



## Interested in Youth Courts? What *Community Organizations* Need to Know

A youth court is a program in which youth volunteers sentence their peers under restorative justice principles for juvenile offenses, traffic infractions, truancy, or school rule violations. There are over 25 youth courts operating throughout Washington State and many more are being planned. Could your community service organization benefit from a youth court program? Here are a few things to consider as you think about starting a youth court program.

### **Benefits for Community Organizations**

Youth court programs are an excellent way to help community organizations fulfill their mission and strengthen the communities that they serve.

#### **A youth court program can help your organization**

- develop a healthy, positive relationship with youth,
- provide youth with a forum to voice concerns and offer solutions,
- strengthen relationships with other community and government organizations that share your mission,
- reconnect previously alienated youth to their community through restorative justice principles, and
- acquire new youth volunteers as respondents fulfill the community service requirements of their disposition at your organization.

#### **State law authorizes and encourages youth courts**

State law authorizes and regulates youth court programs in Washington State. The law requires youth courts to use restorative justice principles and follow national youth court guidelines. It specifically encourages courts to work with cities, counties, community organizations and youth to implement, expand and use youth court programs.

In addition, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy has determined that youth court programs reduce crime and save taxpayers and victims over \$9,000 per case.

#### **Roles for Community Organizations**

Community organizations are pivotal to the success of a youth court program. The role of a community organization in a youth court program can vary depending on the type of program and how it is structured.

#### **Community organizations can**

- advocate for the creation of a youth court program to meet the needs of the youth they serve,
- provide leadership for youth court programs by supplying advisory board members,
- make available the physical space for a youth court program,
- offer community and social service referrals for respondents,
- supply a venue for respondents to do community service, and
- provide educational classes for respondents and volunteers.

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*"The benefits of youth court can be measured in the educational value, the commitment to community by the student participants, and the positive relationships that are formed between adults and youth."*

– Susan Goettsch,  
Director, Boys and  
Girls Club  
Monroe WA



**Want to create a youth court but don't know where to start?**

Help is here! Start with contacting the **Washington State Council on Public Legal Education** for information and technical assistance.

Visit the **Federal Youth Court Program**, [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net), which has helpful publications, training materials and resources to assist emerging youth court programs, including these **important publications**.

- *Youth Cases for Youth Courts Desktop Guide*
- *Peer Justice and Youth Empowerment: An Implementation Guide for Teen Court Programs*
- *National Youth Court Guidelines*

Based on the principles of restorative justice, a main objective of youth court is to reconnect respondents to the community. Active involvement of community organizations provides this critical opportunity. When youth court respondents work with a community organization, true transformation is possible. By providing community service as part of their disposition, youth are learning job skills, realizing the importance of giving back to the community, and discovering that adults can play a big part in their lives in a positive way.

**Steps to take**

Community organizations can serve as the catalyst to start a youth court program by leveraging their existing network of relationships with schools, courts, and law enforcement agencies. Here are some steps you can take right now to begin the creation of a youth court in your community.

- Participate in an exploratory group to identify youth problems in your community and where there is a need for effective programs.
- Contact the Washington State Council for Public Legal Education ([cple@wsba.org](mailto:cple@wsba.org)) for information and technical assistance in starting and operating a youth court.
- Consult the Federal Youth Court Program at [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net).
- Contact other communities in Washington that have a youth court program in place.
- Participate in an advisory group to set up a program.
- Serve as a recruiter and advisor to your youth court.

**For more information on youth court programs and training opportunities in Washington State, contact**

**The Council on Public Legal Education**

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