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ABSTRACT

This paper reports findings from the Evaluation of Teen Courts Project, which studied teen courts in Alaska, Arizona, Maryland, and Missouri. Researchers measured pre-court attitudes and post-court (6-month) recidivism among more than 500 juveniles referred to teen court for nonviolent offenses. The study compared recidivism outcomes for teen court defendants with outcomes for youth handled by the regular juvenile justice system. Alaska and Missouri youth referred to teen court were significantly less likely to be re-referred to the juvenile justice system for new offenses within 6 months. In Arizona, teen court may have related to a reduced probability of referral. In these three sites, teen court cases were compared with case outcomes for an average group of young, first-time offenders. Teen court seemed to outperform the traditional juvenile justice process. In Maryland, teen court was compared with a more proactive, police diversion program that provided many similar services and sanctions as teen courts. Youth had to pay restitution, perform community service, and write apology letters. The entire process was managed by the police department. No court appearance was required. Recidivism was slightly higher among teen court cases, but re-offending rates for both treatment and comparison groups were low. Overall, teen courts represent a promising alternative for the juvenile justice system. Appended are data on the sites, participants, and questionnaires. (SM)

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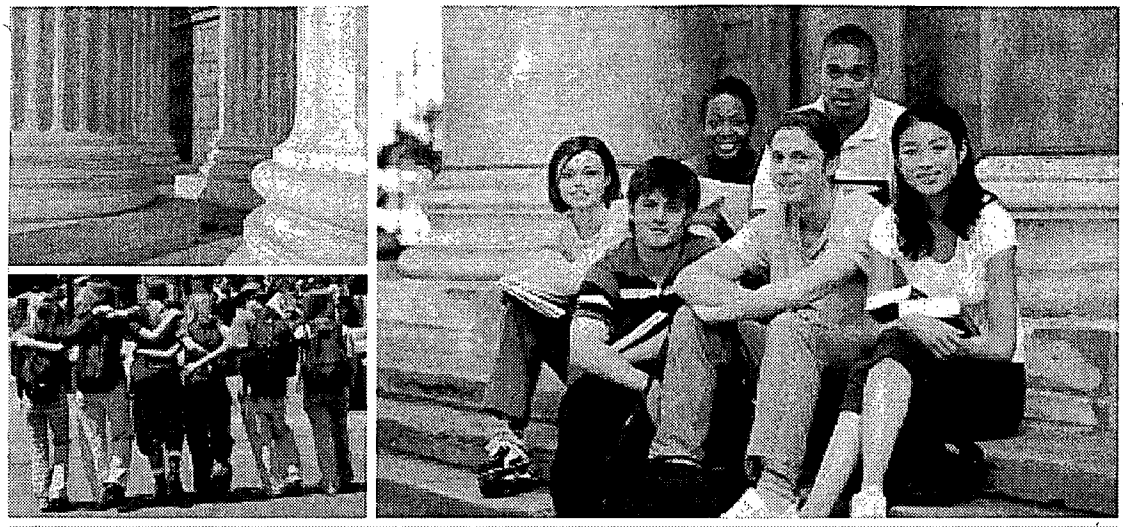

RESEARCH REPORT

April 2002

The Impact of Teen Court on Young Offenders

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Mark B. Coggeshall

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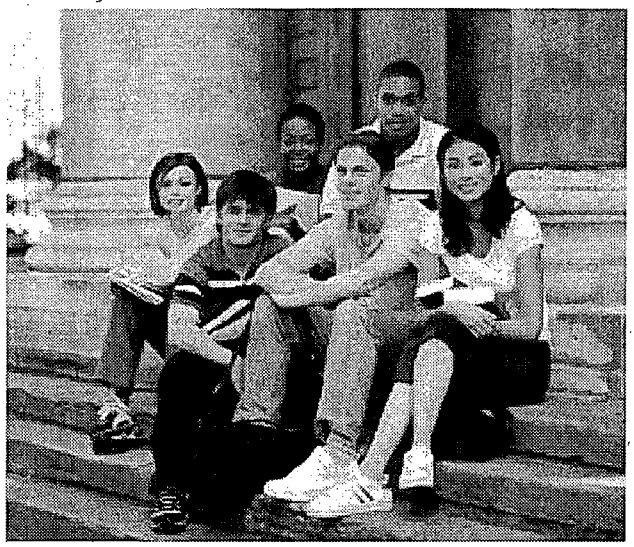
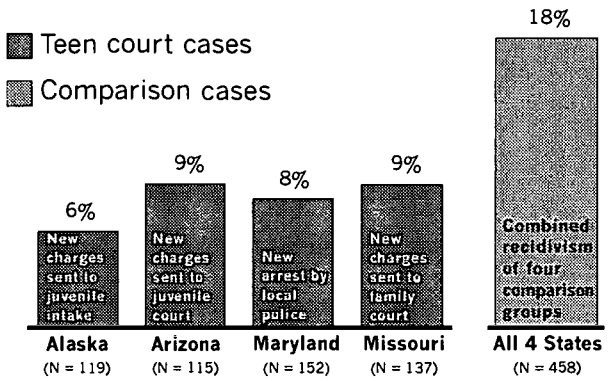


This is the first report of findings from the Evaluation of Teen Courts (ETC) Project, which was conducted by the Urban Institute and funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

The ETC 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 non-violent 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.

What Happened to Youth Six Months Later?



Source: Urban Institute. 2002. Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

About the Evaluation of Teen Courts Project

This report summarizes the findings of the Urban Institute's Evaluation of Teen Courts (ETC) Project, which was funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), a component of the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) Office of Justice Programs (OJP).

The ETC Project studied teen court programs in four jurisdictions:

1) Anchorage Youth Court in Anchorage, Alaska;

2) Teen courts operated by the Arizona Superior Court in Maricopa County, Arizona;

3) Montgomery County Teen Court in Rockville, Maryland; and

4) Independence Youth Court in Independence, Missouri.

More than 500 teen court cases from the four sites were compared with similar cases handled by the traditional juvenile justice systems in those jurisdictions. The evaluation collected baseline data about the youth and their parents or guardians, and tracked the youth for at least six months, measuring the extent to which official recidivism differed between the teen court youth and those processed within the juvenile justice system.

About the Authors

Jeffrey A. Butts is the director of the Program on Youth Justice at the Urban Institute in Washington, DC. In addition to directing the Evaluation of Teen Courts Project, his recent work has included projects on juvenile drug courts and the methods used to anticipate the demand for bed space in juvenile detention and corrections facilities. Before joining the Urban Institute in 1997, he was a senior researcher at the National Center for Juvenile Justice in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is a graduate of the University of Oregon and earned a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan.

Janeen Buck is a research associate in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute where she served as project manager for the Evaluation of Teen Courts. Her previous research focused on juvenile crime and the needs of at-risk and delinquent youth as well as the nexus between substance abuse and crime. She is a graduate of Hood College and holds a Masters degree in Justice Studies from American University.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about The Urban Institute, the Program on Youth Justice, or the Evaluation of Teen Courts Project, see www.urban.org. For questions and to receive email updates on the research activities of the Program on Youth Justice, send an email to JPC@ui.urban.org.

For more information about the National Youth Court Center, see www.youthcourt.net.

For more information about the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, see www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org.

About The Urban Institute

The Urban Institute is a nonprofit policy research organization established in Washington, DC, in 1968. The Institute's goals are to sharpen thinking about society's problems and efforts to solve them, improve government decisions and their implementation, and increase citizens' awareness about important public choices.

About the Justice Policy Center

One of nine policy centers within the Urban Institute, the Justice Policy Center carries out nonpartisan research to inform the national dialogue on crime, justice, and community safety. JPC researchers collaborate with practitioners, public officials, and community groups to make the Center's research useful not only to decisionmakers and agencies in the justice system but also to the neighborhoods and communities harmed by crime and disorder.

About the Program on Youth Justice

This report was developed by the Urban Institute's Program on Youth Justice, which identifies and evaluates strategies for reducing youth crime, enhancing youth development, and strengthening communities.

The Program on Youth Justice was established by the Urban Institute in 2002 to help policymakers and community leaders develop and test more effective, research-based strategies for combating youth crime and encouraging positive youth development.

Researchers associated with the Program on Youth Justice work to transcend traditional approaches to youth justice research by:

- studying all youth, not just those legally defined as juveniles;
- considering outcomes for families, organizations, and communities as well as individuals;
- sharing insights across the justice system, including prevention programs, police, courts, corrections, and community organizations; and
- drawing upon the expertise of multiple disciplines, including the social and behavioral sciences as well as professional fields such as medicine, public health, policy studies, and the law.

