

DUTCHESS COUNTY

J-FIRE

Juvenile Firesetter Intervention, Response, and
Education Program



Program Development Timeline

- **April 2014:** First meeting at DCSO with various stakeholders
- **May 2014:** Steering Committee formed for program research & development
Monthly meetings conducted thereafter
- **April 2015:** DA allocated asset forfeiture money for training
- **June 2015:** County Legislature passed resolution authorizing formation of J-FIRE Program under DCDER, to enter into IMAs and seek grants.
- **August 2015:** IMAs signed by all participating agencies
- **Sept 2015:** SOGs finalized; Intervention Specialist I training completed
- **January 2016:** J-FIRE Program “Goes Live”
- **April 2016:** Intervention Specialist II training completed.



Steering Committee Members

- **Dave Alfonso:** DC Department of Emergency Response
- **Shawn Castano:** DC Sheriff's Office
- **Karen DeSimone:** DC Probation & Community Corrections
- **Linda Fakhoury:** DC Department of Law

Participating Agencies

- Dutchess County Department of Emergency Response
- Dutchess County Sheriff's Office
- Dutchess County Department of Law
- Dutchess County District Attorney
- Dutchess County Office of Probation and Community Corrections.
- Dutchess County Department of Behavioral and Community Health
- Dutchess County Department of Community and Family Services
- Astor Services for Children and Families
- City of Poughkeepsie Police
- Town of Poughkeepsie Police
- Town of Hyde Park Police
- Town of East Fishkill Police
- Lagrange Fire Department
- Fairview Fire Department



What is the Mission of J-FIRE?

- The mission of the Dutchess County J-FIRE Program is to provide a comprehensive, non-punitive multi-disciplinary approach to address the problem of juvenile fire setting through early identification, assessment, education and intervention in an effort to protect lives and property.

Why do children start fires?

- ***Curious / Accidental:*** does not understand consequences
- ***Cry for help:*** stress, depression, draw attention
- ***Delinquent:*** vandalism, crime concealment
- ***Cognitively impaired:*** developmentally disabled or impaired
- ***Social / Cultural:*** socially motivated, riots
- ***Pathological:*** Severely disturbed, psychotic, delusional, personality disorders

Myths

- Firesetting is a common, normal part of a child's development
 - “It's just a phase”
- Kids who start fires are obsessed with fire, or have “uncontrollable urges”
- Older children start more dangerous fires than smaller children
- If you talk to kids about fire, it will encourage them to light more

Facts

- Annually, fire play causes an averages of:
 - 80 deaths
 - 860 injuries
 - \$265M in damages
 - Fires caused by lighters or matches = 83% of civilian deaths
- 83% of structure fires caused by males
 - 43% of those fires caused by children younger than 6



But it's *MY* Child...

- Parents want the best for their children
 - Protective
 - Fear of legal consequences
 - I don't want my child to have a “record”
 - Fear for child's safety – and their own
 - Concern for child's future
- It's also the whole family

Legal Consequences

- J-FIRE is NOT:
 - A way to punish children
 - A route into the juvenile justice system
 - A way to avoid accountability or obtain immunity
- Legal Protections
 - If the juvenile justice or adult criminal systems are involved, J-FIRE waits until the fact finding phase is complete
 - Protects the child's legal rights
 - Considered juvenile records (and where considered Youthful Offender records), therefore held to the strictest confidentiality rules

Process

- Referral
 - Call J-FIRE Hotline **845-486-3994**
 - Email jfire@dutchessny.gov
- The J-FIRE Coordinator assigns the case within 48 hours
 - Minimum of two Intervention Specialists
 - Typically one fire, one criminal justice (police or probation officer)
 - Right of first refusal given to jurisdiction where incident occurred/
child resides

Process

- Intervention Specialists contact the parents within 48 hours to schedule meeting
 - Child's home, whenever possible
 - J-FIRE office at Department of Emergency Response
 - Other appropriate location
- Meet with the child and parents separately
 - Assessment tool
 - Assess fire safety in the home

