Jefferson County Human Services launches youth justice podcast

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JEFFERSON — Youth across Jefferson County now have access to a podcast that walks them through the justice process, from the first moment of trouble to the conclusion of a case.

The Real You Emerging (T.R.U.E.) Podcast is a 13-episode program created over the summer by the county's Youth Advisory Board. Every episode features one or more board members — each with experience in the youth justice system — speaking with Jefferson County officials including judges, lawyers, victim advocates, school counselors and others.

The podcast can be found on YouTube under the channel name "Jefferson County TRUE Podcast."

"We wanted to try and do something different," said Jefferson County Human Services Director Brent Ruehlow. "Something that would reach the youth in a new medium."

The show was officially launched on Oct. 5 with an intimate celebration featuring Human Services staff, podcast guests and members of the YAB.

"They were super excited," said Jefferson County Youth and Family Supervisor Jessica Godek when asked about the youth involvement with the show. "Everyone was so eager and so willing to do it."

Two YAB members who appeared on the podcast were Anthony and Lina.

"There's a deeper message if you read it carefully," said Anthony. "The way we explain it is the way teenagers understand."

"It puts out an important message for youth in the system," agreed Lina.

Episodes vary subject matter, from how to behave in a courtroom to dealing with social stigma at school after court involvement. Collectively, the entire show provides a resource for any youth, or the county as a whole, detailing what experiencing the justice system as a young person is like.

"Getting questions from these kids helps us understand how they see things from their angle," said Jefferson County Circuit Judge Theresa Beck. "How can we do things that support them?"

For some interviewees, like Jefferson County Assistant District Attorney Brookellen Teuber, the process involved an emotional exchange.

"I got to tell them that they matter to me," said Teuber. "Just so they know they're not another case file. They're human beings."

That mission of humanization and connection fits exactly with the Youth Justice Team's ethos, according to Godek.

"Kids in the youth justice system get a bad rap as 'bad kids, going nowhere,'" she said. "That couldn't be any more wrong…Listen to their stories."

Matz Center saves county thousands in hospitalizations

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JEFFERSON — Hospitalizations are down in Jefferson County and eyes are on the Youth Crisis Stabilization Facility (YCSF), otherwise known as the Matz Center, for helping it happen.

The Matz Center, formerly part of Bethesda's Camp Matz, is an eight-bedroom facility housing four boys and four girls while providing short-term crisis stabilization in a community-based setting.

It serves youth ages 10-17, and provides mental health crisis stabilization 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year. The Center delivers the temporary structure, clinical treatment and care required to meet the child's needs. The average age in the Center is 13.5 years old.



FILE PHOTO

The Matz Center

Jefferson County Administrative Services Division Manager Brian Bellford delivered a budget report during a Sept. 8 Jefferson County Human Services meeting where he highlighted the positive numbers.

"Good news here. For the first time in quite some time, (they are) projected to be under budget or favorable on a net basis of $72,713," said Bellford.

He explained that county projections showed a current net negative of $603,398 relating to hospitalization expenses. The county had previously budgeted $676,000, resulting in the favorable balance of over $72,000.

Bellford called it "tremendous news" on hospitalizations.

"This year's projection, a net-negative bottom line of $603,000, would be the lowest or best situation we've had in quite some time," said Bellford. "Quite the improvement. "

Jefferson County Human Services Director Brent Ruehlow chimed in, speaking to the Center's effect.

"The good news out of all that is the Matz Center was the right thing to do," said Ruehlow. "It's a great, great partnership… It's working. It's keeping kids out of the hospital."

For 2024 and 2025, the daily rate for a Matz Center individual was between $752 and $857. For a similar institution, the Winnebago Mental Health Institute, the rate was between $923 and $1,213.

Ruehlow pointed to these figures as signs of how Matz helped both its county budget and the individuals it served.

"In '24, we saved almost $100,000 on that hospital budget. In 2025 we saved about $146,000," said Ruehlow.

"(What's) important is the human life that we're keeping from being detained in the back of a police car, being handcuffed and then driving all the way to Winnebago to a state institution. A state institution absolutely has its place on the continuum, and it's needed, from time to time. However, you hear us talk a lot about least restrictive stays and we really want to keep kids and adults in the least restrictive placement possible. That's what the Matz Center is doing."