

# IN SESSION

THE NEWSLETTER  
OF THE NATIONAL  
YOUTH COURT CENTER



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## Weed and Seed and Youth Courts — A Perfect Match

by John G. Duncan

### The Weed and Seed Program

Since 1992, the U.S. Department of Justice has supported a community initiative to reduce crime and restore neighborhoods under the uniquely titled effort called Weed and Seed. Designed to draw together both law enforcement and human service resources, no introduction to this program can be made without stressing that it is a strategy and not a grant program. Its primary focus is to emphasize human resources — not funding sources — to affect needed change in neighborhoods suffering from the decaying effects of drugs and violence.

The cornerstone to any Weed and Seed initiative is its steering committee comprised of not only federal, state and local officials but also a broad base of community representatives willing to develop and implement a strategy for change. The process begins by designating a specific area of the community, ranging from a few blocks to several square miles, as the Weed and Seed site. With the leadership of the local U.S. Attorney, communities develop a plan of action and apply for recognition from the U.S. Department of Justice. With official recognition, they are eligible for federal funding to support their law enforcement and revitalization efforts.<sup>1</sup>

Given its stated objective to “weed” out crime and “seed” the revitalization of neighborhoods, steering committees need to draw together a full range of law enforcement, prevention, intervention, and treatment services. Weed and Seed’s strategy of coupling financial resources with a well constructed plan for action has proven to be one of the Department of Justice’s longest-standing and most successful community-based initiatives. The program presently has 315 officially recognized sites nationally.

Weed and Seed sites are most commonly found in neighborhoods disproportionately characterized by high crime rates and high unemployment. Residents typically have little education and household incomes fall well below the federal poverty level. Housing is frequently substandard with only a small percentage of owner-occupied dwellings. Youth in these neighborhoods, faced with growing up in an environment lacking security, suitable housing, and adequate adult supervision, start out at a severe disadvantage. Poor school performance coupled with limited after-school activities only increases the likelihood that young teens will become involved in criminal activity.

While youth may initially commit only minor offenses such as curfew, loitering, and graffiti violations, the presence of gangs, firearms and easy access to drugs can be a compelling influence towards more serious criminal conduct. In this type of environment it is not surprising that many youth end up as school dropouts with few marketable skills or job opportunities and graduate to more serious criminal activity. Traditional juvenile courts, often faced with full dockets and too few resources, find it difficult to adequately address and supervise these young offenders.

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# IN SESSION

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## NCJRS Celebrates 30-Year Partnership with Criminal Justice Field

In 1972, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) started a project to make criminal justice information available to the public. Thus, forming of the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), the first federally funded clearinghouse of information.

NCJRS's extensive reference and referral services are available to answer your questions about crime and justice-related research, policy, and practice. NCJRS staff can provide statistics, offer referrals, discuss publications, compile information packages, search for additional resources, and provide other technical assistance — all tailored to your particular information needs.

The easiest way to access NCJRS is to visit its website at [www.ncjrs.org](http://www.ncjrs.org). The website offers full-text of more than 2,000 publications, and an abstracts database containing over 170,000 summaries of publications, reports, articles, and audiovisual products. Links to information about grants and funding opportunities, a calendar of events, and resources for upcoming conferences also add to the valuable content on the website.

For more information about NCJRS or to join the NCJRS network, visit [www.ncjrs.org](http://www.ncjrs.org) or [www.ojp.usdoj.gov](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov).

## NYCC Website Gets a New Look and New Features

The National Youth Court Center's website at [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net) looks a little different than it did when the last issue of this newsletter went to print. The website has undergone a complete redesign, including a new look and new navigation. All of the terrific content and resource information that has always been on the website is still there, along with some new features that you should find useful, including:

**Youth Court Job Postings** — Individuals interested in obtaining employment in the youth court field can visit this section to view employment listings from around the nation. Individuals looking to fill positions in their area can also send the NYCC information to post the positions.

**Online Calendar of Events** — Conferences, trainings, and other events related to youth courts are posted here. Individuals can also submit events for the calendar.

**New Coordinator Information** — One-stop shopping for new youth court coordinators. This page contains links to a variety of resources that are helpful for new youth court coordinators who need some assistance getting started.

