

Attendance Success Stories

September is National School Attendance Month. In recognition of that, I thought I would share some recent success stories from the work of our district social worker and district truancy officer in Thomasville City Schools. So many times, we fight a losing battle with attendance and are perceived as the “bad guys” for questioning students and parents when they are not in school. However, as these stories illustrate, conversations that start about attendance can lead to positive changes across the board for students and their parents/guardians.

Davidson County Truancy Court began 16 years ago through a grant from JCPC (Juvenile Crime Prevention Council). Poor school attendance is usually a symptom of another issue within the home, such as lack of parenting skills, drug/alcohol use, violence, involvement with DSS, law enforcement, etc. Most parents want their children to get an education and to be successful but have too many barriers in their lives that prevent them from assisting the school in this effort. Truancy Court helps remove some of the barriers that families face. The two stories below are from of our truancy officer, Barbara Barnes. Names have been removed for privacy purposes.

Success Story #1

“I received a call from a grandmother stating her grandchild had never enrolled in school although she was 7 years of age. The NC statute states 7-16 years of age must be in school, however this child should have started at age 5 placing her almost three grades behind. The grandmother did not have custody and was not sure where mother was living. Through much investigation, I was able to location mother. She was living in an abusive situation and there was obvious drug activity. It was very evident that the mother cared for her daughter but was in no condition to be a parent. We did get her enrolled by giving grandmother custody but the child was not my only focus at this point; the mother needed help to get her life back together or maybe together for the first time in her life. She was very resistant and with the child with grandmother, it did not really matter. Placement with grandmother soon fell apart, which meant that the child was now back with this dysfunctional mother. It did not take long before she had the 10 unexcused days and we needed to file in Truancy Court. This mother thought I was the devil for taking her to court (not her first court experience). She did not show for her First appearance so an order was made for her arrest. She did show the next court date with evidence of the drug use and basic lack of parenting skills and could not read nor write very well. She was ordered to a drug assessment and program, Parenting classes, Mental health evaluation and was told her child could not miss school without a valid doctor’s note. At this point, our relationship changed from devil to support system. Long story short, the mother completed all the court orders, learned how to be a Parent to her daughter, became drug free and healthy and most of all had GREAT pride that her daughter had moved up a grade, was making straight A’s, and was not missing school. She was very proud of herself as she had reason to celebrate her victories, which gave her daughter victories. Another little side note is that the mother had a sibling with children with attendance issues. After seeing the threat of court and learning how to ask for help, those children’s attendance improved as well.”

Success Story #2:

“Two sisters living together with a host of children between them, all of which were attendance problems. Bottom line problem was education was not a priority for them nor their children, survival was their main goal. They also had the attitude that no one could or would tell them what to do with their children. Law Enforcement and the court system were no strangers to these women. I filed on both sisters very quickly and our court process began. As you can imagine they did not care a lot for Truancy

Court or me. Usually they go into court with hate and resentment. However, after the 18 months of service, support, and seeing that Judge Covington and I only wanted the best for them and their children, they are thanking us, hugging us and happy with their achievements and with life. Education was now a priority for their children. I am happy to say all of their children have remained in school and have not had any attendance issues. “

We hope that our efforts during September and every other month help keep our students and families on the right track with school attendance. It is vitally important that our Bulldogs, as well as students everywhere, are in school – ALL DAY, EVERY DAY!

Catherine R. Gentry, EdD

Superintendent

Thomasville City Schools