The Program on Youth Justice is directed by Dr. Jeffrey A. Butts and housed within the Justice Policy Center, directed by Dr. Adele V. Harrell.

About the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

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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- Cheryln Townsend of the Arizona Superior Court in Maricopa County;
- Pamela Troia of the Montgomery County (MD) Teen Court; and
- Judge Susan Watkins of the Independence (MO) Youth Court.

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Alaska

Theresa Ball, Volunteers of America
Jane Banaszak, Youth Court Legal Advisor*
Mark Begich, University of Alaska Board of Regents
Thomas Begich, AK Division of Family & Youth Services
George ("Russ") Boatwright, Volunteers of America
Sally Bradshaw, Anchorage Youth Court
George Buhite, AK Division of Juvenile Justice
Robert Buttcane, AK Division of Juvenile Justice
Russ Carey, AK Division of Juvenile Justice
Superintendent Carol Comeau, Anchorage School District
Chief Justice Dana Fabe, Alaska Supreme Court
Bob Fedoroff, AK Division of Juvenile Justice
Children's Master William Hitchcock, Anchorage Family Court
Blythe Marston, Anchorage Bar Association
Steve McComb, AK Division of Juvenile Justice
Mark Mew, Anchorage Police
Linda Moffitt, AK Division of Juvenile Justice
Robert Owens, Anchorage Bar Association
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Donald Harvey, Independence Youth Court Board
Judge Garry Helm
Capt. David Lamken, Independence Police
Lt. Raymond Rast, Independence Police
Sally Rast, Independence Youth Court
Lance Sandage, Independence Youth Court Board
Mayor Ron Stewart, City of Independence
Wayne Welsh, Independence Youth Court Board
Sam Williamson, founder of Independence Youth Court

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As part of the research design, all teen court subjects in Montgomery County, Maryland and a comparison group from Howard County, Maryland were interviewed by researchers from Westat, Inc. of Rockville, Maryland. The staff from Westat handled the design and organization of these interviews with great efficiency and good humor. The project is especially indebted to Dr. David Cantor, Tracey Hagerty Heller, and Dawn Williams of Westat, Inc.

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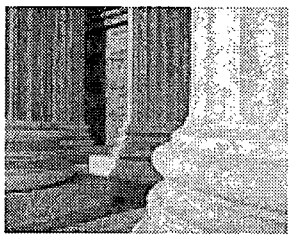
Finally, the Evaluation of Teen Courts Project, the Urban Institute, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention express their admiration and gratitude to the thousands of young people across the country that have been, or are currently involved in teen courts and youth courts. Their energy and dedication make teen courts work.



The Impact of Teen Court on Young Offenders

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INTRODUCTION

Teen courts (or youth courts) are specialized diversion programs for young offenders. The typical youth referred to teen court is 14 to 16 years old, in trouble with the police for the first time, and probably charged with vandalism, stealing, or some other non-violent offense. Teen courts offer these youth an alternative to the regular juvenile court process. Rather than going to juvenile court and risking formal prosecution and possible adjudication, a young offender can go through teen court and avoid what might have been the first stain on his or her legal record.

In return, however, a young person in teen court is almost certain to get a rather stiff sentence. Many are required to do community service and pay restitution for any damages they may have caused. They may be ordered to write apology letters to their parent(s) and the victim of their offense, and perhaps an essay about the effects of crime on the community. Often, they must return to teen court to serve on juries for other cases. Compared to what they might have received in the regular juvenile court process for a first-time, non-violent offense, youth that agree to go to teen court get relatively severe sanctions.

Teen courts operate much like juvenile courts except that fewer adults are involved in the process. The young offender (usually with a parent or guardian) may meet with an adult staff person before the teen court hearing. The purpose of the meeting is to explain the teen court process and obtain the youth's formal agreement to abide by the teen court's decision. In the teen court hearing itself, however, young people are responsible for much of the process, from calling the case, to reviewing the charges and presenting the facts, to choosing the proper sentence. Teenagers may serve as the court clerks, bailiffs, attorneys, jurors, and in some cases, even the judges that hear each matter brought before the court. Most of the youth who work in teen court are volunteers, but many are former defendants who return to participate in other cases as a condition of their sentence.

TEEN COURTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Teen courts have become very popular in the United States. Growing from a handful of programs in the 1970s, there may be more than 800 teen court programs now in operation across the country (NYCC 2002). These courts handle a large and growing caseload. A recent study estimated that teen courts were handling about 65,000 cases a year in 1998, when there were only 500 teen courts nationwide (Butts, Hoffman, and Buck 1999). If the 800 courts operating in 2002 are similar in size to the 500 courts that existed in 1998, teen courts nationwide could be handling more than 100,000 cases per year. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, traditional juvenile courts in the U.S. handle about 750,000 delinquency cases per year in which no formal charges are filed.[1] Clearly, teen courts are becoming a major component of the juvenile justice system, or at least one of the primary diversion options used by the juvenile justice system.

Teen courts first came to national prominence in the 1990s, but the idea of using youth-operated courts for young offenders has a much longer heritage. In fact, similar programs have existed for at least 50 years. In the late 1940s, Mansfield, Ohio had a youth-operated "Hi-Y" bicycle court that met on Saturday mornings to hear cases of minor traffic violations by juveniles on bicycles (Mansfield News Journal, May 16, 1949). Using the facilities of the municipal courthouse in Mansfield, teen defendants were arraigned for infractions such as violating the stop sign ordinance or riding at night without reflectors. Teen judges imposed sanctions in each case and often required young defendants to write 300-word essays about the importance of traffic laws.[2]

Essays are still one of the most common sanctions imposed by contemporary teen courts, but many other sanctions are used as well. Most teen court sanctions are designed to do more than simply punish the offender. They encourage young offenders to restore at least part of the damages their behavior caused to the community or to specific victims. Some offenders pay restitution or perform community service. Other

1. According to the OJJDP Juvenile Court Statistics series, U.S. juvenile courts handled 1,757,400 delinquency cases in 1998, and 43% of these were processed informally with no charges filed by prosecutors.

2. One of the authors of this report learned about the Mansfield, Ohio program from his father, Richard D. Butts, who served as a teen judge in the Mansfield bicycle court during 1948 and 1949.

CASES APPEARING IN TEEN COURT

- 15-year-old boy who stole a stereo
- 14-year-old girl who stole cigarettes from a store, claiming she did it for a friend
- 16-year-old, female co-defendants who did not open the door for a police officer who followed them home after seeing them commit a driving offense
- 13-year-old girl charged with shoplifting; came to youth court wearing a Winnie the Pooh shirt
- 14-year-old girl who was arrested trying to steal $280 of merchandise from a department store
- 15-year-old girl who left a restaurant without paying the bill; sent to youth court even though she later returned to the restaurant and paid the bill
- 15-year-old boy who was charged with curfew violation
- 16-year-old boy who was arrested for shoplifting $9 worth of merchandise

Source: Courtroom observations by the Urban Institute, 2002, Evaluation of Teen Courts Project

FEATURES OF U.S. TEEN COURTS

Most common administrative arrangement Who usually runs the teen court?	1. Court or probation agency 2. Private agency 3. Other service agency 4. Local law enforcement 5. Local prosecutor
Most common offenses What laws have teen court defendants usually broken?	1. Theft or shoplifting 2. Minor assault 3. Disorderly conduct 4. Alcohol possession or use 5. Vandalism
Most common sanctions What are teen court defendants most often ordered to do?	1. Community service 2. Victim apology 3. Written essay 4. Teen court jury duty 5. Drug/alcohol class or other classes

Source: Urban Institute, 1998, National survey of youth courts and teen courts. Features are ranked, with 1 being the most common.

programs use innovative dispositions such as requiring offenders to attend classes about decision-making skills, victim awareness, or the social costs of shoplifting. The exact configuration of each teen court depends on state and local preferences and sometimes the formal guidelines established by lawmakers.

State Laws

All teen courts operate within the parameters of state and local law, but most programs are not explicitly authorized by statute or local ordinance. In some areas of the country, however, states have enacted legislation that specifically mentions teen courts and recommends that local jurisdictions consider implementing teen court programs. Some have even established standards for the design and operation of teen courts, and a few have provided funds to encourage local jurisdictions to start teen courts or to expand the capacity of existing programs.