We hope that you will visit [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net) often and that you find the resources and new information helpful in your efforts as a youth court coordinator. If you have any questions about the website or suggestions for new features, please email us at [nycc@csg.org](mailto:nycc@csg.org).

## Street Law, Inc. Passes a Resolution in Support of Youth Courts

On December 17, 2002, the Board of Street Law, Inc. adopted a resolution in support of the formation and expansion of youth court programs. The resolution as it was adopted states,

*"Therefore, be it resolved: That we commend, support and assist those involved in youth courts and others in developing youth courts."*

The complete text of the resolution appears on the NYCC's website at [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net).

# 2002: The Year in Review

*Many exciting things happened related to youth court during 2002. Here are some of the highlights.*

## Awards Received

- The National Youth Court Center's website ([www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net)) received the CivicMind™ Award in February of 2002.
- The Director of the National Youth Court Center, Tracy Godwin Mullins, received the Public Service Award for the American Probation and Parole Association's youth court project from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- The American Bar Association's Youth Court Volunteer Training/Educational Package received the Distinguished Achievement Award for Multimedia Instructional Materials, Young Adult Category from the Association of Educational Publishers.
- The developer of TEAM YC (Tools to Evaluate and Manage Youth Courts) received the Best Practices Award from the New York State Forum for Informational Resource Management in September of 2002.

## Resolutions Passed in Support of Youth Courts

- The American Probation and Parole Association passed a resolution in support of youth court programs in June of 2002.
- Street Law, Inc. passed a resolution in support of youth court programs in December of 2002.

## Resources Developed

The National Youth Court Center and allied organizations released the following youth court resources during 2002:

- *Roadmap: Youth courts: Young People Delivering Justice* (Developed and distributed by the American Bar Association, Office of Justice Initiatives through a subcontract with the NYCC and OJJDP)
- "Getting the Most Out of the Deliberation Process" online training, video, and facilitator's guide
- National Youth Court Month Action Kit
- 2003 12-Month Campaign Calendar: Empowering Youth Through Education and Service
- Youth Court Volunteer Training/Education Materials (Developed and distributed by the American Bar Association through a subcontract with the NYCC and OJJDP)
- *Giving Back: A Community Service-Learning Manual for Youth Courts* (Developed by the Constitutional Rights Foundation and Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago through a subcontract with the NYCC and OJJDP)
- *Street Law for Youth Courts: Educational Workshops* (Developed by Street Law, Inc. through a subcontract with the NYCC and OJJDP)

Most of these resources can be found online at [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net). For more information on availability of particular resources, contact the NYCC at [nycc@csg.org](mailto:nycc@csg.org) or (859) 244-8193.

## Trainings Delivered

The NYCC conducted the following training events in 2002:

- Restorative Justice and Youth Courts in Lexington, Kentucky August 12-14.
- Youth Courts: Evaluation and Grant Writing Training Seminar in Indianapolis, Indiana October 23-25.
- Youth Courts: An Implementation Training Seminar in Providence, Rhode Island December 9-11.

## National Youth Court Conference 2002

On April 14-16, 2002 over 960 youth court coordinators, youth volunteers, and others interested in youth courts gathered in Arlington, Virginia to attend workshops, sessions, and to network.

## First National Youth Court Month

The NYCC organized and supported the first National Youth Court Month in September of 2002. For more information, go to [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net).

## New Youth Website

In April 2002, the NYCC debuted a new website designed exclusively for youth court volunteers ([www.youthcourt.net/youth/ycy.htm](http://www.youthcourt.net/youth/ycy.htm)).

## United Nations Special Session on Children

In May 2002, youth court was the only program from the United States that was highlighted at the United Nations Special Session on Children in New York, NY, which occurs once every decade. To read the speech given at the Special Session by OJJDP Administrator J. Robert Flores, go to [www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org).

## Evaluation Findings Released

During the National Youth Court Conference in April, 2002 the Urban Institute released its evaluation findings on the OJJDP sponsored Evaluation of Teen Courts Project. The project studied teen courts in four states: Alaska, Arizona, Maryland, and Missouri. Researchers measured pre-court attitudes and post-court recidivism among more than 500 juveniles referred to teen court for nonviolent offenses, such as shoplifting and vandalism. The study compared recidivism outcomes for teen court defendants with outcomes for youth handled by the regular juvenile justice system.

