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MORE THAN A YEAR LATER, KEYS 2 DRIVE STAYING ON ROAD TO SUCCESS

When it launched more than a year ago, the goal of the KEYS 2 Drive program was to help people obtain a valid driver's license and get back on the road legally. That goal is being met: more than 900 people have earned their license through the program.

Another added benefit has been the collection of outstanding fines and fees — since launch, the Duval County Clerk of Courts has collected more than \$642,000.

The smart justice initiative was established in partnership with the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, Fourth Circuit Judiciary, and Duval County Clerk of Courts. It benefits public safety and the criminal justice system as a whole by assisting people facing certain license-related offenses break the cycle of suspensions, fines, fees, and repeated infractions.

The program has been popular so far — in almost a year and a half, the State Attorney's Office referred more people to the program than every diversion program and treatment court combined. More than half are still in the program; early analysis shows participants average between six and 18 months to obtain a license.

Early recipients have indicated their licenses will help them find employment and housing, assist family members, and spend less time and money on alternative transportation. The local criminal justice system has been able to recoup outstanding fines and fees and spend fewer resources on incarceration and prosecution.

“This is the positive impact we envisioned when KEYS 2 Drive was created,” said State Attorney Melissa Nelson. “This smart justice program has made a difference in the lives of many people and our community and we look forward to it continuing to flourish.”

KEYS 2 Drive’s early success in Duval County led to the program’s expansion to Nassau County in May 2019 through collaboration with the Nassau County Clerk of Courts, Nassau County Judiciary, and support of Nassau County law enforcement.

“We have assisted hundreds of people obtain their license and believe the program has had an exceptional first year,” said Ruben Valdivia, executive director of Court Options, which serves as case managers for participants.

The Duval County judiciary also plays a role in the success of the program, as County Court judges monitor the progress of those enrolled. County Court Judges Roberto Arias and Scott Mitchell both have seen positive results since the program began in May 2018.

“The program benefits the community as a whole, as an unlicensed driver is an uninsured driver,” said Arias. “I am personally hopeful more people are referred to the program to ensure it has the most chance to succeed.”

Mitchell also has seen the benefits from the bench.

“The KEYS 2 Drive program provides an opportunity for unlicensed defendants to obtain a valid driver’s license and to drive legally,” said Mitchell. “This facilitates their ability to work, to care for their families, and to become productive members of our community. The program is succeeding in this regard, and I’m enthusiastic about its future.”