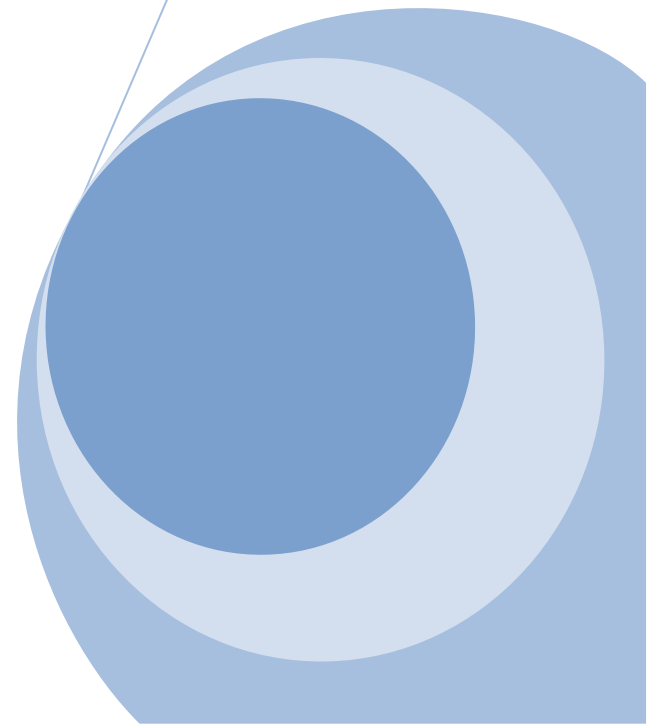
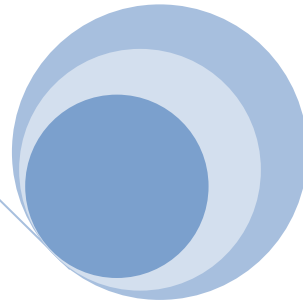
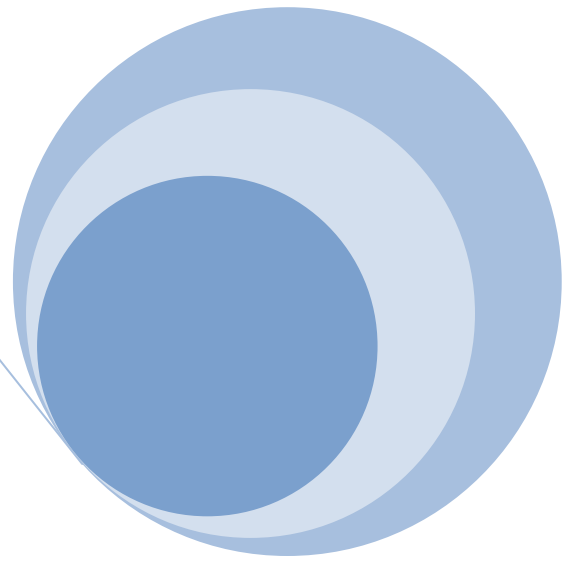




**Columbia County  
Teen Court Report**  
2005 - 2007



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## What is Teen Court?

Imagine walking into a courtroom where the defendant and the court officers are all under the age of 18. At first glance, it might appear as if a mock trial was being conducted. However, in a growing number of jurisdictions across the nation, this is exactly the type of setting and approach being used to handle minor juvenile cases. Teen Courts, sometimes called youth courts and peer courts, present an alternative approach to juvenile justice in which juvenile offenders are sentenced by a jury of their peers.

Teen Courts constitute one avenue for employing concepts such as restorative justice, positive peer influence, accountability, social competency development, and youth leadership to offer communities a prevention and early intervention program. Currently there are 40 Teen Courts in Wisconsin and over 1000 nation wide.

In Columbia County, Teen Court is available to first-time offenders who have been cited for minor infractions of the law. Offenders referred to Columbia County Teen Court participate on a voluntary basis. Teen Court is for offenders who admit guilt and choose to go before their peers to be sentenced. Youth offenders who successfully complete all Teen Court requirements have their case dismissed from the regular court system and their record is expunged.

