

**2007 Innovations Awards Program
APPLICATION**

ID #: 07-S-01SCTEENSAFTERSCHOOL

State: South Carolina

Program Category: Public Safety - Criminal Justice

1. Program Name: Teen After-School Center (TASC) Program

2. Administering Agency: South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)

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9. Description of Program:

Teen After-School Centers (TASC) are daily after-school programs for at-risk youth that are based in local churches, community centers and other public buildings, and staffed by local volunteers in communities across the state. These centers are geared toward juveniles in need of additional structure and assistance beyond that provided under normal DJJ probation or parole, and are designed to reduce the likelihood that program participants will become further involved with the juvenile justice system.

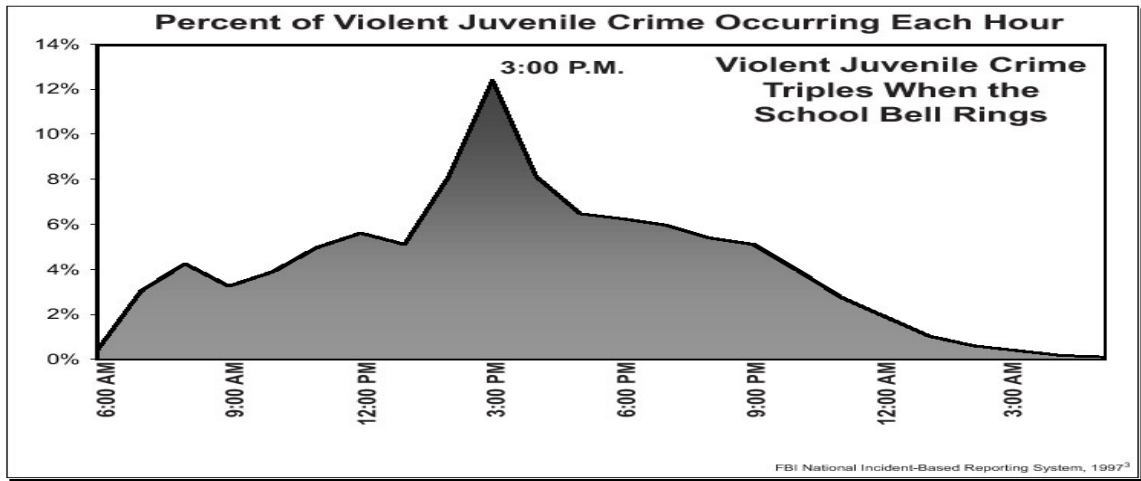
10. How long has the program been operating?

TASC was developed and implemented by DJJ in 2003 through a collaborative effort involving the faith community and the South Carolina Legislative Black Caucus. The original three pilot sites were created in Greenville, Lee and Darlington Counties.

11. Why was the program created? What problem(s) or issue(s) was it designed to address?

As societal norms and policies stress the importance of employment, the demand for school-aged child care has ballooned. Almost all adults agree that elementary school children need adult supervision, but it is no less important for middle school youth. Young people aged 10 to 14 are often seen as old enough to stay on their own for short periods of time, but they are also old enough to get into serious trouble. The hours between the end of the school day and when parents return from work is a risky time for young people. Research has demonstrated that serious violent crime committed by juveniles increases between these times. Juvenile offenders at DJJ often refer to the hours immediately after school as “thugging time.”

According to Snyder and Sickmund (1999), “violent crimes by juveniles peak in the afternoon between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m., the hour at the end of the school day.” This same research reported that “19 percent of all juvenile violent crimes occur between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. on school days.” This spike in delinquent activity is likely due to children returning after school to homes with little or no supervision because their parents are at work. Traditional after-school programs serve youth between the ages of 5-12. There are fewer programs that serve youth age 12 and older. By contrast, TASC was specifically designed to serve at-risk youth between the ages of 12-17.