The Urban Institute's findings were published in a report titled, "The Impact of Teen Courts on Young Offenders", which is available online at <http://www.jbutts.com/pdfs/410457.pdf>.

## Youth Court Documentary

The Colonie Youth Court Program in New York was filmed by a German production company for a documentary on youth courts. The program aired on German and French public television in the fall of 2002.

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## National Youth Service Day – April 11-13, 2003

National Youth Service Day is the largest service event in the world, engaging millions of young Americans and focusing national attention on the amazing leadership of young people. National Youth Service Day is also an opportunity to recruit the next generation of volunteers while promoting the benefits of youth service to the American public.

For the National Youth Service Day Tool Kit and other resource information about National Youth Service Day, go to Youth Service America's website at <http://www.ysa.org/nysd>.

# Youth Volunteers are Asked, “Why Volunteer for Youth Court?”

by Mistene M. Vickers

Let’s say you are a youth court coordinator at ABC Youth Court in Anytown, USA. You probably have a core group of youth volunteers that are committed to your program, showing up for nearly every hearing, and helping out with the program in other areas as they can. But what about the countless number of other youth in your community that don’t volunteer for youth court? Have you ever asked yourself why some youth volunteer for youth court, and others do not?

Young people today have a wide range of activities and interests that compete with their time. Athletics, band, choir, academic clubs, jobs, and family commitments all have to be balanced along with school-work. Most youth already have a lot on their plates, and with all of the opportunities available to them, how do they decide how to spend their time?

It’s a good question, and one that you should know the answer to if you are a youth court coordinator wanting to recruit and retain youth volunteers for your program. The answer, however, is not as clear as it may seem, and varies from youth to youth. Young people volunteer for youth court programs — or don’t volunteer — for all sorts of reasons, some of which might surprise you.

Cynthia Shangin, a senior at West Anchorage High School in Anchorage, Alaska and the President of the Anchorage Youth Court Bar Association joined the Anchorage Youth Court in 1999. When asked why she thinks youth volunteer for youth court, she said, “I think the first reason that a lot of students volunteer for youth courts is that they think it will look good on their college applications. But when they start to get into the program and find out how youth court really does great things and helps give youth a second chance, then they feel good about that. They realize they’re also doing an incredible service for their community.”

Some youth are invariably attracted to youth court because of the feeling of empowerment that they get by determining a fair, appro-

## Youth Volunteer Retention Tips for Program Coordinators

- Remember to recognize your volunteers whenever possible. Let them know how much you appreciate their time by giving them certificates, coupons for “freebies” in your community, or simply a pat on the back now and then.
- If possible, designate funds for scholarships for your graduating senior volunteers.
- Reward volunteers that consistently go above and beyond what’s expected of them. Make sure they know how much their efforts mean to you.
- Give volunteers an opportunity to perform other duties in addition to their traditional roles. If you made a list of all of the administrative tasks that you usually do yourself, you could probably think of at least a few that could just as easily be done by youth, freeing up your time and allowing them to build competencies and feel good about their contributions at the same time.
- Whenever possible, organize get-togethers to give your volunteers an opportunity to socialize away from the court setting.

iate sentence for youth court respondents (i.e., defendants). Like anyone, youth enjoy the satisfaction of making a difference in someone’s life. However, there have to be other reasons why youth volunteer. If their friends are involved with the program, they might decide to volunteer just to see what it’s all about. Some youth may become involved with the program as a respondent, and then decide to stay on after their sentence requirement is fulfilled. Other youth may take a government or social studies class at school that gets them interested in youth court.

Youth court is not for everyone, however. When a group of youth volunteers was asked why they think other youth don’t sign up for youth court, the most common answer received was that some youth just don’t think it’s cool to be in youth court. “Some people don’t get involved with youth court because they don’t think it’s cool to get these people in trouble for something they did,” said Emily Margolies from the Brown County Teen Court in Aberdeen, South Dakota. “They don’t understand that it isn’t us, as youth court volunteers, getting them into trouble.”

Aaron Barnett, a youth volunteer with the Placer County Peer Court in California, had this to say about why youth don’t volunteer: “Some youth don’t get involved because they simply aren’t interested in the law, or their friends aren’t interested in the law and they want to spend time with them. A lot of kids also have trouble with transportation to youth court, or their parents don’t support them.”