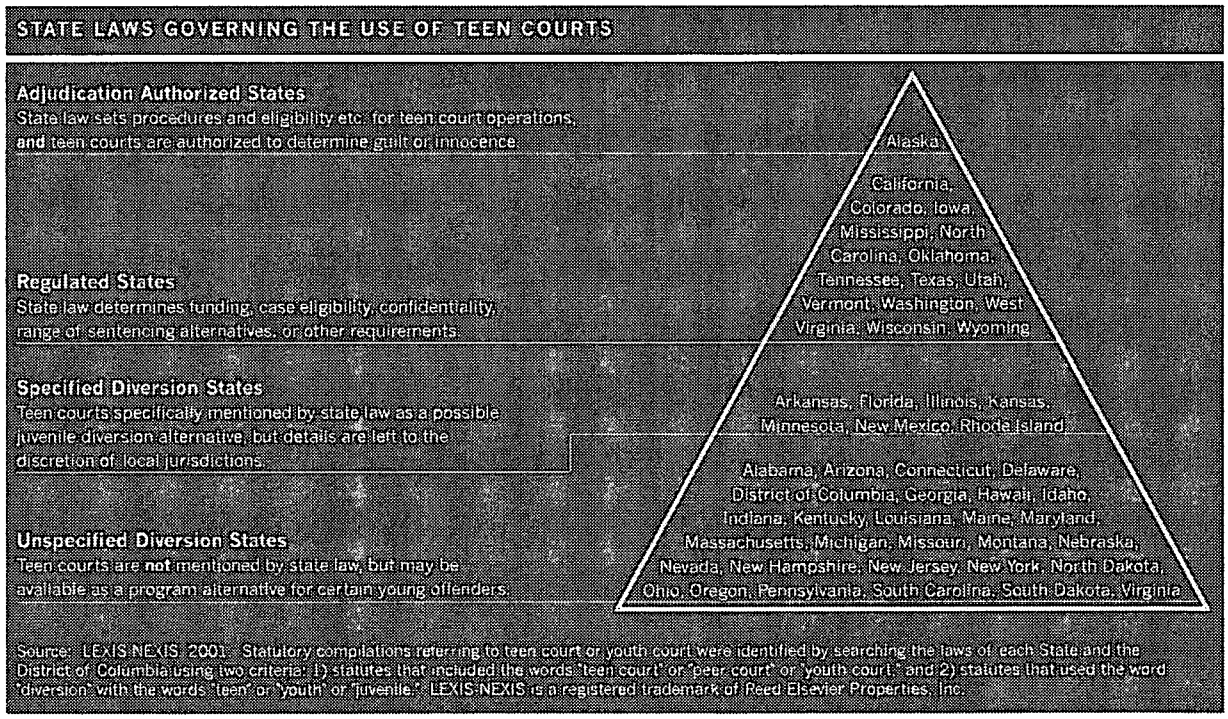
The provisions enacted by states vary significantly. Some include broad legislation that merely grants county officials, school districts, and local nonprofits the discretion to enact teen court programs if they choose to do so. Others provide specific guidelines for local officials to follow in designing and implementing teen court programs.[3] State laws may also address case eligibility, confidentiality restrictions, sentencing alternatives, and the respective roles of adults and teens in court hearings and other aspects of teen court programs.[4] Some states specify the agencies that may establish teen courts and limit oversight responsibility for teen courts to the judiciary, probation departments, and prosecutors.

Some jurisdictions require teen courts to have a board of advisors with explicit guidelines for membership (e.g., Utah and Vermont). The amount of time permitted for defendants to complete their teen court sentences, and the action that may result from a failure to comply, may also be defined in statute. Laws in Colorado and Utah, for example, require defendants to fulfill their sentence within six months to avoid having their cases returned to juvenile court.

Most states, however, do not formally endorse teen courts. Jurisdictions in these states establish teen courts

3. Alaska's teen court statute, for example, specifies the procedures required for local officials and private organizations that wish to implement teen court programs (Alaska Stat. § 47.12.400a. 2000).

4. For example, Iowa's peer court legislation in 2000 simply suggested procedures to reduce the influence of prejudice in teen court proceedings (Iowa Code § 602.6110. 2000.).



as they do any other program in the juvenile justice system. They rely on the broad discretion given to local jurisdictions to fund and operate programs for youth, including recreation programs, restitution and community service alternatives, job readiness training, electronic monitoring, intensive probation, etc. Cities and counties in these states are free to develop teen courts as one of their juvenile justice program options.[5] Whether they do or not depends entirely on the actions of local officials.

Alaska is the only state to address teen court adjudications in statute. Under Alaska state law, teen courts may determine a youth's responsibility for an alleged offense. Teen defendants may invoke the right to trial by entering a plea of "not guilty" as part of the teen court process. Trial procedures are defined by statute. Youth attorneys may ask the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services to subpoena witnesses. If a witness fails to appear, the state may petition the superior court to compel the witness. Alaska also requires that the by-laws of every teen court in the state include an appellate process.

5. In 2000, for example, Hawaii's statute indicated that a "court or other designated agency shall investigate, evaluate, make necessary determination, and take appropriate actions regarding making such other informal disposition as may be suitable" [Hawaii Rev. Stat. § 571-31.2(a)(3)(E)].

Legal Authority

When a young offender appears in teen court, it may seem as if he or she is required to comply with the program and that the teen court has the authority to enforce sanctions for delinquent behavior. The teen court's authority, however, is purely informal. Youthful offenders appear in teen court as part of a diversion agreement with the regular juvenile justice system. The local police department or juvenile intake agency agrees to send young offenders to teen court in lieu of formal processing. Juveniles and their families agree to comply with the teen court program in exchange for dismissal of delinquency charges. The only penalty for noncompliance with the teen court process is that the youth would return to the regular juvenile justice process and face possible adjudication by a juvenile court judge.

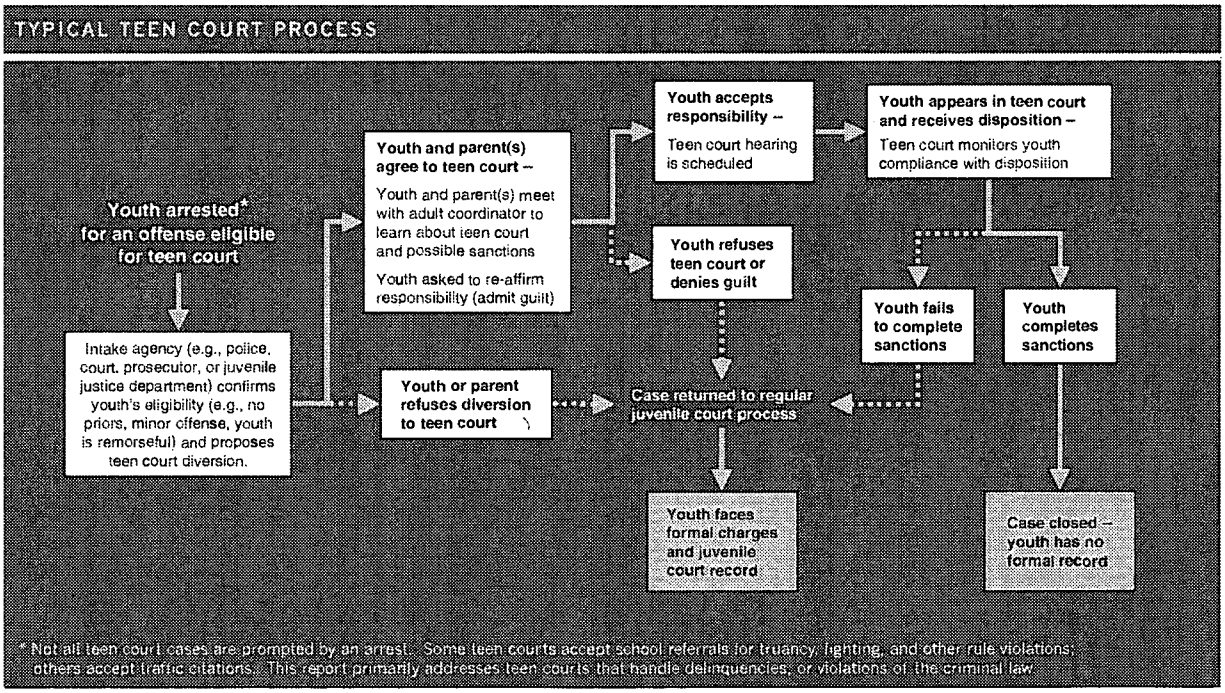
Private nonprofit organizations and school districts may work in concert with juvenile justice officials to select the criteria for acceptance into teen court and perhaps set the procedures that teen courts use to handle cases, but this does not mean that legal authority over teen court cases is actually transferred from the juvenile justice system to the teen court. The only real authority over each case remains with the regular juvenile court or family court in that jurisdiction, or with the police department or prosecutors office, depending on which agency refers youth to the teen court. Even in Alaska, where youth courts are authorized to render adjudications, they do so only with the consent and authority of the juvenile justice system, and adjudication is not a legal finding. It is simply a more elaborate diversion process.