Because the hours directly after school can be so dangerous for school-aged children, delinquency prevention programs should be used to reduce the probability of these incidences. Quality after-school programs are widely supported as a buffer against the danger of delinquency. Nearly 100 percent of those polled in a U. S. Department of Justice survey agreed that it is important for children to have an after-school program that helps them develop academic and social skills in a safe, caring environment (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). But despite this support, there is a lack of affordable, accessible after-school opportunities in many communities. This is particularly true for juvenile offenders, who are often stigmatized due to their delinquent behavior and not welcome in many after-school programs.

Youth who have already penetrated the juvenile justice system are at a particularly high risk for criminal behavior during the after school hours. In South Carolina, a significant percentage of these youth enter the system due to school-related misbehavior. In the 2005-2006 fiscal year the number one offense associated with juvenile delinquents referred to the family court was for Disturbing Schools, which represented 2,726 cases out of the 25,820 juvenile cases processed by DJJ that year.

DJJ recognized the great need for an after school program specifically designed for juvenile offenders and other at risk youth in communities across the state, but lacked the facilities, personnel, and vehicles needed to support such a program. That is where the faith-based community stepped in. Churches have the facilities, the people, and the vehicles needed to run an after school program, but often lack the technical expertise, supplies, computers, and software needed to run an effective program. Through the efforts of the South Carolina Legislative Black Caucus and the leadership of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, churches bought into the vision for TASC and volunteered to partner with DJJ to create a TASC program in their community. They offered their facilities, people and vehicles, and DJJ agreed to provide the training, technical assistance, supplemental funding, computers and software needed to operate the program.

TASC was created to meet the multifaceted needs of youth that enter the juvenile justice system due to school related misbehavior. These centers provide the supervision necessary to ensure juvenile offenders remain crime free during the after-school hours, while at the same time addressing the educational and vocational deficits that may contribute to their delinquency. Many of the parents have shared that since their child enrolled in TASC they worry less about their safety and potential for becoming either delinquent or victims of crime. The parents of “latch-key” kids naturally worry about whether their child is safe, hungry and if homework is completed. It is also believed that the services and supervision provided by the centers will help divert low risk youth away from the juvenile justice system and help them become responsible, contributing members of society. Many of the youth who attend the centers are African American, and TASC services help reduce the number of African American juvenile offenders who fail in the community and as a result are committed to DJJ residential facilities.

12. Describe the specific activities and operation of the program in chronological order.

Daily TASC Activities:

The daily schedule is flexible, and offers security, independence, and stimulation to meet the needs of all youth, staff, volunteers and mentors. A typical schedule includes the following:

- A. Youth are picked up at the school by TASC staff and brought to the center soon after school ends. The school may elect to drop students off if feasible.
- B. Snacks (food and drink) are given to each student and they are given some time to socialize and to orient them to the center.

- C. Each youth participates in a variety of recreational options suited to their interests. Other activities could include arts and crafts, computer gaming or research, library leisure activities, science and community service projects, field trips and outdoor adventures, chess and other board games, movies and filming, drama and music appreciation, etc.
- D. Each student and center staff engages in learning activities geared towards their school homework or special projects. Volunteer tutors are assigned to students to help provide direct learning services tailored to each youth.
- E. Each center develops a parenting component that is engaging and educational for both youth and adults. One night a week (Friday) or a Saturday could be scheduled to have a dinner or luncheon celebrating the youth's weekly success with a parenting class to help families promote positive activities. A separate session can be held for adults to advance their careers or explore higher education opportunities.
- F. Students are transported to their homes in the evening by TASC staff or parents pick them up. This service provides an opportunity for volunteers/mentors to meet with the entire family to discuss the day's progress and plan for the next day's opportunities.
- G. Students are assessed and given individualized services as needed and as available at the center. In some cases, referrals are made to an external community resource to address a particular need of a youth or family member.

