary
- Birthday
- Engagement
- Wedding
- Club News
- Food Sales
- Out of town births
- Religion
- Reunions
- Worth a look

Neighbors

- Austintown News
- Boardman News
- Canfield News
- Poland News

[Home](#) • [Terms of Use](#) • [Privacy Statement](#) • [Advertise](#) • [Staff Directory](#) • [Help](#)

© 2012 Vindy.com. All rights reserved. A service of The Vindicator.

107 Vindicator Square, Youngstown, OH 44503

Phone Main: 330.747.1471 • Interactive Advertising: 330.740.2955 • Classified Advertising: 330.746.6565

[Sponsored Links: Vindy Wheels | Vindy Jobs | Vindy Homes |](#)