Youth are often overlooked when communities address youth problems. It is a familiar assumption that the teen years are turbulent and stressful. Other frequently held misconceptions are that teens are not capable of being responsible, making appropriate decisions, having a serious thought or conversation, or

handling any type of independence. These myths and assumptions are challenged when observing and talking with youth who participate in teen court programs.

The Columbia County Teen Court Peer Jury is composed of volunteer teens from schools throughout Columbia County, as well as youth offenders who have been required to serve on a jury as part of their sentence. Referrals come through law enforcement, human services, and schools.



2004 – Mock hearing to introduce the public to Teen Court. Volunteers being sworn in by Judge James Miller.



The Clerk of Courts presents the case during a mock hearing.

During a Columbia County Teen Court hearing, the Peer Jury is presented with the case, calls witnesses, decides the consequences, and passes sentence. The jury may impose a sentence that includes community service, verbal or written apologies, restitution, writing an essay, curfew, a jail tour, diversion classes and jury duties.

The high level of youth participation that Teen Court programs demand affords communities an opportunity to empower youth to influence behaviors and address the problem of juvenile crime in their community. The experience can help youth take pride and ownership in the safety and well-being of their communities.



Teen Court volunteers and respondents picking up garbage on Highway 33. Adult supervision provided by Chief Ken Manthey (far left) and Paula Enger (far right).

## **Statistics**

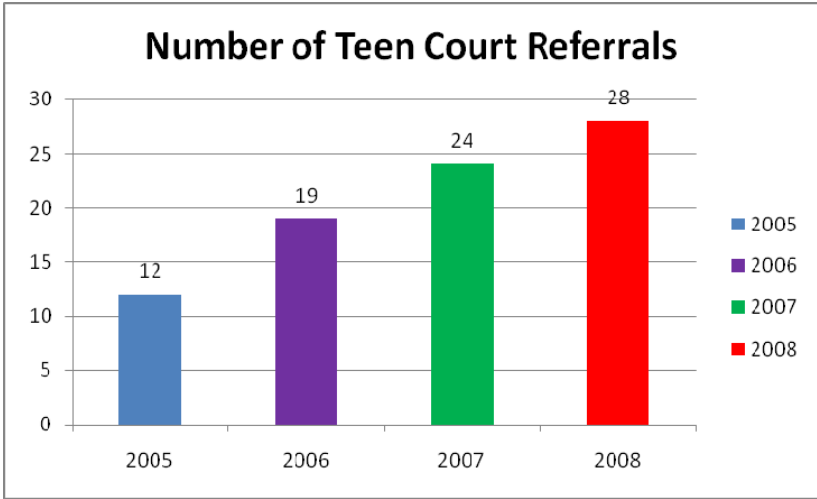
Since 2005, Columbia County Teen Court has been collecting survey data. Youth offenders (called Respondents in our court) who take part in the Teen Court program and their parent(s) or guardian(s) are given a pre, a post and a six-month follow up survey.

The pre-survey is given to the respondent and his or her parent (s) at the beginning of the intake interview. The post-survey is sent to the respondent and his or her parent (s) upon completion of the respondent's sentence. The six-month follow-up surveys are sent to the respondent and his or her parent(s) six months after the completion of the respondent's sentence.

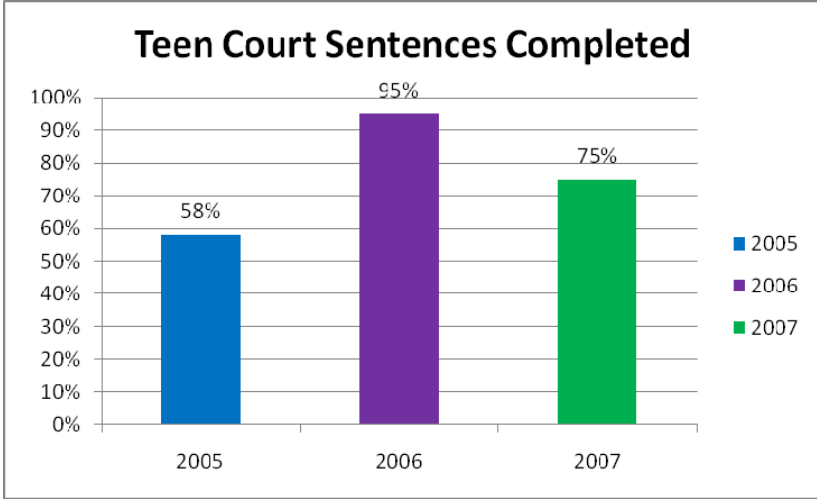
The survey is anonymous. Neither the respondent nor the parent put their names on the survey. Survey data is sent to an outside evaluator.