Success or progress in the center is gauged by measuring attendance, grades (before and after entering the center), suspensions, truancy, tardiness from school, and the rate that youth are referred to court for formal prosecution. Input is sought from the youth's probation officer, school officials and parents to help evaluate a youth's behavior while attending TASC.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

This program is new and creative approach in that DJJ, faith-based organizations and Boys and Girls Clubs have been able to come together in this historic partnership to create an innovative, community based program for at-risk youth. TASC brings these two very diverse groups together in a collaborative effort to help decrease juvenile delinquency, crime victimization, and to enhance public safety in communities across South Carolina.

One other unique aspect of TASC is the very low direct cost that is required to operate the program, which allows it to be offered free of charge to the youth and their families, many of which are low income families. Faith-based organizations are aware that there are limited resources available to parents for after-school care, and that the cost of quality programs is out of reach for many families. Therefore these organizations have donated the use of their church fellowship halls and classrooms along with their church vans, reducing the cost of operating TASC. Each TASC site operates on a budget of only \$12,000 per year, which helps provide funding for staff salary and operating expenses. This translates into a cost of approximately 36 cents per hour per youth to attend a TASC site.

The way computers and computer software are supplied to the TASC sites also represents a very unique and creative partnership that results in the computers being supplied free of charge to the TASC program. Individuals and organizations donate their used and often outdated computers to the Friends of Juvenile Justice (FJJ), a non-profit organization whose sole mission is to support the efforts of DJJ. FJJ then donates the computers to DJJ's Computer Buddies Program located at the department's secure Broad River Road Complex. Juveniles in the Computer Buddies Program then repair and upgrade the computers. When they are finished, the computers along with additional software needed for TASC are then donated to the TASC sites. Through this innovative program, juvenile offenders are learning valuable job skills, giving back to the community, and helping other at-risk youth stay out of the juvenile justice system.

The fact that so many youth are caught up in the juvenile justice system due to school related misbehavior is a major concern in South Carolina. Research indicates that the juvenile crime rate is impacted by youth unsupervised during the after-school hours. The South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice provides leadership, funding and technical assistance in the implementation of TASC to help prevent juvenile crime, teen pregnancy, alcohol & drug use, as well as gang involvement all of which are also concerns for faith-based organizations. TASC aims to provide a safe haven for at-risk youth and strives to provide them with the sense of belonging they desire.

14. What are the program's start-up costs?

Monetary:

\$12,000 is provided to each site to be used for salary, supplies, snacks and operating expenses.

In-Kind: (Provided to the program by the center in ways other than money)

- A building and specific room(s) for youth to participate in TASC activities. At least one room is needed that will accommodate up to twelve (12) youth and two adults. This room will be used for academic classroom instruction. The Center should have access to an indoor area for recreation facility and space.
- Transportation of youth from the school to the Center. Each Center should have a bus or access to a bus that is approved by the State Department of Education to transport youth from the school to the Center.
- Staff and volunteers willing to work with the youth. Each Center should have at least two adults in the classroom working with the youth. Staff and volunteers will attend a one day training event for working with at-risk youth offered by DJJ. Each Center shall seek to provide each youth a mentor for the duration of their participation in the program.
- A kitchen or access to a kitchen to prepare snacks for the youth attending the Center.

- Equipment and space for recreation. Each Center should have an area and equipment that allows youth and staff to recreate. Recreation could include board and video games, basketball, volleyball, baseball/softball, soccer, billiards, ping-pong, and other forms of recreation.
- Centers shall provide snacks, recreation, academic enrichment, service project opportunities, and life skill development as part of their daily TASC activities.
- Centers shall carry liability insurance for staff/volunteers who work with youth.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

Only \$12,000 per year is provided to each site by DJJ to operate their TASC program.

