

GREENPOINT YOUTH COURT

The Greenpoint Youth Court trains local teenagers to serve as jurors, judges and attorneys, handling real-life cases involving their peers. The goal of the Court is to use positive peer pressure to ensure that young people who have committed minor offenses pay back the community and receive the help they need to avoid further involvement in the justice system. A project of the Center for Court Innovation, the Greenpoint Youth Court handles cases involving young people, ages 10 to 18, who have been cited for low-level offenses, such as vandalism, fare evasion, assault and truancy. The Youth Court receives referrals from local schools, the New York City Department of Probation, and the New York City Police Department.

The Greenpoint Youth Court holds young people accountable for their actions by requiring them to pay back the community for their crimes. Respondents admit responsibility for their actions, and a jury of their peers imposes sanctions that emphasize accountability, repairing harm done to the community, and providing respondents with meaningful activities. Sanctions include community service, letters of apology, essays or skill building workshops on various topics such as conflict resolution and goal setting. Youth Court staff work closely with respondents to ensure that they complete sanctions as mandated, and inform referral sources of compliance.

To ensure that respondents are judged by a true cross section of their peers, Youth Court members —ranging from 14 to 18 years old—are not “creamed” from the top of their classes. Participants are drawn from a variety of local high schools and community based organizations. There is no minimum grade point average nor is any previous experience required for participation. Young people who have previously had a case with the Youth Court are strongly encouraged to apply. Participants receive 40 hours of pre-service training on critical thinking, precision questioning, active listening and youth court protocols. In addition, they participate in on-going, intensive youth development and team-building activities to help cultivate their leadership skills.

HOW IT WORKS

Upon receiving referrals, program staff contact young people and their parents to explain the Youth Court program. Interested youths and their parents participate in an intake interview with staff. Respondents then meet with their youth advocates, members of the youth court who will represent the respondents in the hearings. During hearings, the respondents have the opportunity to testify and respond to questions posed by the jury. The jury then deliberates to determine fair and appropriate sanctions. Youth court staff closely monitor the completion of sanctions and report compliance to referring agencies. Youth court staff also provide youth and their families with voluntary social service referrals as needed.

For more information, contact Jessica Stein, Program Coordinator at 646-460-1764 or jstein@courts.state.ny.us.