This report could not be completed until a large enough pool of surveys had been completed. As you can see from the above description, the collection of one respondent's surveys could take as much as a year's time. A sentence can take up to six months to complete and the final survey is then sent out six months after the sentence completion.

On the following pages you will find statistics from the first three years of the Columbia County Teen Court program.



Although this report is for 2005 – 2007, the number of referrals for 2008 has been included to show that the upward trend is continuing.

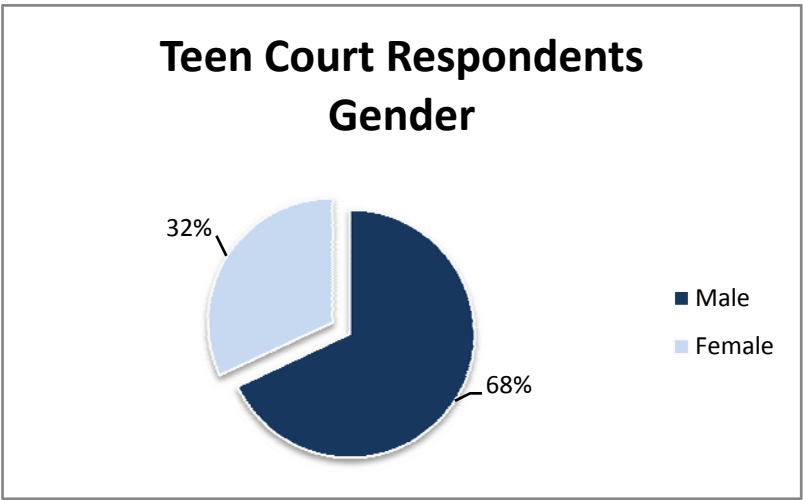


Reasons for incomplete sentences include:

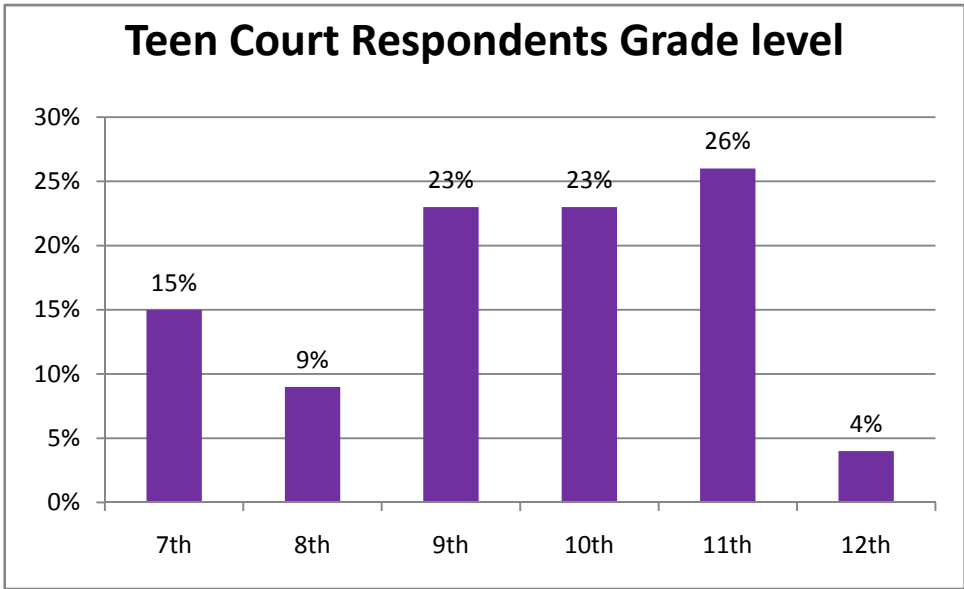
- non-compliance with sentence requirements
- involvement with law enforcement/school discipline while under sentence
- no-show for required activity while under sentence
- sent back to referring agency before hearing/did not meet requirements for program
- withdrew self from program