THE TEEN COURT PROCESS

The procedures that govern case handling and the imposition of sanctions in teen court can vary considerably from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. In most cases, however, teen court defendants go through some form of intake process, which includes a review of the charges involved in each case and a formal presentation of the teen court alternative to each youth and a parent or guardian. During the intake interview, the youth and parents are asked to sign a contract or verbally agree to be diverted to teen court. In most jurisdictions, diversion requires youth to admit responsibility for the charges against them. In other words, they must admit their guilt prior to being diverted to teen court. Very few young people refuse to do so. They and their parents understand that diversion to teen court allows them to avoid the possibility of formal juvenile court adjudication.

Once the youth has admitted responsibility for the offense and formally agreed to be diverted to teen court, the teen court coordinator (or youth volunteers) will organize the paperwork involved in each case and schedule the teen court hearing. In programs that include youth attorneys (or youth advocates), the defendant may then have an opportunity to meet with his or her attorney (or attorneys, as some teen courts use teams). In some jurisdictions, this discussion may happen days before the hearing. In others, it may occur on the same day as the hearing, or even just moments before the defendant goes into the courtroom. Youth attorneys may use the meeting to explain the likely chronology of courtroom events to the youth, and they may choose to review other relevant facts that could help to mitigate the severity of sanctions (e.g., good grades, indicators of good citizenship, any punishment the youth may have already received for the same offense from his or her parents).

While the attorneys are meeting with the defendant, youth prosecutors (or community advocates) may also be meeting and reviewing the facts of the case. Their task during the teen court hearing is to ensure that each defendant receives an appropriately firm response, or that the sanctions imposed by the court are in proportion to the defendant's behavior and the likelihood that they may re-offend. After each attorney or team of attorneys has an opportunity to present the facts of the case as they see them, the defendant may be allowed to speak to the court about the facts of the case and perhaps to propose additional mitigating factors that should be considered by the court in choosing a disposition. In some programs, the victim (or a victim surrogate) may also address the court prior to final disposition. In



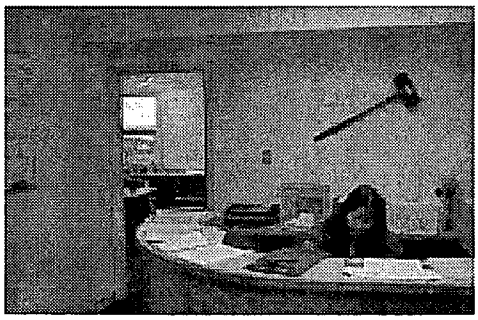
shoplifting cases, for example, the court may hear from a security guard or cashier from the business that was victimized.

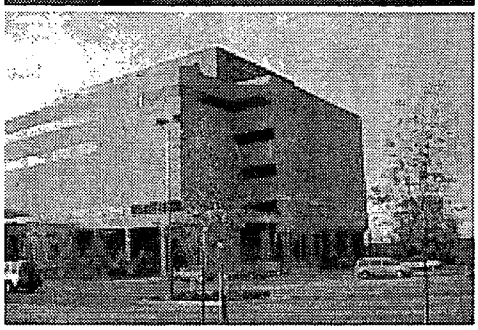
After the court has heard from all participants, the judge (or judges) may take a few minutes to go over everything presented during the hearing and then review the possible sanctions for such a case. In most teen court programs, the choice of sanction is constrained by "sentencing guidelines" that specify the appropriate range of punishment for various offenses depending on the characteristics of the defendant (age, attitude, prior record, etc.). Certain offenses may warrant a written apology only, while others may call for community service, jury duty, or restitution.

After the disposition is presented to the defendant verbally and in writing, each youth will usually meet once again with an adult staff person to go over what they are supposed to do. The youth and his or her parent will be given whatever information is necessary to complete the particular combination of sanctions ordered by the court – i.e., where and when to appear for community service, where to turn in their written essay, how to make payments of financial restitution. An adult staff person may then monitor the youth's progress to ensure that he or she actually completes the terms of the teen court disposition. The community service work site will be contacted to confirm the youth's attendance and performance. Restitution payments will be checked. Written essays and apology letters will be read and approved. Once all the components of the disposition have been completed, the youth will be informed that his or her obligation to teen court has been fulfilled and the terms of case closure will be explained. In many programs, all records related to closed cases are eventually destroyed, although some record of the youth's referral to teen court may be retained. If the youth is arrested again, however, the juvenile court will know that the youth has been to teen court already. In most jurisdictions, a youth cannot go to teen court a second time. They've had their chance at diversion, and any new offenses are handled by the juvenile justice system.

Courtroom Models

Not all teen courts fit the model just described. In particular, some programs do not include juries. Other programs do not include attorneys. Some programs do not involve judges, and in those that do, the role of judge may be performed by an adult rather than a teenager. The process used by teen courts, and the number of different roles involved in the process





A DAY AT ANCHORAGE YOUTH COURT – PART 1

The Anchorage Youth Court (AYC) operates out of a small, cement block building in downtown Anchorage, Alaska. The structure looks like it may have originally housed a dry cleaning business or auto parts store. The youth court staff takes full advantage of its four or five small rooms, filling all available space from the reception desk in front to the small conference room in back, furnished with what might be called non-profit cast offs.

Above left:
Reception desk at the Anchorage Youth Court

Left:
Courthouse in downtown Anchorage

In addition to its main office, the AYC also uses space in the basement of the state courthouse just across the street. The courthouse is attractive and modern, with mountain views from the large windows on the upper floors where the courtrooms are located. The AYC office space in the courthouse consists of one large room in the basement, divided into six cubicles, with obviously used furnishings.

The basement office in the courthouse is where the clients of the Anchorage Youth Court first encounter the AYC staff. Youth and their parents are instructed to appear in the AYC office 30 minutes before their scheduled youth court hearing in order to meet with a case manager. Hearings occur in the early evening. An AYC case manager sits in one cubicle, and the

depends on the courtroom model used by each particular program.

The courtroom models used by teen courts are generally divided into four types: adult judge, youth judge, youth tribunal, and peer jury. In the youth judge and youth tribunal models, young people perform all courtroom roles, including that of judge. Youth tribunals involve a panel of three judges that hear cases presented by youth attorneys. There is usually no jury in the tribunal model. Programs using the youth judge model traditionally involve opposing counsel, juries, and a single judge. Adults may assist with courtroom management in these programs, but hearings are usually run by the youth.

Adult judge programs, representing approximately half of all U.S. teen courts, function much like programs using youth judges, except that the role of the judge is filled by an adult who also manages the courtroom routine (Butts and Buck 2000). The peer jury model works much like a grand jury. An adult or youth volunteer presents each case to a jury of teens, and the jury questions the defendant directly. The jury members choose the most appropriate disposition, sometimes with the guidance and oversight of an adult judge.

COURTROOM MODELS USED BY TEEN COURTS AND YOUTH COURTS IN THE UNITED STATES

	Adult Judge Model	Youth Judge Model	Tribunal Model	Peer Jury Model
Who performs the role of judge in the courtroom?	Adult	Youth	3 Youth	Adult (sometimes no judge)
Are teen attorneys included in the process?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
What is the role of the teen jury during court?	Listen to attorney presentations, recommend sentence to judge	Listen to attorney presentations, recommend sentence to judge	Usually no jury	Question defendant, recommend or order sentence

AYC sentencing coordinator sits in another. Youth meet with the case manager before their hearing. They will speak with the sentencing coordinator immediately after the hearing to learn how they can complete whatever sanctions are ordered by the court. The remaining cubicles in the basement office are used by youth attorneys who meet with each defendant prior to his or her court hearing.

As youth and parents enter the office, they see a desk just inside the front door. On the desk is a paper sign that reads, "Please check in here." Other signs identify the occupants of each cubicle. In fact, everything in the office is labeled clearly and clients seem well oriented almost immediately upon their arrival. The youth and parent(s) are instructed to go to a particular cubicle to meet with the case manager and youth attorney assigned to their case. Several air purifiers are running throughout the room, serving as makeshift white noise machines to ensure privacy.

