

Enhancement & Innovation Grant Proposal 2023 (FY24)
Lowndes County Accountability Court
PROJECT NARRATIVE

In September 2020, Lowndes County began the operation of a juvenile drug court. The court is named the Lowndes County Juvenile Accountability Court and is overseen by Judge James Tunison Jr. Initially, the court was completely funded by Lowndes County Board of Commissioners (\$55,000 from September 2020 to June 2021). The county has agreed to continue to support the court through June 2024.

In 2023, the court is working toward finding solutions for several factors that complicate the juvenile drug court model. We believe we have a great plan. There is an agency in Valdosta named The Mental Wealth Center. The center has staff from the community who volunteer as receptionists, opening at 9 a.m. and closing at 5 p.m. There is an LPC trained in addiction counseling that provides clinical services. School and social service professionals are providing academic assistance and addressing other barriers to success that juveniles encounter.

The court has had to adapt to frequent changes in treatment providers. Initially, the court received services from the community service board – however, the agency changed the therapist assigned to the court 3 or 4 times with periods of no services at all. We moved to another provider, and they resigned just before a year had passed. The coordinator developed a relationship with the Mental Wealth Center and when the last provider resigned – the court was grateful they agreed to jump on board.

The court has developed effective relationships with many community stakeholders. The team includes social workers from Valdosta City Schools, Lowndes County Schools, and Echols County Schools, a Social Services Specialist Supervisor from Lowndes and Echols Counties Department of Children and Family Services, and a Lowndes County Sheriff's Deputy serving as a field supervisor. The court has community sponsors that provide incentives and gift cards. The 2024 FY will be a big year for the Lowndes County Juvenile Accountability Court.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Lowndes County Juvenile Accountability Court requests funds to compensate the Mental Wealth Center for some of the services they already provide. The center has stated that they will continue to do what needs to be done despite funding shortfalls. Still, the services and opportunities the court can provide are limited by budgetary factors.

The Court is expecting an increased census in the next several months. The court has a new policy directing all supervised juveniles in Lowndes County with substance use risk factors to be assessed for appropriateness for the program. Previously, some juveniles with substance use issues may not have been found due to infrequent substance screening. The court uses the YLS-CMI to assess juveniles and accepts high-risk/high-need juveniles.

The services will be available to the juveniles participating in the JDC in Lowndes, Echols, and Brooks Counties. The Court has some funds to transport to Valdosta juveniles from