2007 - Teen Court Coordinator, Meg McCullough, presents Volunteer Caiti Enger with the Wisconsin Teen Court Association (WTCA) Scholarship. In 2008, Jake Barreau was awarded a WTCA scholarship. Teen Court volunteers from all over the state apply for this scholarship and only two receive the scholarship annually. It was a huge honor that a Columbia county Teen Court volunteer was chosen – two years in a row!





2006 - New volunteers being sworn in by Judge James Miller at the annual volunteer training. Volunteers are required to attend a six to eight hour training annually, as well as two of the four quarterly meetings/trainings.



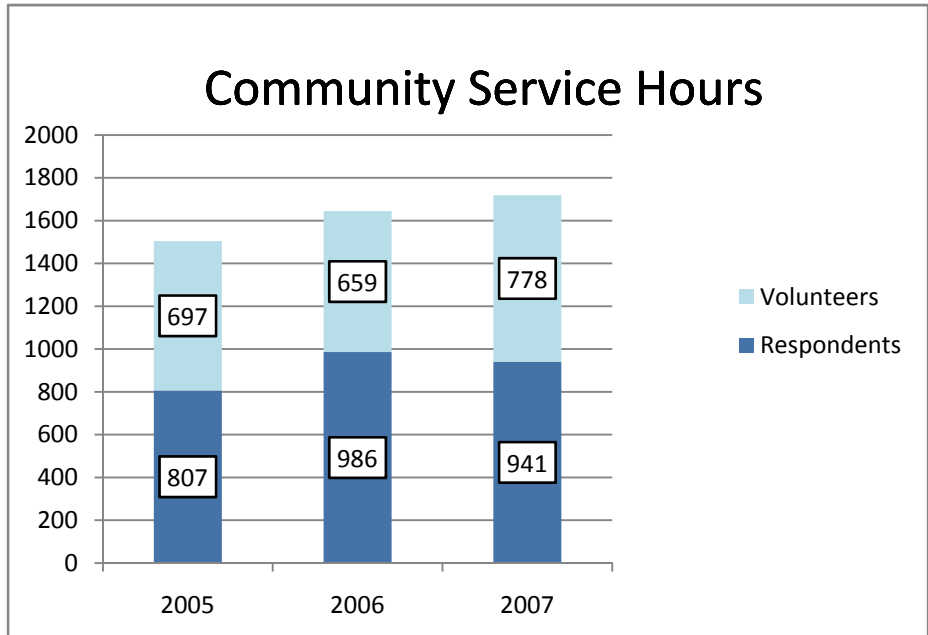


Teen Court volunteers doing community service at a local nursing home.

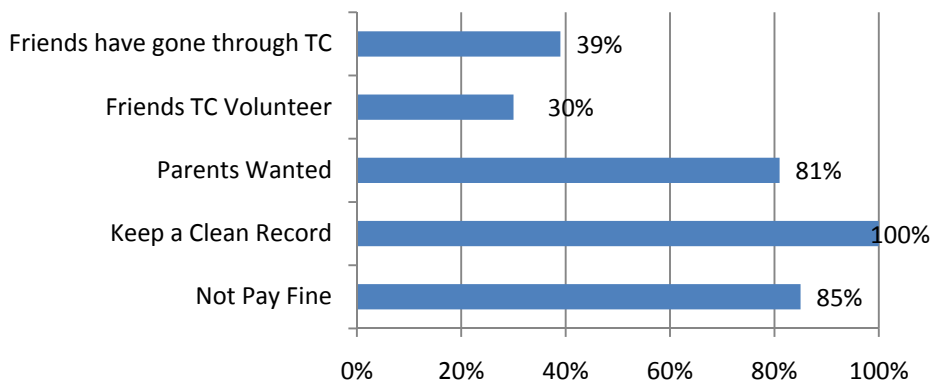


One on one time with nursing home resident.