Each youth meets with a case manager and youth attorney, and the AYC process is explained to them. The youth attorney goes over the facts of the case as presented in the police report and the AYC case summary. Each youth defendant is given an opportunity to ask questions, and the attorney advises the youth and parent(s) on proper courtroom demeanor. The attorney then escorts the youth and parent(s) upstairs to the waiting area just outside the courtroom. As they exit the elevator, they see a relatively large, but quiet area with tile floors and benches along the walls. They are invited to sit on one of the benches until a youth bailiff comes out of the courtroom and calls their case number.

Source: Descriptions of the Anchorage Youth Court process are based upon observations made during visits to the court in 2000 and 2001. Much of the material is drawn from notes made by Alexa Hirst, former research associate at the Urban Institute.

WHAT MAKES TEEN COURT EFFECTIVE?

Teen court is widely heralded as an effective alternative for young offenders, but it is not exactly clear how teen court programs reduce recidivism. The ETC Project reviewed the evaluation literature on teen courts in an earlier report (Butts and Buck 2000). While the number of studies about teen courts has grown in the past decade, there are still no definitive outcome studies. The studies that do exist often use weak designs (e.g., no comparison groups) or they involve so few cases that statistical analysis is not reliable. The overall impression one gets from the evaluation literature is positive, yet researchers have yet to identify exactly why teen court is believed to be such a promising juvenile justice alternative.

Teen courts vary greatly in their case handling procedures, courtroom models, and the sanctions they use to hold offenders accountable. Some programs use courtroom procedures that are relatively formal; others are quite informal. Some include adults in prominent roles; others do not. Some involve youth attorneys and some involve youth juries, but many do not. Are these differences important? Do they affect the ability of teen courts to reduce recidivism? What are the essential ingredients for an effective teen court? These questions pose serious challenges for policymakers and practitioners. Ultimately, such issues must be resolved by evaluation research, but until there are sufficient numbers of well-designed studies of teen courts, policymakers and program administrators need other sources of guidance. Researchers usually turn to theory for such guidance.

Theory allows a researcher to estimate cause-and-effect relationships even though he or she may not have outcome data about a particular program. Most people have an intuitive understanding of what it means to say that one action caused another. For two actions to be related as cause and effect, the cause must occur before the effect, and the effect must follow the cause every time, or at least most of the time. Criminologists are clearly concerned with cause and effect. They want to know why some people commit crimes and others do not. Policymakers are interested in the practical application of cause and effect. They need to know whether a particular policy or program will reduce the likelihood that an offender will commit a new crime. In other words, based upon what we know about the causes of crime, "why should we expect this intervention to work?"

Many theoretical questions related to teen courts are similar to those asked of all programs designed to reduce delinquent behavior among young people. Namely, what are the mechanisms that lead young people to engage in crime, and how can intervention programs stop or reverse those mechanisms? A number of theories have been proposed to explain the origins of crime among young people, including "social control" theory, "strain" theory, and the theory of "peer association." Intervention programs within the juvenile justice system are often based upon one or more of these theories.[6]

There are also several theoretical perspectives related to the operations of the justice system. Some theories address what causes court participants to view a legal proceeding as fair and how this perception is related to recidivism. Some consider what other factors increase the impact of the courtroom process on the perceptions and behavior of participants. All of these theories, and the quality of the evidence in support of them, were reviewed by the ETC Project to focus the evaluation on those elements of teen court that might be expected to have an impact on subsequent recidivism among young offenders.[7]

Seven Theoretical Perspectives

The ETC Project located seven different theoretical perspectives that could be related to questions about the impact of teen court on youth recidivism. Although they are known by various names, the ETC Project identified the seven theoretical schools as follows:

1) peer justice,
2) procedural justice,
3) deterrence,
4) labeling,
5) restorative justice and repentance,
6) law-related education, and
7) skill building.

All seven perspectives offer at least some explanation for why teen courts may reduce recidivism. Project researchers reviewed each theoretical perspective for its relevance to questions about the impact of teen courts. Next, they examined the available research evidence and the extent to which it was supportive of key concepts within each theory. At least some supportive evidence existed for all of the

6. Several good overviews of delinquency theories are available (Akers 2000; Vold et al. 1998; Gibbons 1994).

7. The review of theoretical literature is discussed in a separate, forthcoming report from the Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS RELATED TO TEEN COURT EFFECTIVENESS

Theoretical Perspective	Theoretical Proposition	If Theory is Accurate, the Most Effective Teen Courts Would...
Peer Justice	Just as association with deviant or delinquent peers is commonly associated with the onset of delinquent behavior, peer pressure from pro-social peers may propel youth toward law-abiding behavior.	... involve extensive opportunity for high-quality, pro-social, peer-to-peer interactions during teen court hearings.
Procedural Justice	Offenders who are treated fairly in the legal process and who are given an opportunity to express their views in court are more likely to comply with ordered sanctions and less likely to re-offend. Greater reductions in recidivism should occur regardless of the severity of sanctions imposed.	... have consistent procedures that were clear and understandable, and that provided defendants with ample opportunity to contribute their views and to see that they are treated just like other youth.
Specific Deterrence	People violate the law when the "costs" of doing so seem to be outweighed by the "benefits" (as defined by each individual). Raising offender costs can be accomplished by increasing the certainty, swiftness, or severity of punishment.	... deliver meaningful sanctions soon after arrest, and with little opportunity for defendants to evade the court process.
Labeling	Labeling young people as "delinquents" or "criminals" by processing them through the justice system increases the likelihood that they will think of themselves as offenders and thus continue to commit illegal acts.	... allow youth defendants to avoid being stigmatized in teen court and to avoid being publicly identified as lawbreakers.
Restorative Justice	Offenders respond better to a legal process that draws upon the community rather than the court system to express social condemnation of the offense, encourages offenders to feel ashamed of their behavior without stigmatizing them, elicits their repentance, and provides a means for them to repair any damages they caused.	... refrain from adversarial contests between prosecution and defense, and focus instead on facilitating victim-offender mediation and creating ways for offenders to repair the harm they caused, either to specific victims or to the community in general.
Law-related Education	Youth avoid illegal behavior as they develop citizenship skills and pro-citizenship knowledge, including a belief in the value of democracy and pluralism, dedication to the ideal of justice, respect for human dignity, and an understanding of the role of law in the legitimate resolution of conflicts.	... deliver highly effective instruction and experiences in pro-social, law-related content.
Skill Building	Youth avoid illegal behavior as they develop effective life skills, including conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, public speaking, and group problem solving.	... provide opportunities for youth to participate in social skill building activities, such as jury duty and community work that is more than punishment.

perspectives, and all seemed to have promise as an explanation for the sudden demand for teen court programs across the country. Of course, none of the existing studies pertained directly to teen courts.

Only the first theoretical perspective – peer justice – is closely related to teen courts. The program effects suggested by the other six theoretical perspectives could conceivably be achieved by interventions other than teen court. The concerns of procedural justice theory, for example, might be addressed by reforming the juvenile court process in a way that encourages youthful defendants to speak more often during court proceedings and to watch the hearings of other youth to confirm the impartiality of the court process. Following deterrence theory, diversion programs in the juvenile justice system could be structured to ensure that sanctions are imposed more swiftly and with greater certainty. Training in law-related education and life-skills could (and frequently does) take place in workshops for juvenile offenders outside of teen court programs. Many diversion programs are consistent with the recommendations of labeling theory as they allow juvenile offenders to avoid formal adjudication. Some could argue that each of these theoretically positive elements might be implemented more effectively within teen courts even though it is possible to do so outside of teen courts, but this and other empirical questions have not been addressed by researchers.

Until more research is available on theoretical questions as they apply to teen courts, policymakers and practitioners must rely on their own instincts to choose which elements of teen court to emphasize to increase their program's effectiveness. The diversity of theoretical perspectives identified by the ETC Project underscores this point. There are many arguments that could be, and have been, made to support the effectiveness of teen court, but little sound evidence exists that would allow researchers to judge the validity of each argument. Teen court programs and evaluators must continue to develop and test various program models before policymakers will be able to learn why and how the teen court process affects youth recidivism.

Recidivism as a Criterion of Effectiveness

This report focuses almost exclusively on youth recidivism in judging the impact of teen courts. Recidivism, of course, is only one aspect of effectiveness. Teen courts may yield other benefits (Butts and Buck 2000:3). They may have lower administrative costs than traditional juvenile courts, and a greater proportion of their offenders may successfully complete their assigned sanctions. Because they use community service as a sanction, teen courts may also enhance community-court relationships.