Process

- “Juvenile With Fire” Assessment Tool
 - Oregon State Office of the Fire Marshal
 - Evidence based
 - Used nationwide
 - Assess the child and family for educational and other intervention needs
- Once assessment complete, Specialists scores the tool, completes report and determines best approach



Focus on Safety

- Tailor the educational approach to meet the needs of the child and the family
- Assess for fire risks in the home
- Mitigate harm in case the child continues their firesetting behavior

Education

- J-FIRE uses a library of educational materials
 - Tailor the program to each child's individual needs
 - “Cafeteria” style approach
- Education for the whole family
 - Fire science that is age appropriate
 - Education for the parents that is informed by child's developmental status
 - Fire safety for each member of the family



Mental Health Partners

- Sometimes, education isn't the whole story
 - May be other, underlying problems
 - Comprehensive approach to wellness
- Children learn:
 - Good decision-making skills
 - Good self-regulation skills
 - Healthy coping mechanisms
- Sometimes children require counselling

Mental Illness

- Mental illness is a medical condition
 - Diagnosis
 - Treatment
 - Recovery
- Stigma prevents parents from reporting
 - “Just a phase”
 - Unsure of developmental stages
 - Denial
 - Fear of what others will think
 - About them
 - About their child

Mental Illness

- Not all children who set fires are mentally ill!
 - Not everyone who goes to counselling is mentally ill
 - Tailored approach
- With appropriate treatment, recovery is not only possible, it is expected
- Intervention Specialists facilitate process of family seeking help from private clinician or services through DC Dept of Behavioral and Community Health.

Comprehensive Program

- Child and family followed up on by Intervention Specialists
 - Periodic outreach to ensure effectiveness
 - Ongoing relationship to provide support
- Other services
 - Skills
 - Support



Program Summary

- **Multi-disciplinary**

- Fire
- Criminal Justice (Police/Probation)
- Mental Health

- **Non-punitive**

- **Educational**

- **Changes Behavior**

- Reduces risk of death, injury, and property loss
- Mitigates harm to others and self