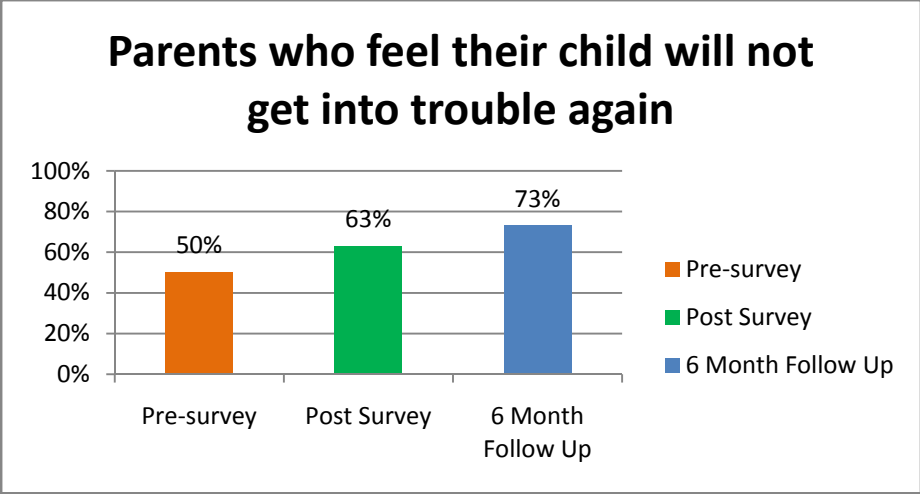
Total community service hours for volunteers and respondents are **4868**. This equates to **\$31,642** of contributions (at minimum wage) to Columbia County communities from 2005 through 2007.



