

## 180 Juvenile Diversion offers youth a second chance Program helps first-time offenders turn around their lives

By Sarah Pryor Freeman Staff

WAUKESHA – Getting in trouble with parents is a rite of passage for teenagers, but what happens when they get in trouble with the law?

Having a criminal record at a young age can be a major hurdle for kids who had a momentary lapse in judgement, but the 180 Juvenile Diversion program is ready to put juveniles back on the right track.

This 9-month program uses a combination of classroom curriculum, case management, physical education, community service and more to help give a second chance to young adults who have committed a nonviolent, non-sexual, firsttime misdemeanor or lowlevel felony.

“Clients go through a massive self-examination from top to bottom,” said Case Manager Rebecca Scott. “It’s not touchy-feely –more like brutally honest. We just tell them straight forward that everything that happens to them is on their shoulders and a lot of what they do today will set their foundations for the future.”

Scott said more than 100 juveniles have successfully graduated the program since its inception in 2008, and all graduating clients have received a reduction or dismissal of charges.

However, most clients say the class is about more than getting their charges reduced.

“(180 Juvenile Diversion) taught me about my tendencies and habits and how to turn them into something that can help myself,” said 18-year-old Emmanuel Castillo, who became involved with the program when he and a friend faced six counts of theft. “It won’t automatically change you like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, but if you come to class and take what they say and do something with it, you’ll have a brighter future.”

The University of Wisconsin-Waukesha donates space for the program to hold classes on Monday and Tuesday evenings, and the UW-Extension program provides the group with an office in the basement of the Waukesha County Courthouse.

The program is entirely funded by client tuition and donations, which help provide things like random drug testing for clients and motivational speakers, Scott said.

District Attorney Brad Schimel praised 180 Juvenile Diversion as a second chance for first-time offenders, but pointed out that it’s no free handout.

“It’s a lot of work for the clients, but I’ve heard many stories of positive impact from the program,” Schimel said. “It’s a great opportunity for people who are straddling the line or at the crossroads ... we can get them squared away.”

Clients are referred by the Schimel’s office, private lawyers or individually and must face a rigorous application process, but only 12 percent of program graduates go on to re-offend, Scott said.

“It makes you be honest with yourself and map out where you want to be when, and how to get there,” said 21-year-old Cole Arnold who got involved with the program after facing drug dealing charges. “I would suggest this to anyone, even if they haven’t done anything wrong, because it helps you figure your life out and work on being a great person.”

For more information, visit [www.waukeshacounty.gov/180](http://www.waukeshacounty.gov/180) or call (262) 548-7780.

Email: [spryor@conley.net](mailto:spryor@conley.net)





**Charles Auer/Freeman Staff** Coach Ray Lilley, left, leads participants in the 180 Juvenile Diversion program in a workout on Tuesday at University of Wisconsin-Waukesha.



**Charles Auer/Freeman Staff** Josh Sandstrom exercises with other participants in the 180 Juvenile Diversion program at the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha on Tuesday.