16. How is the program funded? -

TASC was organized as a result of a growing need for after-school programs for at-risk youth. Various funding partners have contributed to TASC, including the SC Legislative Black Caucus, the 7th Episcopal District of A.M.E Church for South Carolina, and the SC State Department of Education. The 7th Episcopal District of A.M.E Church for South Carolina has recently funding to support the efforts of TASC. TASC was also funded by State Department of Education in the amount of \$120,000 for 2004, \$80,000 for 2005, and \$80,000 for 2006. The South Carolina Department of Public Safety has also recently provided a three-year grant to support TASC in the amount of \$48,825 annually. DJJ also receives re-occurring state funding to help operate the program, with \$100,000 provided to DJJ by the state in FY 2006-2007 for TASC.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations?

No

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

The Friends of Juvenile Justice (FJJ) has partnered with DJJ to offer the Computer Buddies Program to the youth participating in TASC. Children without access to computers often struggle in school. Computer Buddies refurbishes donated computers and places them in the sites that are serving at-risk children. Each site has is given between 5 to 8 computers for students' use and the Computer Buddies www.computerbuddies.us software is loaded on each computer. The software allows the student to practice basic math, writing and reading with goals of improving each area. Individual educational enhancements also may be developed for youth that have had difficulties (academic or social) in mainstream educational settings. A new color printer and educational software are also given to the center. A technician employed by DJJ provides installation and maintenance of the computers for each site.

Database for Program Evaluation

A customized database has been developed for TASC and is currently being used by the centers gathering a variety of demographical information. DJJ provides each center with this database and trains staff to use it. Each child's participation in the program is charted on a Weekly Progress Report and Service Notes Form. In particular, the database equips the sites with the ability to track school performance and academic improvement, family contacts and visits, community service partners' contacts and visits, counseling and training offered, and information on re-arrest or violation of supervision.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state?

Yes. TASC is considered one of our most unique programs because it was developed in partnership with a variety of faith-based organizations, Boys and Girls Clubs, and the South Carolina Legislative Black Caucus. Foundational to this effort is an historic statewide partnership with the 7th Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Bishop Warren Williams, the president of the AME Church's global Council of Bishops, is the spiritual leader of over 400,000 AME members and has contributed greatly to our TASC efforts. The partnership has pledged funding and is working closely with DJJ to provide mentors and TASC programs in churches across the state of South Carolina. TASC has been uniquely designed to serve the at-risk youth in South Carolina.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states?

No

21. Has the program been fully implemented?

It is DJJ's long-range goal to cover the state with TASC centers, so that at-risk youth in every community in South Carolina can receive the support and assistance they need to be successful. DJJ will not consider the program fully implemented until this vision becomes a reality. The department's first objective is to have at least one TASC site in all forty-six (46) counties within the state. This will assist the State in addressing the increasing number of youth charged with Disturbing School, along with truancy, status offenses, and other offenses with the multi-functional prevention and intervention programs that TASC emphasizes. This after school program model is designed to improve youth's average daily school attendance, thus increasing academic performance and improving social functioning. TASC accomplishes this by meeting the diverse needs of children and their families through intervention efforts with potential to prevent youth from being incarcerated in the juvenile justice system.

It is projected that once fully implemented, an average of 20 at-risk youth will be actively participating in TASC programs in forty-six (46) counties across the state, thus serving approximately 920 of those 25,000 youth referred to the family court system each year.

The anticipated outcomes of the TASC project expansion are:

- 1) A reduction in the number of students with school related problems being referred to the juvenile justice system.
- 2) A reduction in the number of contempt of court cases being remanded to the juvenile court system as the result of the failure of children/families to comply with an order to attend school.
- 3) An enhanced ability to provide a foundation for truancy prevention within each school/community independent of the juvenile justice system.
- 4) To provide schools, law enforcement, solicitors, and the courts a viable alternative the prosecution and incarceration of low risk juvenile offenders.
- 5) A reduction in the number of minority youth being committed to DJJ institutions.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program’s effectiveness in addressing the defined problem(s) or issues(s).