### Reasons to participate in Teen Court (Somewhat or Very Important) N=47

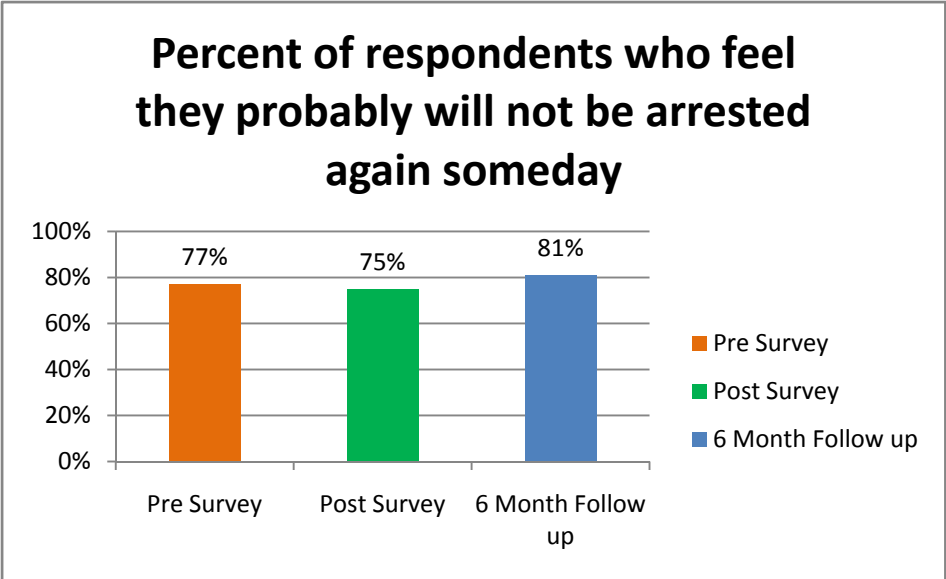


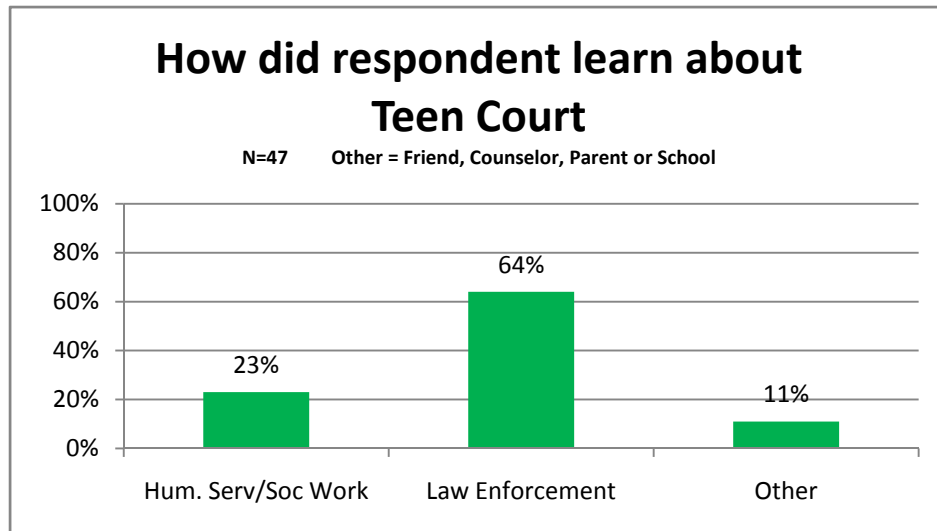
Respondent pre-survey responses to the question, "Why did you come to Teen Court?"



**Repeat Offender Rate**

- **62%** of respondents who completed their sentences did not receive any warnings or citations from law enforcement during the six months after completing their sentences. (In future surveys this question will be reworded to make it clearer and to identify true repeat offender rate. While it is important to know if the respondents have received a warning, we have found in talking to respondents who later became volunteers, that this question was not clear and they were marking any interaction with law enforcement as ‘yes’).
- **91.5%** of respondents who completed their sentences did not receive a school suspension or expulsion during the six months after completing their sentences.





### Other Key Findings

- **84.6 % to 91 %** of respondents reported being satisfied with their choice of coming to Teen Court (from questions #26 and #35 on the post survey)
- On the post survey, **89.6%** of respondents reported that they think teens are important role models for other youth
- **22%** of respondents became Teen Court volunteers after completion of their sentence
- **93%** of parents felt their children, who went through Teen Court, were treated fairly



Community Service – bell ringing for the Salvation Army.



2005 - One of the first jury training sessions.

## Offenses seen in Teen Court

Offense	2005	2006	2007
Burglary/Theft	4	2	6
Criminal Damage	0	2	3
Curfew	0	2	6
Disorderly conduct	3	8	3
Facsimile Firearm @ school	1	0	0
Obstructing	1	0	0
Operating a motor vehicle without owners consent	0	2	0
Possession of marijuana	0	0	1
Possession of narcotics	0	2	1
Possession of Paraphernalia	1	0	1
Possession of Tobacco	1	1	0
Resisting	1	0	0
Shoplifting	0	0	1
Trespass	0	3	3
Underage alcohol consumption	1	0	2
<b>Totals*</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>

\*Please note: Respondents sometimes come to Teen Court with multiple charges. As a result the total offenses will not match the total number of surveys collected (as listed on page 5).

## Individual Success Stories

In the following success stories the names of the respondents have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

### Sally

Sally came to our group as an eighth grader. Sally and another girl drank alcohol and then took Sally's parents car and went for a joy ride. Both girls were referred to Teen Court.

When Sally came to Teen Court, she had a major attitude and there was some doubt that she would even make it through our program. Thankfully, Sally proved us all wrong and not only completed the program but also joined us as a volunteer after she completed her sentence.

Sally has completely immersed herself in the volunteer program, taking part in committee work and becoming a peer trainer. Sally is not afraid to talk about what brought her to Teen Court and she has done a wonderful job making presentations to local groups and organizations. She has also taken on the leadership role of Jury Foreperson and has brought numerous new volunteers to the group.