Through their reliance on volunteers, teen courts may promote volunteerism among youth and adults. Youth volunteers participate in the justice system in a manner that would not be possible in a classroom or a mock trial program. Youth volunteers may improve their listening, communication, and public-speaking skills. Teen jurors who are asked to negotiate dispositions with their fellow jurors may improve their problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills. Youth volunteers may also cultivate a sense of empowerment that motivates them to become involved in their communities and in other service organizations (Godwin 1996). All of these potential outcomes of the teen court process may have value, but the most important client outcome for policymakers is often reduced recidivism, or lowering the rate at which youth commit new offenses after teen court. Thus, while other outcomes are considered, this report focuses primarily on the association between teen court and recidivism.

DESIGN OF THE ETC PROJECT

The ETC Project used a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the impact of teen courts in the four study jurisdictions. The goal of the evaluation in each site was to assess the effect of the teen court process on the perceptions and behavior of youth defendants. In other words, what individual outcomes are associated with the use of teen courts, and do these outcomes differ from outcomes observed among similar youth handled by the traditional juvenile justice system?

Evaluation Questions

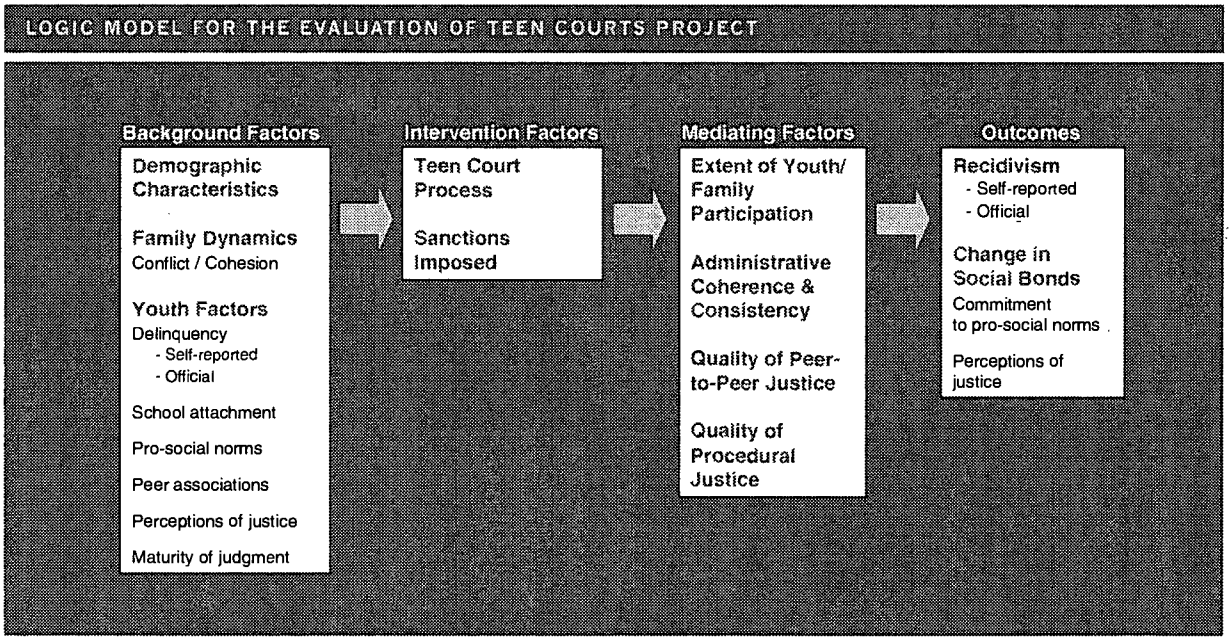
The evaluation was designed to address a number of questions about program impact that were posed by OJJDP when it initiated the project, including:

- What is the profile of the juveniles participating in teen court? What is the nature of their offense histories, including the incident that led to teen court referral?
- What sentences are rendered in teen courts and are sentencing requirements fulfilled?
- How do teen courts affect the attitudes and behavior of participants?
- How do youth outcomes vary across teen court models and across subsets of offenders?
- How do teen court outcomes compare with those in the traditional juvenile justice system?

The measurement domains to be addressed by the evaluation were identified using a logic model created by the ETC Project. The model identifies the key influences that are thought to be related to teen court effectiveness based upon the project's review of the evaluation literature and the published views of practitioners and teen court advocates (Butts and Buck 2000).

Chronology and causality flow from left to right in the logic model. The expected outcomes of teen court are shown on the far right. Recidivism, or post-program delinquency, is measured by self-report measures as well as police and court contacts among the study youth. The other chief outcome, change in social bonds, includes various measures designed to detect increased commitment to pro-social attitudes and improved perceptions of justice.

The ability of teen courts to achieve these outcomes may be influenced by background factors (the column on the far left) and by mediating factors that shape the impact of the teen court process on individual youth. Background factors are similar to the general predictors of youth problem behaviors as identified in the research literature on high-risk youth. In addition to demographic information, background factors included family risks (substance use, inadequate parental supervision) and youth risks (school problems,



lack of pro-social norms, association with delinquent peers). Mediating factors included the extent to which the youth and families report positive interactions with the teen court program and the quality of the teen court process as it relates to peer-to-peer justice and measures of procedural justice (openness, fairness, etc.).

Site Selection

The ETC Project conducted a national evaluation of teen court programs in 1998 (Butts and Buck 2000). The survey was used to identify teen courts that: 1) were willing to participate in an evaluation project; 2) had caseloads large enough to enable the project to generate case samples of sufficient size; 3) had been in operation for at least three years, which suggested administrative stability; 4) used a range of courtroom models; and 5) were geographically diverse.

The four study sites in the ETC Project were selected in order to allow the study to gather at least some information about each of the key questions posed by OJJDP. Among them, the jurisdictions in the study use all four of the courtroom models typically employed by teen courts and youth courts across the country. Two of the programs (Arizona and Maryland) use a combination of the adult court and peer jury models, while one program (Alaska) uses the youth tribunal model and one program (Missouri) uses the youth judge model.

Two of the four programs require youth defendants to admit their guilt in order to qualify for teen court (Arizona and Maryland). The other two programs (Alaska and Missouri) are authorized to accept youth without such an admission and then determine the facts in the case (i.e., render an adjudication) as part of the teen court process. Two of the programs are operated by private agencies (Alaska and Missouri). One program is operated by a local court system (Arizona) and one by a local prosecutor's office (Maryland).

One program (Alaska) has a highly organized youth bar association. One program (Arizona) routinely incorporates victim statements or victim surrogates into teen court hearings. Two programs (Arizona and Maryland) are located in urban areas with highly diverse populations, while one program (Alaska) is located in a medium-sized city and the fourth (Missouri) is located in a smaller, homogeneous community just outside a major urban area.

THE TEEN COURT PROGRAMS

The evaluation tracked youth outcomes in four treatment groups (i.e., teen courts) and four, non-equivalent (i.e., not randomly assigned) comparison groups. The data collection strategies in each site and the composition of the comparison groups varied, reflecting differences in the structure of the juvenile justice system in each community and in the characteristics of each teen court program.

Anchorage Youth Court

Working with the Young Lawyers Section of the Anchorage Bar Association, attorney Blythe Marston established the Anchorage Youth Court (AYC) in 1989. She first learned about teen courts while in law school in upstate New York. Initially, the program handled only 20 cases a year. The focus of the program shifted in 1996, as juvenile crime rates were perceived to be rising in Anchorage. Increased funding from the city, contributions from the Anchorage Bar Association, and new efforts by local policymakers provided resources for the AYC to begin handling more cases of youth charged with minor delinquency offenses. Under its director, Sharon Leon, the program proved to be so successful that by the end of the 1990s, the AYC was handling nearly every first-time juvenile offender charged with a relatively non-serious offense, accounting for 15 percent of all delinquency referrals in Anchorage, according to some estimates.

The AYC was established as a nonprofit organization. It operates in partnership with the Alaska Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Juvenile Justice. Financial support comes from the State of Alaska, the City of Anchorage, the Anchorage Bar Association, the business community, and several local foundations. These resources cover operational costs such as rent and materials, as well as four staff positions (the full-time program coordinator, a part-time case manager, and two attorneys that serve as part-time legal advisors). The Alaska State Court System donates the use of its courtrooms for AYC hearings. The State Court building is located directly across the street from the AYC offices in downtown Anchorage.

The AYC handles 400 to 500 cases per year, generally minor property offenses and other misdemeanors. Serious drug and alcohol violations, as well as cases involving youth with gang-affiliations, severe psychological and emotional issues, or prior violent offenses are not eligible for AYC. Some youth with prior arrests for minor offenses may be eligible but most are first-time offenders, and they may go through youth court only once.

