



OJJDP FACT SHEET

John J. Wilson, Acting Administrator

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National Youth Court Center

by Mistene Vickers

Youth court programs have become an integral component of the juvenile justice system in communities across America and have expanded rapidly in the past 5 years. There are now more than 650 programs, with hundreds of jurisdictions ready to develop new programs. Although jurisdictions may call their programs different names—youth court, teen court, or peer court—the philosophy guiding the programs is the same: hold juvenile offenders accountable for their actions, educate youth about the judicial and legal systems, and empower youth to be active in their communities.

To create a central point of contact for youth court programs, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) established the National Youth Court Center (NYCC) in 1999 at the American Probation and Parole Association in Lexington, KY. The Center provides training, technical assistance, and resource materials to developing and existing youth courts.

Information Clearinghouse

NYCC manages an information clearinghouse, which provides information on operations and practices of youth court programs in the United States. It also provides resource materials for program development. The Center maintains a searchable database of information about active and developing youth court programs; nearly 500 youth courts have submitted comprehensive information. The database allows NYCC staff to perform customized searches to meet specific requests for information. For example, staff can track the number and location of youth courts that accept truancy cases or the number and location of programs that use youth judges. NYCC also maintains a youth court Web site (www.youthcourt.net), which is updated frequently and contains a current list of youth court programs, downloadable resource information, training announcements, and links to other helpful sites.

National Guidelines

OJJDP has asked NYCC to develop national guidelines to assist youth court programs in developing policy and implementing

practices that promote accountability and integrity in the juvenile justice system. NYCC also is compiling a compendium of resources to assist youth courts in implementing the suggested guidelines; it will include sample forms, policies, procedures, and protocols that a program can easily customize as needed.

Training and Technical Assistance

The Center will conduct a total of five regional and national training seminars beginning this year. These seminars will consist of two tracks—a beginner track for new or developing programs and an advanced track for operating programs. NYCC is also coordinating a national conference in Albuquerque, NM, to be held October 22–24, 2000. The conference will offer more than 30 workshops on a variety of topics, including volunteer recruitment and training, evaluation of youth courts, and promotion and encouragement of community involvement. Workshops will be geared to both adults and young people who are involved in youth court programs.

Technical assistance ranging from telephone and written correspondence to onsite assistance is available from NYCC to jurisdictions needing support for program implementation or enhancement.

Partnerships

The appeal of youth court programs across a variety of disciplines has led to diverse partnerships. At the Federal level, NYCC receives support from four agencies—OJJDP, the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. NYCC also has formal partnerships with three of OJJDP's Law-Related Education (LRE) program grantees to develop materials for NYCC. (The LRE program teaches K–12 students about law, the Constitution, and their rights and responsibilities under the law.)

The American Bar Association of Washington, DC, will develop a youth volunteer training/education package for youth volunteers. This package will provide educational resources to train youth court volunteers and enhance their understanding of both the law and the justice system. The package will include youth volunteer manuals based on the different youth court program models and an instructor's guide. Street Law, Inc., of Washington, DC, is developing 10 student-centered, interactive, law-related lessons that deal with topics for which young people frequently are arrested and referred to youth court. These lessons will be a sentencing resource for youth court programs. Phi Alpha Delta of Granada Hills, CA, the largest law fraternity in the United States, is promoting youth courts to its members to encourage them to volunteer with local programs. Finally, a National Youth Court Alliance, comprising Federal, national, State, and local public and private agencies, has been formed to help promote the youth court concept and to work with the Center on youth court initiatives as they arise.

For Further Information

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The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

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