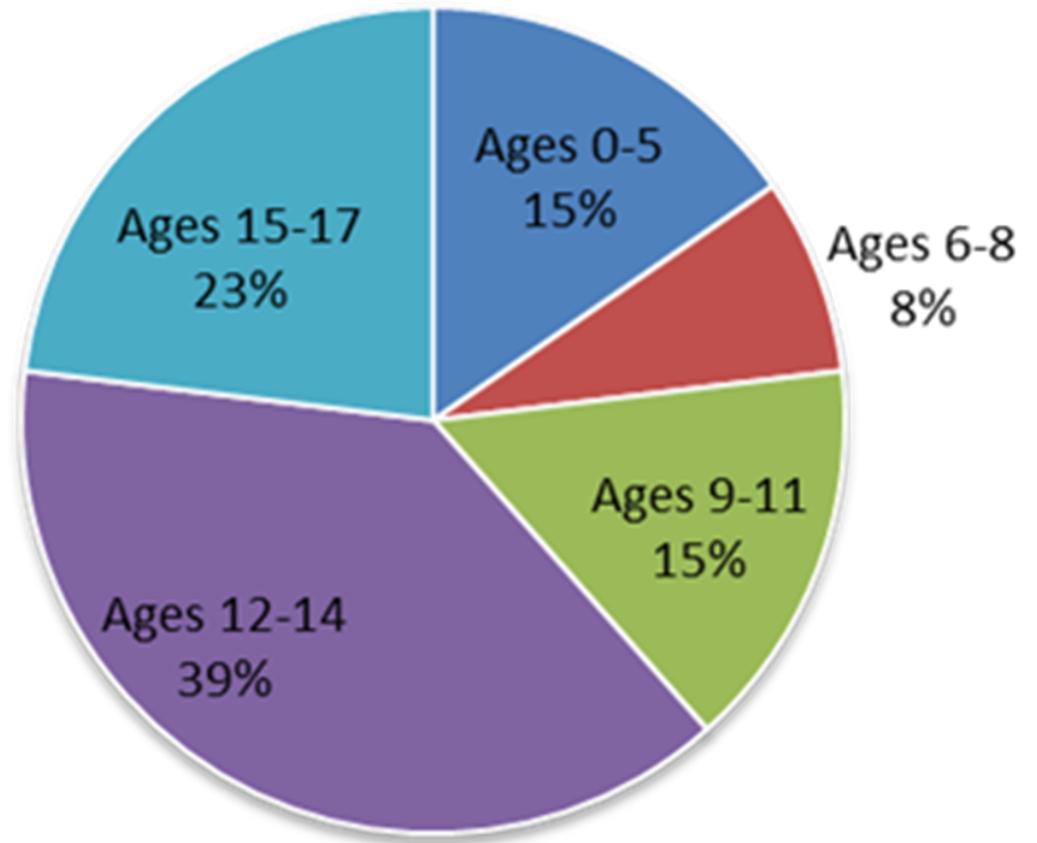
Program Statistics for 2016

- Total Number of interventions conducted in **2016**:

13

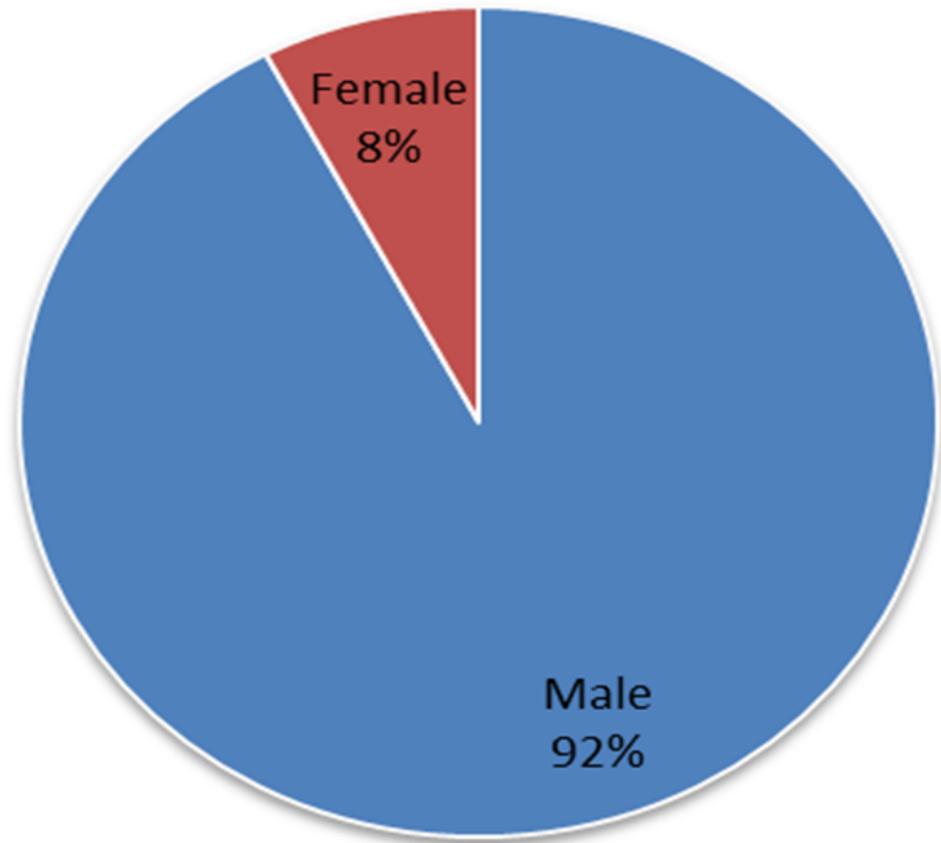
Program Statistics for 2016 (Ages)

- Age 3-5: **2**
- Age 6-8: **1**
- Age 9-11: **2**
- Age 12-14: **5**
- Age 15-17: **3**