Unlike most teen courts and youth courts, defendants in the AYC have the option of pleading "not guilty" to the charges against them. Only a handful of such cases are handled each year, but when a youth pleads not guilty, the youth court spends considerable time and resources to schedule and staff an adjudication hearing, or trial. Youth attorneys involved in trials may spend several days interviewing witnesses and investigating the facts of a case. The arresting officer and witnesses may be called to testify. The AYC has a procedure for defendants who wish to appeal unfavorable trial verdicts, but very few do.

One of the strengths of the Anchorage Youth Court is the Anchorage Youth Bar Association (YBA). Involving more than 200 youth volunteers, the YBA meets monthly to discuss and vote on issues related to the operation of the youth court, to conduct trainings in trial procedures, and to hold brief award ceremonies for members that achieve various milestones in their service to the court. Youth may volunteer for the AYC beginning in the seventh grade. Many begin their service at that time, and work their way up through the ranks of clerk, bailiff, attorney, and judge, as they get older. All volunteers must complete an eight-week training course and pass a youth bar exam to gain admittance to the YBA. Only YBA members may serve as attorneys or judges in youth court. Officers from the YBA also sit on the Anchorage Youth Court's Board of Directors, and they sometimes represent the AYC before the Anchorage City Assembly and play an active role in raising operating funds from local businesses.

Maricopa County Teen Courts

The ETC Project collected data from two teen courts in Maricopa County, Arizona, one operated by the Tempe Justice Court and one operated by the Chandler Justice Court. Both communities are located within the greater Phoenix area. Arizona's Justice Courts are similar to municipal courts or justices of the peace. They handle minor civil and criminal cases, traffic, and local ordinance violations. Following a community justice perspective, both the Tempe and Chandler Justice Courts are located in shopping center storefronts and are highly visible and easily accessible to the public.

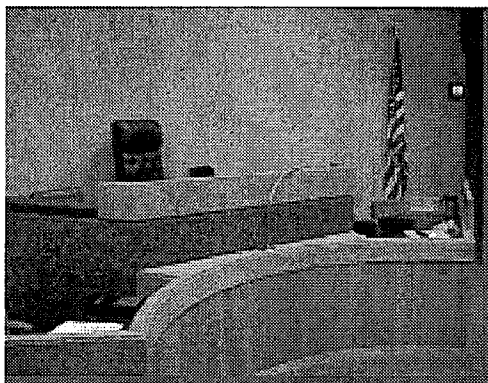
The teen court programs are funded and operated in conjunction with the community services division of the Maricopa County Juvenile Court Center, a

component of the Arizona Superior Court. Under the supervision of Cheryln Townsend, director of juvenile court services for Maricopa County, two juvenile probation officers screen and coordinate referrals to the teen court programs, while the Justice Courts run the programs and manage the courtrooms and hearings.

The Tempe Teen Court was founded in 1995 by a former judge at the Justice Court. Program guidelines and policies were developed by the judge and several key partners. Initially, the program functioned rather autonomously. Recent changes in state laws governing the oversight of juvenile diversion programs, however, brought the teen court program more directly under the purview of the juvenile court system.

A single program moderator, Bill Graham, organizes and manages the Tempe and Chandler teen courts. The Justice Courts supply administrative support and materials. Both teen court programs operate throughout the year, although each follows the school calendar. Sessions are suspended for a six-week period between mid-December and late January for the school system's winter break, and the court is interrupted again for a three-week period in late July.

A DAY AT ANCHORAGE YOUTH COURT – PART 2



AYC Courtroom, Anchorage, AK

Case Number 687432, Anchorage Youth Court

Defendant: Angela, age 15

Charge: Concealment of Merchandise, a Class A misdemeanor

Date: October 4, 2001

Based on an actual case from the Anchorage Youth Court, but names and other identifying details have been modified.

At 4:00 p.m., a youth bailiff for the Anchorage Youth Court steps into a waiting area on the third floor of the Anchorage courthouse and, reading from a docket sheet, calls out "Case Number 687432." A 15-year-old girl named Angela stands and begins to move toward the thick courtroom door, along with her mother and father.

Waiting in the courtroom are two teenage defense attorneys (both female) that Angela and her parents met 45 minutes before in the basement offices of the Anchorage Youth Court. Two young men in their mid-teens are sitting at a table near the front of the courtroom. They will be serving as the prosecuting attorneys for Angela's hearing, and they are currently reading through a case file that describes the incident in which Angela has admitted to being involved. An adult legal advisor sits at the side of the courtroom, near a chair used for witness testimony during daytime hearings in the criminal court. During the youth court hearing, the adult legal advisor will be quiet unless the young people in charge of the courtroom direct a question to him or seek his advice about procedural matters.

Angela's parents take their places on one of the five or six long, wooden, church-style pews at the rear of the courtroom that provide seating for spectators. During youth court, however, there are no spectators. The proceedings of the AYC are confidential and closed to the public. Visitors, such as journalists and researchers, are allowed to watch youth court hearings only if permission is granted by the court, and only if Angela and her parents agree, which they do.

Most of the youth in the courtroom are dressed in a style that teenagers would probably consider formal. The boys are usually in khaki pants and button-down shirts; the girls seem to favor plain dress slacks and sweaters, and even an occasional skirt. The bailiff this evening, however, is attired entirely in camouflage fabric. All of the youth were interacting freely and making wisecracks during the break between hearings. The older teenagers among them seemed especially close. Some of them have worked together in youth court for four years or more. When the bailiff went out to call Angela and her parents in for this hearing, however, the courtroom became very quiet and each of the youth volunteers moved quickly to take his or her assigned place.

The youth volunteers study Angela as she enters the courtroom. She has long brown hair and is dressed in jeans and a red shirt. She exchanges nervous glances with her parents as the youth attorneys direct her to come forward to sit near them. Her parents sit directly behind Angela in the spectator area.

The judges' bench at the front of the courtroom is elevated. The jury box on the right side of the courtroom will not be used. The Anchorage Youth Court uses the "youth tribunal" model for its courtroom. All cases are heard by a panel of three judges, and they alone will deliberate on the presentations by

The Maricopa teen courts use two courtroom models, variations of the adult judge and peer jury models. In hearings conducted using the adult judge model, a judge from the Justice Court presides over the courtroom. The adult judge may answer questions during the hearing but the primary reason for the judge's presence is to ensure proper procedure. Youth attorneys question the defendant and a youth jury of 8 to 12 members recommends a sentence.

In cases handled by the peer jury, proceedings take place in a small conference room just off the courtroom lobby. Each hearing is attended by the defendant, his or her parent(s), and about four youth jurors. The process is less formal than what occurs under the adult judge model. After a brief presentation of the relevant case facts by an adult volunteer, the youth jurors question the defendant directly (and sometimes intensely) for 10 to 15 minutes. The defendant is then asked to leave the room for a few minutes while the jurors agree on an appropriate sentence.

Together, the Tempe and Chandler teen courts handle about 300 cases annually. Defendants are typically between 12 and 17 years of age and usually charged with misdemeanors, status offenses, or traffic

the youth attorneys before choosing the most appropriate disposition for Angela. Each pair of attorneys sits at one of two tables designated for this purpose. A speaker's podium is placed between the tables. Anyone standing at the podium will be looking directly at the judges.

For several minutes after Angela enters the courtroom, everyone sits quietly. The attorneys continue to look through their papers, occasionally whispering instructions to each other – "I'll say this part... why don't you say that?" Then, pointing to the case file, "hey, did you know this?" One of the defense attorneys talks in a whisper to Angela about something she sees in the file. The defense attorney and the adult legal advisor move to the hallway to discuss an aspect of the case. The legal advisor answers briefly. The attorney seems satisfied, and they return to the courtroom.

The adult legal advisor looks at each pair of attorneys and silently raises his eyebrows, as if to say, "O.K., ready?" The attorneys nod and the legal advisor leaves the courtroom through a door behind the judges' bench. The clock on the courtroom wall indicates it has been nearly 10 minutes since Angela entered the courtroom.

The program director, Sharon Leon, suddenly comes in and hands the defense attorneys a document that must be related to the case. Ms. Leon is normally working in the downstairs AYC office at this time, getting youth and parents ready for court and ensuring that the youth volunteers are prepared. Her appearance in the courtroom suggests that some detail about the case must have been nearly missed, but she is just in time. The attorneys nod and thank her. She smiles at Angela and Angela's parents as she leaves the quiet courtroom and closes the door behind her. Other than this brief appearance by the program director and the silent presence of the adult legal advisor, the entire courtroom is managed by teenagers.

