

Happy Thanksgiving from Appleseed!

Georgia Center Releases "Common Wisdom" Reports

JUSTGeorgia Project Aims to Improve Juvenile Code

November 26, 2008 - As a leading member of **JUSTGeorgia**, **Georgia Appleseed** recently took a broad leap forward in its mission to renovate the state's juvenile justice system, releasing a series of reports titled "**Common Wisdom: Making the Case for a New Georgia Juvenile Code**." The new study records hundreds of stakeholder opinions on such issues as delinquency, deprivation, foster care, and the termination of parental rights, documenting the numerous ways in which the current code fails to effectively balance public safety and child welfare.

In addition to a statewide summary and an executive summary, a report was issued for each of Georgia's 10 judicial districts. Each study can be viewed here: <http://www.gaappleseed.org/children/reports>

Comprising three lead partners--Georgia Appleseed, **Voices for Georgia's Children** and the **Barton Child Law and Policy Clinic of Emory Law School**--JUSTGeorgia convened in 2006 to secure passage of a new juvenile code during the 2009-10 legislative session. The current code, adopted in 1971 and revised many times since, was deemed so outdated that in 2005 the state's general assembly passed a resolution calling for its complete overhaul.

Recognizing that stakeholder input was essential to garnering majority support from policymakers, Georgia Appleseed recruited thirteen law firms to gather this information using teams of volunteers. For over a year, hundreds of lawyers and other professionals logged over 6,500 pro bono hours in identifying and interviewing more than 300 stakeholders, including parents, young adults and older youth, law enforcement, child welfare workers, mental health providers, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, educators, business leaders, probation officers and many others. Additionally, to encourage input from the general community about the current juvenile code, Georgia Appleseed held public town hall meetings, facilitated by the University of Georgia's Fanning Institute, in each of the state's 10 judicial districts.

The most striking result of the study, according to the Center's executive director, **Sharon Hill**, was that of the more than 300 individual interviewees from across the state, the reaction was "virtually unanimous" that Georgia needs an entirely new juvenile code.

"Another finding, based on interviews across the state," she said, "is that many stakeholders would support a change in the code that brings 17-year-olds into juvenile court. Many people noted that 17-year-olds are typically high schoolers and have much more in common with their 16-year-old classmates than with adults in the adult world." Informed by the findings in "Common Wisdom," Georgia Appleseed is continuing to work with its partners to finalize the draft of the legislative package that will be submitted to the state legislature in 2009, with the hope that it will achieve passage the following year. Given the bill's size, however, the coalition will "need to continue to stay closely engaged in the legislative process as amendments are introduced," Hill said.

Join us in congratulating Georgia Appleseed on this extraordinary accomplishment! In addition to the more than 260 volunteers who contributed to the project, Appleseed extends special thanks to project manager **Leslie Gresham** of Georgia Appleseed, as well as "volunteer extraordinaire" **Judy O'Brien**, lead writer of the statewide summary report and pro bono partner at **Sutherland**.

For more information on Appleseed, visit www.appleseednetwork.org. To support the work of Appleseed, donate [here](#).

Common Wisdom: Making the Case for
a New Georgia Juvenile Code



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