Thinking youth court is silly, lack of interest in the law, and lack of parental support may be some of the reasons why a youth would not want to volunteer for youth court, but that does not mean a youth court coordinator cannot address these issues in his or her recruitment and retention efforts. Holding a mock hearing at school can help show kids who might have not known anything about youth court before

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## Youth Volunteer Recruitment Tips for Program Coordinators

- Organize a community awareness meeting at a local school (or at your youth court program’s location) to inform the community about youth court and recruit volunteers. Send an announcement to local schools, churches, and other community groups.
- Demonstrate how youth court works by showing a mock trial, and then have program materials and information ready to distribute afterwards. Make sure several staff members and volunteers are available to answer questions and sign up new volunteers.
- Talk to local school officials about youth court. Invite them to attend a hearing (with the permission of the offender and his/her parents) to see how youth court operates. Encourage school personnel to promote the program in their schools.
- Create a program brochure and send them to individuals in your community that you would like to support the program. Include a letter from you with more information and encourage them to distribute the brochures to other youth and adults.

# Upcoming Training Seminars

## Youth Courts: An Implementation Training Seminar Specialized Training for OJP Grantees April 23-25, 2003 \* Washington, DC

The National Youth Court Center is conducting a special training seminar to assist jurisdictions in developing and implementing effective youth court programs. This highly interactive 2 1/2 days seminar is designed to provide information on youth courts from a national perspective; program planning and community mobilization; program staffing and funding; legal issues of youth courts; types of referrals for youth court and referral process; effective program services and sentencing options; volunteer recruitment and training; youth court operations and case management; and program evaluation.

This seminar is designed especially for Office of Justice Program grant recipients such as Weed and Seed, Drug Free Communities, Tribal Youth, Safe and Healthy Students, the Police Corps, and other initiatives funded by the Department of Justice that are interested in establishing a youth court. Types of individuals who may be interested include new youth court coordinators, juvenile justice system professionals, law enforcement officers, educators, and community members.

For more information about this training seminar, contact the National Youth Court Center at (859) 244-8193 or view training information online at [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net).

## Training of Trainers for Statewide Youth Court Associations and Networking Groups April 14-16, 2003 \* Oak Brook, Illinois

States with statewide youth court associations and networking groups will be eligible to send two experienced trainers to the "Youth Court Training of Trainers, Professional Development Institute". A three-day event, the Institute will prepare participants to hold training sessions in their states using resource materials from the National Youth Court Center, the American Bar Association, the Constitutional Rights Foundation, and Street Law, Inc. There is no charge to attend the Institute, and airfare and a per diem will be provided.

The Institute will be held at the McDonald's Corporate Training Center, Hamburger University. Set on a wooded 80-acre campus in west suburban Oak Brook, the University overlooks one of two lakes on campus. The lodge has an indoor swimming pool and workout room. Nature walkers often encounter deer.

Applications for this Institute are available from the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago. For more information, contact your statewide association representative after February 1 or Margie Chan from the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago at [chan@crfc.org](mailto:chan@crfc.org) or (800) 801-9933. (If you are unsure who your statewide association or networking group contact is, you can find a link to these listings on the resources page of the NYCC's website at <http://www.youthcourt.net/resources/overview.htm>.)

The Institute is made possible by a subcontract from the National Youth Court Center and the American Probation and Parole Association, through a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

# Youth Court Resources

## 2003 12-Month Campaign Calendar

In November 2002, all active youth court programs and programs in the developmental stage in the National Youth Court Center's database were mailed a copy of the new *2003 12-Month Campaign Calendar: Empowering Youth Through Education and Service*. The purpose of the calendar is to assist youth court programs with developing community service ideas for respondents, and to provide a forum for educating youth on a variety of social issues that affect young people. Every month, a new focus is highlighted in the calendar. The monthly focus areas were selected based on a poll taken by youth court coordinators. Some of the issues in this year's calendar include conflict resolution, bullying and harassment, and school safety. Each monthly focus also includes resource information, listings of national organizations that may be of assistance, and a list of community service or educational activities that youth court programs may consider doing related to the monthly focus.