This past year one of our adult volunteers nominated Sally for an Award. While receiving the award she stood on stage along side one of her former middle school teachers (who was also receiving an award). The teacher had tears in her eyes while the awards were presented. Afterwards I approached the teacher to congratulate her. She shared with me why she had been crying. It was not because of her own award, it was because Sally was receiving an award. She said she had Sally as a student in middle school and had endless problems with her. She was crying because she was so happy to see that Sally had made such changes in her life. Two and a half years later, Sally continues to be a real asset to our Teen Court.

#### **Key Survey results for Sally:**

(A blank space in the following chart indicates that the question was not asked on that particular survey)

<b>Question</b>	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>	<b>Six-month</b>
<b>Being involved in Teen Court makes you a better person</b>	Not sure	Strongly agree	
<b>I will probably be arrested again some day</b>	Not sure	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>It is important to me to help other people in my life</b>	Not sure	agree	Strongly agree

On the six-month follow-up survey Sally was asked, "Because of Teen Court one thing I do differently now is..." She answered, "Think before I do anything" and if there was anything else she would like us to know about Teen Court, She said, "Thank you for giving me a second chance. I really do appreciate it!"

When Sally's parent or guardian was asked, on the six-month follow-up survey, if there was anything that she would like us to know about Teen Court, she said, "It was very good to know others care when teens are concerned. "

Six months after the end of Sally's sentence she had not had any school suspensions or expulsions and no interaction with law enforcement.



Pictured at left is a Teen Court quarterly meeting. Volunteers are required to attend a minimum of two quarterly meetings per year. The meetings are run by the youth. A chairperson, vice-chair and secretary are chosen by the group and serve a one year term. At the meetings volunteers have an opportunity to make decisions about how the program is run and to do some on-going training.

## Ted

Ted came to Teen Court with an attitude and a chip on his shoulder. Ted was sent to Teen Court for fighting at school. He seemed to have difficulty relating to his peers and reported that he had few friends.

At his hearing, the jury sentenced Ted to a number of sanctions including 13 hours of community service and two jury duties. Ted attended jury duty training. He had oppositional behavior, making comments contrary to the groups opinions and discounting the police and legal system. After the training, the adult supervisor expressed concern that Ted might not make it through Teen Court because of his attitude.

On a Saturday in April, the Teen Court (volunteers and respondents together) did a community service project at the Divine Savior Nursing Home by planting flowers and playing bingo with the residents. As part of his sentence, Ted came to the nursing home. He arrived with head hanging down and his hands shoved into his pockets. He barely spoke as he checked in. As the coordinator, I was concerned about Ted interacting with the residents so I kept a close watch on him.

Ted was assigned to a resident, "Shirley," who was very cognitively aware but who was confined to a wheelchair and did not have use of her arms. As I observed Ted and Shirley, I was surprised at the amount of conversation that was going on – there was even laughing! I overheard Shirley say to Ted, "You know, I really like you." Ted was smiling from ear to ear. What a connection had happened here - it gave me goose bumps. For the rest of the day Ted was like a different person. As he was leaving he

waved and yelled, “Good-bye” and “See you next time.” The following week Ted stopped at the Teen Court office to drop off some paperwork and asked how he could become a volunteer!

**Key Survey results for Ted:**

(A blank in the following chart indicates that the question was not asked on that survey)

Question	Pre	Post	Six-month
I will probably be arrested again some day	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
It is important to me to help other people in my life	Not sure	Agree	Agree
I will never get into serious trouble again	Not sure	Strongly agree	Strongly agree

On the six-month follow-up survey Ted was asked, “Because of Teen Court one thing I do differently now is...” He answered, “Think before I act.”

Ted’s parent or guardian was asked to describe any behavior change that was seen in their child as a direct result of being involved in Teen Court. Ted’s parent said, “Thinks before action.”

Six months after completing his sentence Ted has had an in-school suspension, however, he has not received any warnings or citations from law enforcement.

Team building activities are an important part of the annual volunteer training.



**Responses to Open Ended Questions**

Please note that answers have been typed verbatim from the survey responses.