The South Carolina Department of Education’s Center for Dropout and Truancy Prevention conducted an evaluation of nine DJJ TASC that operated in 2005-2006. The evaluation revealed that TASC programs were found to be operating with a high degree of integrity as a result of having quality oversight by DJJ. TASC programs were cited as a holistic approach to delinquency reduction with emphasis on academics and education.

Data related to recidivism, suspension, grade point average (GPA), and truancy were assessed to measure program effectiveness. The evaluation found that 90% of youth served by TASC did not re-offend while participating in the program, and 86.8% of youth served by TASC were not suspended from school. Over one-third of youth did exhibit the desired change in school performance and 31.8% of youth had fewer reported unexcused school absences. The evaluation concluded that TASC provided youth with intangible social benefits including opportunities to attend professional sporting events, visit state parks, tour colleges, attend etiquette classes and visit libraries. The following are some pros and cons involved in operating the program:

Pro:

- TASC sites provide financial relief to the parents of the youth who attend. There are limited resources available to the families for after-school programs for youth age 12-17.
- Safety: Parents who have youth at home unsupervised are often worried about their well-being during the hours after-school and the time they arrive home from work. TASC offers a safe haven for youth. All staff providing services must first undergo a criminal, sex offender, and other background checks before being permitted to work in a TASC program.

- Status offenses and delinquency rates will decrease because youth are being supervised during the high risk after school hours.

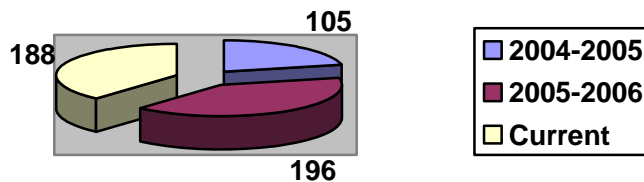
Con:

- The introduction of “Jacob’s Law” negated the use of the church vans and required more expensive transportation costs.
- The level of interest expressed statewide has been much greater than the capacity and current funding available to create new TASC sites.
- The level of interest expressed statewide has been much greater than the capacity and current funding. This is actually both a “pro” and a “con,” as DJJ is committed to creating a TASC site in every county in the state.