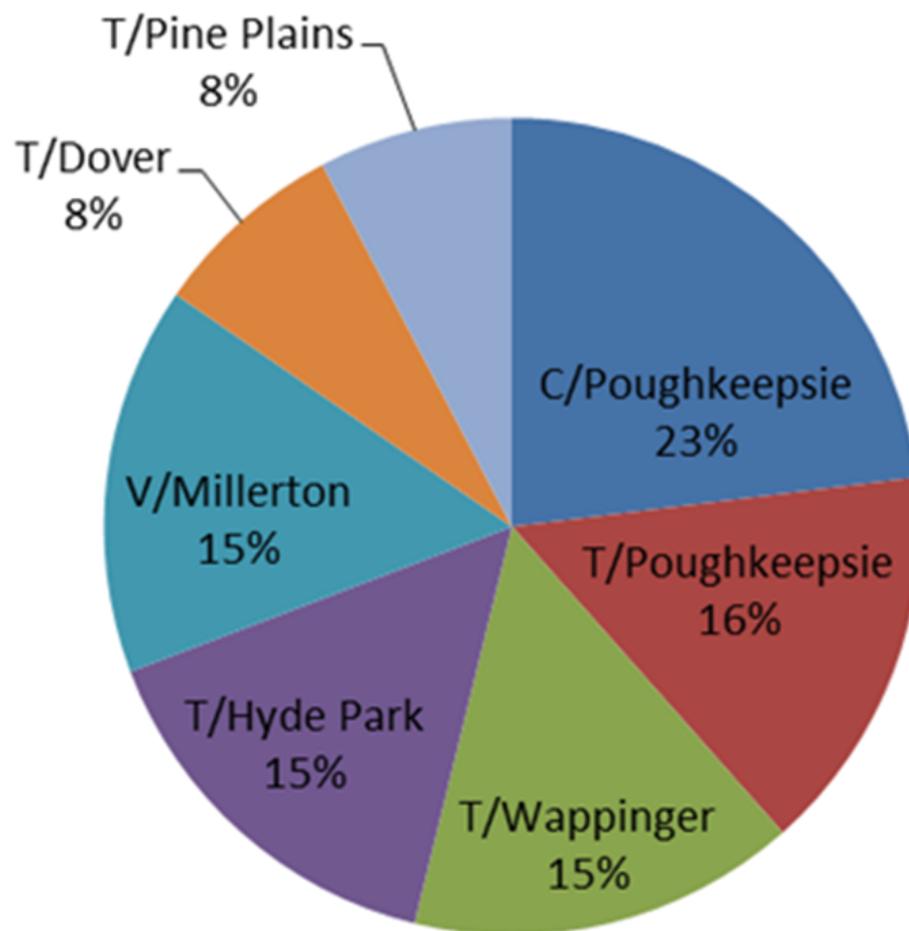
Program Statistics for 2016

- Male: **12**
- Female: **1**



Program Statistics for 2016 (Location)

- C/Poughkeepsie: **3**
- T/Poughkeepsie: **2**
- T/Wappinger: **2**
- T/Hyde Park: **2**
- V/Millerton: **2**
- T/Dover: **1**
- T/Pine Plains: **1**





Program Statistics So Far for 2017

- Total Number of interventions conducted/in the process of being conducted in **2017**:

15



Program Statistics for 2017 (Ages)

- Age 3-5: **0**
- Age 6-8: **0**
- Age 9-11: **5**
- Age 12-14: **8**
- Age 15-17: **2**



Program Statistics for 2017 thus far...

- **Male: 12**
- **Female: 3**

Program Statistics for 2017 Thus Far (Location)

- C/Poughkeepsie: 2
- T/Hyde Park: 2
- V/Tivoli: 1
- V/Wappinger Falls: 1
- T/Lagrange: 2
- T/East Fishkill: 1
- T/Pleasant Valley: 3
- C/Beacon: 2
- T/Beekman: 1



QUESTIONS?

Send an email to jfire@dutchessny.gov or contact one of the Steering Committee Members directly:

Dave Alfonso – DC Fire Coordinator: 845-486-2080
Linda Fakhoury – DC Dept of Law: 845-486-2110
Karen DeSimone – DC Probation: 845-486-2600
Shawn Castano – DCSO: 845-240-8069