**From Parents: “Please add any additional comments that you might have about Teen Court.”**

- Good for (respondents name removed) to see how justice system was fair to him
- Had it not been for Teen Court, this could have affected her in bad way. I am so grateful for this program and willing to help out when needed as I feel it could help save another teen’s life
- I am grateful for Teen Court, especially that his offense/crime isn’t on his permanent record
- I am grateful my child was in Teen Court – she understands what being in trouble means
- Understands there are consequences to actions

- I believe my daughter made an error and Teen Court was a good thing for her because she doesn't have a record now. I believe she will never make a mistake like this again
- I feel sentencing should be grouped and given according to severity of offense, I.e., my son should not have been given more punishment for "being there" as kids who actually performed the act
- It seemed to drag on for months
- Meg and Liz did a great job with my child. They helped in every way I asked. They are strong, but understanding. Made our experience worth time and effort
- More teens need to be able to sit in room (parents involved) and talk openly about incident – or be humiliated in front of friends might work better
- Most of the kids on the peer jury acted very mature and respectful. A few did not, and I thought they should have been removed immediately for giggling and laughing during the session
- My son wants to volunteer for Teen Court – he found it very interesting. I think he learned a lot from it
- Participating in community service helped promote how much other people need our help – even if small things



Audience members observe a mock hearing.

- Pleased to see the outcome – making better decisions, treat each other with more respect, community service = positive
- Seemed somewhat disorganized at times, but when teens are involved that can happen. Meg did great job of explaining and having kids understand seriousness of their actions
- Taught my child there are consequences when breaking the law
- Teen Court educated my child so that they learn from their mistakes
- Teen Court is a great way to pay for what you did and start over with a clean record. Thank you!
- Teen Court is an excellent alternative to regular court for teenagers. It gives teens a second chance and the teen jurors are very fair with their choices for discipline
- Teen Court meant nothing to these kids. No interest in us or rapport had NO BUSINESS being in charge of my daughter's penalty. She dropped a class, it affects her class choices for 2 years, always will regret this, loss of trust for law enforcement
- Thanks so much for everything! Your time and talents and help!
- This was a good program. I am grateful for the understanding and the help that was given. I think my son will "remember" this if the temptation ever presents itself-and go the other way

- Very good program, good luck and thanks
- When there is no court it would be nice to get together once a month anyways. Too much of a time lapse to keep the positive thing flowing

**From Parents: “Please describe any behavior change that you have seen in your child that is a direct result of being involved in Teen Court.”**

- Doesn’t fight
- Has a better understanding of consequence for actions and avoids trouble
- Haven’t seen any
- He has been much more responsible
- He tries to think before doing
- Is in contact with me more when he is out of the house
- It is easier to talk to him
- Looks at the consequences
- Maturity, taking responsibility for actions
- More grown up
- My child has changed a lot. Becoming the person I knew they were
- My son made a mistake and did not have a behavior problem
- She has become more aware of consequences and become more responsible
- She is more concerned with school and making sure friends stay out of trouble
- She knows she can’t trust people
- Thinks about consequences before he acts
- Thinks before action. Touring the jail scared him, I believe that’s what keeps him out of trouble



Jury returning to the courtroom after deliberation. 2004 mock hearing.

**From Respondents: “Because of Teen Court, one thing I will do differently now is...”**

- Be more cautious
- Check my pockets, and tell my parents where I am or try to at least
- Cut back on tobacco
- I don’t hang out with bad people anymore
- I try hard to stay out of trouble, I just do stupid things sometimes
- Listen to others and treat everybody with respect
- Listen!!
- Not get in trouble with the law
- Nothing really
- Nothing really. I never got in trouble before either
- Respect the law
- Stay out of trouble

- Stay out of trouble
- Talk to people about joining Teen Court as a volunteer
- Think about consequences before I do anything
- Think about responsible things that could happen after a decision
- Think about what I'm doing
- Think about what I'm going to do before I do it
  
- Think before I act
- Think before I do anything
- Think before I go and do something illegal
- To stay out of trouble, be involved in organizations and keep my time occupied
- Would try never to steal again



Volunteers preparing to do a Peer Jury Training session. Respondents who sit on a jury must also take this training.

### Further Information

For further information about Columbia County Teen Court, please contact:



Volunteers preparing to do a Peer Jury Training session. All respondents who sit on a jury must first take this training.

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