

What is Youth Court?

City of Buffalo Youth Court is a training program that combines youth leadership development with juvenile justice, involving youth in the community in the decision-making process for sanctioning their peers who have violated the rule of law or engaged in problem behavior. The program is a youth driven, voluntary alternative to traditional juvenile court and school disciplinary proceedings.



What Happens in Youth Court?

A youth, who has admitted guilt to a crime or offense, appears for a sentencing hearing before a court of peers. The court is presented with evidence relevant to sentencing, deliberates, and passes sentence. Sentences typically include community service, counseling, and referral to crime and educational awareness programs.

Who Participates in Youth Court Proceedings:

Youth Court proceedings involve a youth respondent and youth volunteers who may serve as the judge, prosecuting attorney, defense attorney, clerk, and bailiff.

What Types of Cases are heard in Youth Court?

Erie County Family Court and Probation, Buffalo City Court, and the City of Buffalo Board of Education Department generally refer cases. Cases commonly involve juvenile delinquency offenses such as larceny, criminal mischief, vandalism, minor assault, possession of alcohol, and minor drug offenses, violations of school rules, as well as P.I.N.S. behavior such as truancy. Through the youth court process, respondents do more than make up for their misdeeds; they have a chance to learn deeper lessons about their role in the community as they engage in constructive sentences handed out by their peers.

Teen Courts offer Four Potential Benefits to the Community:

Accountability: Teen courts may help to ensure that youth offenders are held accountable for their illegal behavior, even when their offenses are relatively minor and would not likely result in sanctions from the traditional juvenile justice system.

Timeliness: An effective teen court can move young offenders from arrest to sanctions within a matter of days rather than the months that may pass with traditional juvenile courts. The youth court intervention ensures that both needs-immediate sanctions and personal accountability are satisfied.

Cost Savings: Teen's courts usually depend heavily on youth and adult volunteers. Youth courts handle a substantial number of offenders at relatively low cost to the community.

Community Cohesion: A well-structured and expansive teen court program may affect the entire community by increasing public appreciation of the legal system, enhancing community –court relationships, encouraging greater respect for the law among youth, and promoting volunteerism among both adults and youth.

Who is eligible for the program?

Any City of Buffalo youth between 10-15 years old who has been referred from Erie County Probation or the Buffalo Board of Education.

If you have any referrals, questions or are interested in youth court please contact:

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CITY OF BUFFALO YOUTH COURT PROGRAM



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