For more information about the 2003 12-Month Campaign, or to download a copy of the Campaign Calendar, visit the National Youth Court Center's website at [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net).

## "Preparing For Your Case" Online Lesson Now Available on Youth Volunteer Website

The National Youth Court Center has developed a new online lesson that is available on the Youth Court Youth website at [www.youthcourt.net/youth/ycy.htm](http://www.youthcourt.net/youth/ycy.htm), and the main NYCC website at [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net). This lesson provides information to assist youth volunteers with preparing their cases and includes tips on how to gather and analyze case information; how to prepare questions to ask during the hearing; writing opening and closing statements; and how to prepare witnesses for the hearing. The lesson includes samples and templates in Word and WordPerfect that youth can modify for use in their own youth court program.

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how interesting and fun it can be to volunteer with youth court. Youth that may not have realized they had any interest in the law might be inclined to participate once they saw a demonstration of a youth court in action. If transportation is an issue, programs can organize car pools to and from the hearings, or, if youth court is held at school, a program could schedule hearings immediately after school so youth only have to arrange a ride home. If youth know before they volunteer that they will have help getting to youth court, it might make it easier for them to get parental buy-in so they can participate.

Many youth get involved with youth court initially because they are interested in the law, or in public speaking, or because, as Cynthia Shangin said, they see it as an activity that looks good on their college applications. The trick to keeping youth interested, it seems, is to make youth court a program that is worth their time after the initial excitement and newness of the program wears off. Making the youth feel that their time commitment is valuable and appreciated will go a long ways in retaining them as volunteers. □

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# A Look Back at the 2002 12-Month Public Service and Awareness Campaign

The National Youth Court Center (NYCC) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) would like to acknowledge the efforts of the 37 youth court programs that participated in 109 events and activities in support of the featured or community alternative campaigns during the 2002 12-Month Public Awareness and Service Campaign. The spirit, involvement, and service of the youth, adults, and program staff to their communities are to be commended.

The success of the 2002 12-Month Public Service and Awareness Campaign was largely due to the level of involvement of individual youth court programs. Many of the educational programs and community service projects that youth courts were involved with during the 2002 Campaign were inspiring. Some of the educational programs for youth volunteers and respondents focused on the use of alcohol, drugs, inhalants, drinking and driving; the impact of crime on victims; and effective use of child safety restraints. Community service projects and activities conducted included mock trials; community street fairs; youth court informational booths; the development of public service announcements; drafting and passing proclamations; issuing news releases; and providing community information on youth court in a variety of venues to recruit new volunteers. Youth courts also partnered with other agencies in community service projects and events such as converting an old school into a community center; cleaning yards and removing waste from the homes of elderly people; building a healing garden in memory of a DWI victim; donating quilts, books, and holiday gifts to Headstart programs; and collecting donations of food for needy families.

The extent of educational and community service activities that were done in 2002 is too lengthy to share in one article. We encourage you to go to [http://www.youthcourt.net/12-month\\_campaign/2002/highlights.htm](http://www.youthcourt.net/12-month_campaign/2002/highlights.htm) to view a more complete listing of what was accomplished in 2002.

## Certificates of Merit

Some youth courts went above and beyond the call of duty to participate in the 2002 Campaign. All programs that participated in a minimum of four of the featured campaigns received either a blue, red, or white Certificate of Merit from the NYCC and OJJDP. An explanation of the three types of certificates and the programs that received the certificates appears in Figure 1. Congratulations and thanks to these special programs for all of their hard work.

## Introducing the 2003 12-Month Campaign: Empowering Youth Through Education and Service

The 2003 12-Month Campaign is designed to provide youth court programs with a forum for educating youth on a variety of social issues that affect young people and provide them with an opportunity to enhance their understanding of important social issues through service to their communities. The 2003 12-Month Campaign differs from the 2002 12-Month Campaign in that instead of focusing on a different public awareness campaign every month (e.g., Victims' Rights Week in April), the 2003 Campaign focuses on a new social issue every month (e.g., Victims' Issues for April). This will allow youth court programs

that participate in the campaign some flexibility when planning their activities. The monthly topics were selected, through a voting process, by youth courts across the nation, and are as follows:

