



"Youth courts provide a juvenile probation officer with a system in which the youth's local community has direct impact on the youth involved in first-time and minor criminal offenses.

They provide teens with support and information on resources available to assist juvenile offenders and their families in resolving and coping with difficult situations.

Youth court unites the court and community together in a day-to-day effort to help protect and guide the community and its youth."

*- Danetta Rutten,
Probation
Officer/Diversion
Unit/Teen Court
Coordinator
Clallam County WA*

Interested in Youth Courts? What *Juvenile Probation Officers* 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 benefit from a youth court program? Here are a few things to consider as you think about starting a youth court program.

Benefits to Juvenile Probation Officers

Juvenile probation officers manage large caseloads month after month. As a diversion program, youth courts provide an opportunity for youth to become part of the community again without becoming part of the system. Offenders who have experienced youth court have a better understanding of what it might be like to end up in court and are less likely to recidivate. In fact, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy has determined that youth court reduces crime and saves taxpayers and victims over \$9,000 per case.

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 to follow national youth court guidelines. It specifically encourages courts to work with cities, counties and community organizations and youth to implement, expand and use youth court programs. The list below highlights the responsibilities of the juvenile justice system in juvenile diversion youth court programs as outlined by the Washington state youth court legislation.

- Juvenile court must grant prior approval to and supervise youth courts.
- Youth courts have jurisdiction over 8-17 year old, diversion-eligible youth where the prosecutor or probation counselor determines probable cause to believe the youth committed a crime.
- Youth courts do not have jurisdiction over youth who are under the continuing jurisdiction of the juvenile court for law violations, including youth with a matter pending before juvenile court which has not been adjudicated.
- Youth courts have specific disposition options that are in addition to traditional diversion options.
- Youth court programs are responsible for notifying the prosecutor or probation counselor of unsuccessful completion of disposition.

Roles for Juvenile Probation Officers

Juvenile probation officers have a unique vantage point on the juvenile justice system. They know firsthand the issues facing troubled youth, and are well connected to the schools, courts and other agencies essential to establishing a youth court program. Juvenile probation officers also know about the community resources that are available as disposition options and may provide access to these resources for the youth court respondents. The role of a juvenile probation officer in a youth court program can vary depending on the type of youth court program and how it is structured.

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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, 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*

Juvenile probation officers can

- screen and refer youth to youth court programs,
- operate youth court program through the probation office,
- provide leadership for youth court programs by serving as advisory board members,
- identify and provide access to disposition options, such as educational classes, community service placement, and drug and alcohol assessments,
- advocate for the creation of a youth court program to meet the needs of the youth they serve, and
- serve as youth court coordinators and assist with the day-to-day administration of the program.

Steps to take

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) for information and technical assistance in starting and operating a youth court.
- Consult the Federal Youth Court Program at 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

c/o Washington State Bar Association

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