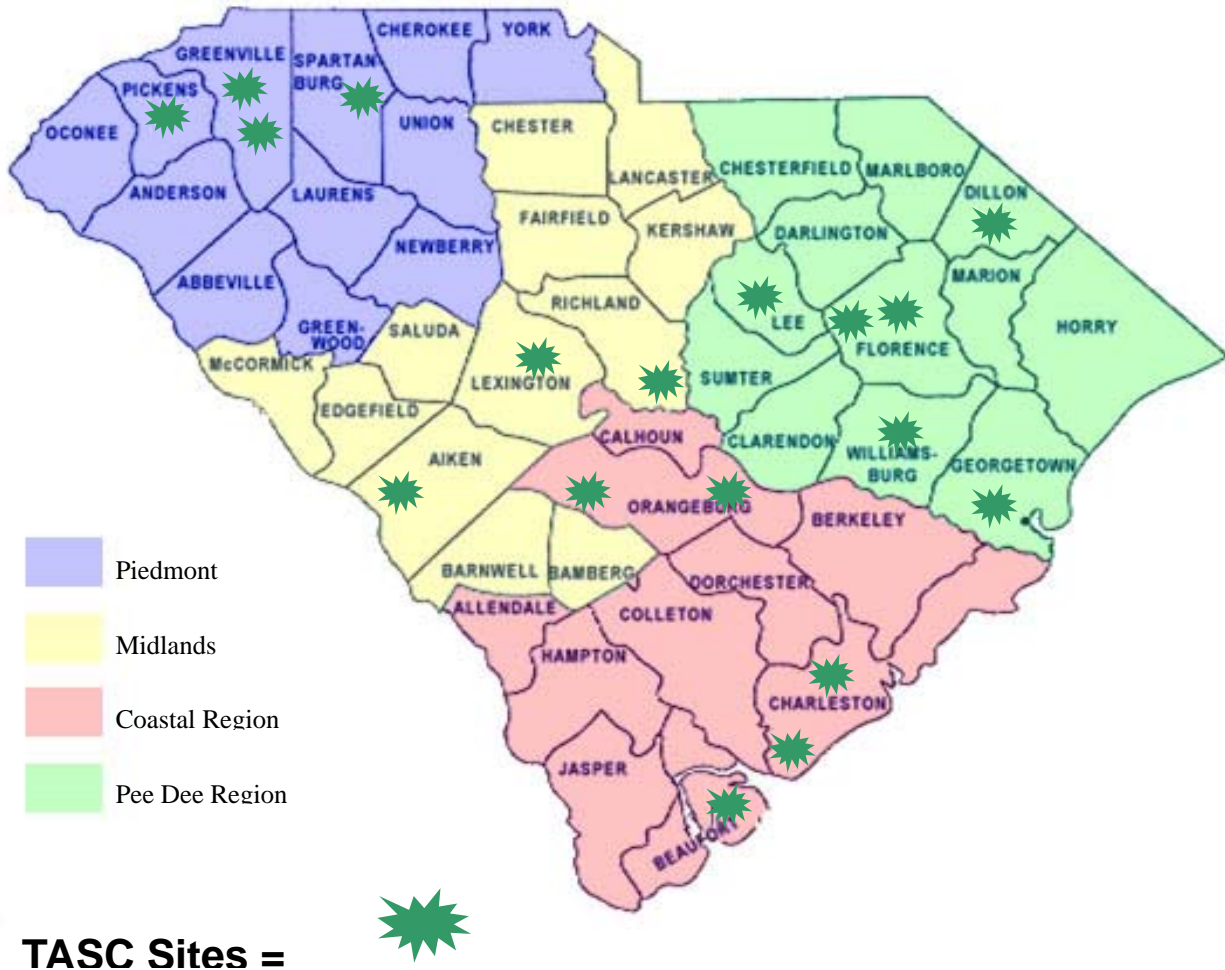
23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

In August of 2003, DJJ staff approached the faith community, the South Carolina State Department of Education and the South Carolina Legislative Black Caucus to discuss the need for new programs in several locations that would address the significant number of youth committed to DJJ for truancy and disturbing school. All agreed that these locations were a priority and that there existed a great need to create alternative, community based programs to address the unacceptable number of youth who were becoming enmeshed in the juvenile justice system. From this came the idea of developing Teen After-School Centers (TASC) as a pilot project. The intent was to engage the faith based and other community entities to offer teen after-school centers in South Carolina. In 2004 three programs were piloted in Greenville, Lee & Darlington Counties. As of today, TASC has grown to 18 programs, in 14 counties across the state.

Number of Youth Served in TASC



**DJJ
TEEN AFTER SCHOOL CENTERS (TASC)**



24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Many organizations may be hesitant in working with programs for delinquent youth. Each state needs to prepare for resistance, fear and risk of liability that the community may express. In working with faith-based organizations, DJJ has found that the most effective way to recruit church sites for TASC is to target church denominations or associations with a central, organized leadership. If the top church leaders endorse the program, they can help convince churches on the local level to become involved in the program. Independent churches are more of a challenge to recruit as leaders at each church have to be convinced to become involved in the program. DJJ has also found more success in recruiting churches from the African American community to become TASC sites, particularly those close to the communities where many of the youth live would attend the site. As most of the youth

served by TASC are African American, these churches seem to feel a greater commitment to serve these youth.

As a general rule, states desiring to implement the TASC program need to involve key stakeholders, i.e., educators, law enforcement, legislators, family court judges, parents, community leaders, state agency representatives, religious organizations, and youth serving organizations. Conducting a statistical analysis of truancy and other school related problems to determine what type of after-school program will best meet the needs of that state is key to designing a program that is uniquely suited to that state.

25. Support Documents (see attached):

TASC Fact Sheet