January	Diversity
February	Truancy
March	Dating Violence
April	Victims' Issues
May	Law-Related Education
June	Conflict Resolution
July	Bullying and Harassment
August	Family Violence
<b>September</b>	<b>National Youth Court Month</b>
October	Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs
November	School Safety
December	Health

We hope youth courts will participate in the 2003 Campaign. If you didn't receive your 2003 12-Month Campaign Calendar, contact the National Youth Court Center at [nycc@csg.org](mailto:nycc@csg.org) or (859) 244-8193. You can also find additional resources and suggestions for activities related to the 2003 Campaign on the NYCC website at [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net)

Figure 1

## Congratulations to 2002 12-Month Campaign Certificate of Merit Recipients

### Blue Certificates of Merit

Awarded to programs that participated in NINE or more monthly- featured campaigns or six monthly-featured campaign and three community alternatives.

**Brown County Teen Court - Aberdeen, SD**  
**Midvale Youth Peer Court - Midvale, UT**

### Red Certificates of Merit

Awarded to programs that participated in SIX or more monthly- featured campaigns or four monthly-featured campaign and two community alternatives.

**Baltimore City Teen Court - Baltimore, MD**  
**Layton Youth Court - Layton, UT**  
**Rio Rancho Teen Court - Rio Rancho, NM**

### White Certificates of Merit

Awarded to programs that participated in FOUR or more monthly- featured campaigns or three monthly-featured campaign and one-community alternatives.

**Cass County Youth Court - Fargo, ND**  
**Colonie Youth Court - Latham, NY**  
**Columbus County Teen Court - Whiteville, NC**  
**Owego Youth Court - Owego, NY**

## Public Safety is the Priority

It is understandable that the highest priority in any Weed and Seed program is public safety. Residents in these communities have benefited from coordinated law enforcement efforts to “weed” out crime. These have ranged from increased community policing and code enforcement to federal-state drug enforcement operations designed to target neighborhood drug dealers for federal prosecution. Parolees and probationers are subject to enhanced supervision. Community residents have also proven to be a significant resource in support of prevention and intervention programs. Residents are encouraged to participate in Neighborhood Watch programs and citizen marches against drugs and violence. Gang diversion, truancy suppression, and drug counseling programs are common to many sites. However, more needs to be done to insulate the youngest members of these communities from the influences that lead them to criminal activity. It is in this context that youth courts can play an active role in this effort.

## Youth Court as a “Weed” Resource

Youth courts have proven to be a promising alternative to addressing criminal conduct at its earliest stages.<sup>2</sup> Given this fact alone, there is little reason for not making youth court an integral part of every Weed and Seed initiative.

Tracking a similar period of growth as Weed and Seed, youth courts have become a popular alternative to the traditional legal system. While some courts have been in place for more than thirty years, most of the reported 865 plus youth courts in the United States have been established in little more than a decade. Founded on a philosophy of having young community members address youthful offenders about their criminal conduct, youth court has proven to be a well conceived strategy for addressing crime at its beginning stages.

Although a variety of youth court models exist, most are designed to allow young respondents, after acknowledging their guilt, to be sentenced by a jury of their peers. Sentences usually consist of community service and restitution. Some courts also require apologies to the victim, attendance at crime deterrence classes or later service on a youth court jury.

Weed and Seed communities understandably focus much of their energies on reducing substance abuse, violence and other criminal activity. Their efforts are frequently focused on identifying, intervening and providing services to high risk youth. While these programs provide much needed benefits, youth court offers an opportunity for young people to participate in an activity that builds qualities such as self esteem, communication skills and an understanding of our legal and judicial systems. It also allows youth to take an active roll as youth court judges, lawyers and jurors in addressing the problems of the young respondents who come before them. This experience can be invaluable to a young person growing up in a neighborhood deeply affected by poverty, crime, and drug abuse.

Facilities such as schools, churches, and community recreation centers can be a resource for recruiting youth and adult volunteers for youth courts. The interaction between trained adult volunteers and youth volunteers provides a wealth of mentoring opportunities. These same organizations can also serve as a source for case referrals where instances of petty theft, rules violations or other misconduct have occurred. For youth, whether they are volunteers or respondents, the youth court experience can be a positive force in their lives. In every Weed and Seed neighborhood, youth court can provide a constructive activ-

ity for its volunteers, a meaningful intervention program for youthful offenders, and an effective strategy for promoting public safety.

## Youth Court as a “Seed” Resource

While many government and community-based organizations have been effective in providing needed services to at-risk youth, they have not been as successful in utilizing youth as a resource for community change. Youth courts can provide that opportunity. One way youth courts can utilize youth for community change is by implementing practices within their programs that are based on restorative justice values. Restorative justice reduces the focus on punishment of the offender and places a greater emphasis on restoring the wellness of the community. While still requiring the offender to be held accountable for his conduct, this alternative approach to the justice system is characterized by having the offender contribute to the healing of the victim and the community for his wrongs.<sup>3</sup> These principles are compatible with the “seed” objective of not only restoring the physical structure of a neighborhood but repairing its human elements where crime, drugs and poverty have brought about a loss of values, hope and mutual respect among its citizens.

Youth courts have been recognized as a useful tool in the restorative justice process.<sup>4</sup> When young offenders are not only held accountable for their offense but given the opportunity to understand the real impact their actions have on those around them, and given opportunities through the sanctioning process to make amends and repair the harm they have caused by their actions, they can learn from their experience and avoid repeating their wrongful conduct. With sentencing options such as community service, restitution, apologies to victims, essays, and educational classes, the kinds of sentencing options available to a youth court in a Weed and Seed site can be easily tailored to meet the needs of any community.

## Conclusion

Declining neighborhoods in America’s cities are being revitalized through aggressive strategies implemented under the U.S. Department of Justice’s Weed and Seed program. The success of these efforts requires communities to implement cost effective and promising or proven programs that reduce crime and restore community values. Youth court is an excellent example of one program that has the capacity to do both. With studies showing that teens can positively influence the conduct of their peers, youth court and Weed and Seed clearly are a perfect match.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Executive Office for Weed and Seed, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, 810 7<sup>th</sup> Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20531.

<sup>2</sup> Butts, J. (Summer 2002) “Encouraging Findings from the OJJDP Evaluation” *In Session*, the newsletter of the National Youth Court Center.

<sup>3</sup> *An Interview with Former Visiting fellow of NIJ, Thomas Quinn*, The National Institute of Justice Journal, March 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Godwin, T. M. (Spring 2001) *The Role of Restorative Justice in Teen Courts: A Preliminary Look*. In *Session- The Newsletter of the National Youth Court Center*. □

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**March 29, 2003:** 8th Annual S.A.V.E. Summit, Raleigh, North Carolina. Contact (866) 343-SAVE or go to [www.nationalsave.org](http://www.nationalsave.org).

**March 31 – April 5, 2003:** Fourteenth National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, St. Louis, Missouri. Contact (703) 528-0435 or [14conf@pal-tech.com](mailto:14conf@pal-tech.com).

**April 10-13, 2003:** Second International Youth Leaders Crime Prevention Conference, Miami, Florida. Contact (305) 670-2409.

**April 14-16, 2003:** Training of Trainers for Statewide Youth Court Associations, Oak Brook, Illinois. Contact Margie Chan at [chan@crfc.org](mailto:chan@crfc.org) or (800) 801-9933.

**April 23-25, 2003:** Youth Courts: An Implementation Training Seminar, Specialized Training for OJP Grantees, Washington, DC. Contact the NYCC at [nycc@csg.org](mailto:nycc@csg.org) or (859) 244-8193.

**May 4-6, 2003:** Association of New York State Youth Courts First Annual Conference "Raising the Bar — New York State Youth Courts", Albany, New York. Contact Marjorie Maniccia at (518) 542-6537 or [mmaniccia@yahoo.com](mailto:mmaniccia@yahoo.com).

**November 4-7, 2003:** Texas Teen Court Association Conference, Wichita, Texas. Contact Myra Weeks at (940) 715-8575.

## National Youth Court Center

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) established the National Youth Court Center (NYCC) at the American Probation and Parole Association in Lexington, Kentucky. The NYCC serves as an information clearinghouse and provides training, technical assistance, and resource materials to assist jurisdictions in developing and operating effective youth court programs.

### NYCC Staff

**Tracy Godwin Mullins, Director**

**Karen Dunlap, Research Associate**

**Mistene M. Vickers, Research Assistant**

**Lisa Ginter, Administrative Assistant**

For more information, contact:  
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