Moments later, the door behind the judges' bench opens and the adult legal advisor comes back into the courtroom. The youth bailiff stands and announces in a clear, loud voice, "all rise," and everyone in the courtroom stands. The three youth judges enter and immediately take their places behind the bench. The chief judge motions for the participants and spectators to take their seats. No one speaks. The chief judge sits in the middle chair, the only high-backed chair. The other two judges make do with low-back chairs that have obviously been moved into position just for youth court. This fact suddenly reminds an observer that the adolescents running this courtroom are not "real" judges.

The bailiff announces the case, reading the case number and charges aloud. The chief judge asks Angela to verify her name, and then asks Angela and her parents to confirm that they have voluntarily consented to have visitors in the courtroom this evening. The chief judge asks the visiting researchers to identify themselves – the adult legal advisor later chastises the researchers because they fail to stand when addressing the bench. It is a mistake nobody makes twice in Anchorage Youth Court. Everyone addresses the judges while standing; everyone calls the judges "your honors." Most importantly, nobody in Anchorage Youth Court speaks without permission from the bench.

Angela's mother learns this during the hearing. She disagrees with something said by one of the prosecuting attorneys, and being one of the few adults in the room, she feels free to interrupt and correct the young man. She barely gets a syllable out before the chief judge cuts her off – "M'am! I'm very sorry, but you have not been recognized by the court. You'll have an opportunity to talk in a few minutes, but for now, I'd ask you to take your seat."

Angela's mother complies, but she seems very surprised. The visiting researchers are surprised. Angela, on the other hand, tries to hide just the slightest smile. The youth volunteers barely notice any of this. It's just an average night in Anchorage Youth Court, and the judges are managing their courtroom, just as they always do.

violations. Shoplifting is the most common offense handled in either teen court. Youth attorneys are recruited from schools in the Tempe and Chandler suburbs. They receive eight hours of training from the Justice Court judge, the teen court moderator, and other adult volunteers from the legal community. Youth jurors may be volunteers, but many are former defendants who return to teen court as a condition of a prior sentence.

Montgomery County Teen Court

Attorneys in the Juvenile Division of the Montgomery County Office of the State's Attorney began efforts to establish the Montgomery County Teen Court (MCTC) in 1996. The State's Attorney's Office embraced the idea of teen court to fill gaps in the local juvenile justice system. Teen court provided a formal diversion alternative for delinquent offenders and involved youth volunteers in crime prevention. The program was organized by an inter-agency coalition that included the State's Attorney's Office, the judiciary, law enforcement, schools, the state department of juvenile justice, the defense bar, and a county-wide student advisory board. The first court session was held in March 1997.

The teen court operates year round under the direction of Pam Troia from the Office of the State's Attorney. Hearings are held twice a month in the courtrooms of the county's Judicial Center in Rockville, Maryland. The court hears between eight and twelve cases in a typical evening. The MCTC uses two courtroom models, splitting the docket evenly between the adult judge model and the peer jury model. Generally, the first two or three cases each evening are heard under the adult judge model and all remaining cases are processed using the peer jury model.

Circuit and district court judges preside over teen court and lawyers from the State's Attorney's Office along with other lawyers from the local bar association provide on-going legal training to youth volunteers. As many as fifty youth volunteers may be needed for each court session in order to fill the jury roster and to provide sufficient numbers of youth attorneys and other court officers. The MCTC staff works year round to recruit a pool of 200 youth volunteers, mainly by visiting schools throughout the county.

The court handles approximately 225 cases per year. Defendants must be between the ages of 12 and 17, and most cases involve first time offenders, although recently the program expanded its eligibility criteria to include youth with a prior arrest for certain minor offenses. The most common charges heard in the MCTC are shoplifting, vandalism, and alcohol violations.

One of the strongest features of the program may be its sponsorship by the Montgomery County State's Attorney. The Office of the State's Attorney supplies the teen court with much of its operating resources, including personnel and materials. The close association between the teen court program and the prosecutors office sends a message to the community, and to elected officials, that teen court is a crime reduction program. Some teen courts are perceived by their communities to be primarily youth development agencies. This may make it difficult for the programs to receive strong support from local prosecutors and police departments, a key ingredient for any crime-reduction program, even in the juvenile justice area. In Montgomery County, it is clear to the entire community that while the teen court may foster youth development, it is also designed to control crime and improve public safety.

Independence Youth Court

The Independence Youth Court (IYC) was established in 1985 as a partnership between the local bar association, the Juvenile Division of the Jackson County Family Court, the City of Independence, and the Independence Police Department. The program receives financial support from Jackson County's anti-drug tax (COMBAT funds), the City of Independence, and local foundations. The city also supports the program with in-kind contributions. The IYC office space, phones, electricity, fax, computers, and other materials are supplied by the city free of charge.

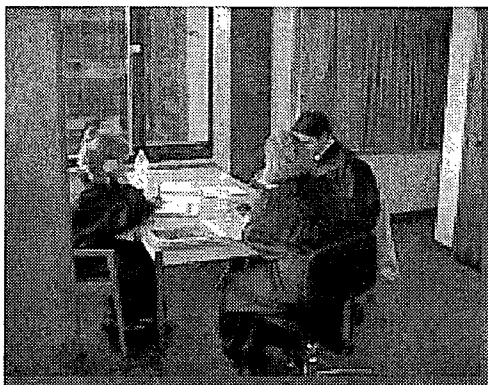
Youth court hearings are held in the evenings at the city's Municipal Courthouse, just across the street from the Independence Police Department. The IYC offices, one large room and a storage closet crowded with file cabinets, are also located in this facility. The court operates with a staff of two (the executive director and a program coordinator). Both positions are part-time, although the program gets much more than it pays for by having a local judge, Susan Watkins, serve as executive director. An executive board that includes representatives from the police, courts, schools, and business community governs the youth court. Conduct issues involving IYC volunteers are addressed by a steering committee with youth and adult members. Youth volunteers must be at least 13 years of age.

Defendants may be as young as seven but no older than age 16. Like the program in Anchorage, youth volunteers in Independence must pass a youth bar exam before serving as attorneys or judges.

All IYC cases are processed using the youth judge model. There are no juries. Youth attorneys present cases to a youth judge who presides over all proceedings and makes sentencing decisions. Although the program employs the youth judge model, the executive director is usually present during court hearings, sitting in the first row of spectator seats just behind the attorneys. After the attorneys have presented the case and the youth judge has imposed a sentence (often the entire process takes just 10 minutes), Judge Watkins speaks briefly with the defendant and his or her parents. Most of these conversations last about five minutes. Judge Watkins typically reviews the just-imposed sentence to make sure that the youth and parent understand the disposition. She also uses this opportunity to remind each defendant that diversion to teen court is an alternative to formal prosecution and the possibility of a permanent legal record.

Defendants may plead not guilty during their initial appearance in youth court, thereby prompting an adjudication hearing or trial. Youth judges preside over trial proceedings, and they are responsible for determining whether a finding of guilt has been substantiated. Trials often require victims and witnesses to appear before the court. A trial may take anywhere from thirty to sixty minutes. Because the IYC program is a diversion alternative, however, adjudication essentially means that youth must comply with their initial diversion agreements. If not, they may be referred back to the Jackson County Family Court, just as they would have been had they refused the youth court alternative when it was first offered.

The Independence Youth Court receives more than 500 referrals annually. Defendants may return to youth court for new (albeit minor) offenses. Nearly all (98 percent) of IYC referrals come from the Independence police; the remaining portion comes from schools. Shoplifting, truancy, and vandalism offenses account for most of the cases handled in IYC. The court also frequently hears cases involving status offenses, third degree assault, and minor drug and alcohol violations.



Judge Deliberations, Anchorage, AK

The three judges in Anchorage Youth Court on this particular evening appear to be 16 or 17 years old. Two are female and one is male. Dressed in black judicial robes, they study the defendant from behind their raised bench as the hearing begins. They start the process by asking the defendant if she has actually read the agreement she signed. Prompted by her youth attorneys to stand and address the judges, 15 year-old Angela indicates that she signed it knowingly and voluntarily. One of the judges announces that Angela has admitted responsibility for a charge of misdemeanor shoplifting, a violation of Alaska statute 11.46.220. The judge looks at the two teenagers that are serving as prosecutors for the case and says, "we're ready for your opening statement."

The first prosecutor reads the facts of the case. Approximately three weeks before the hearing, Angela attempted to leave a local department store without paying for items in her possession. She was stopped by a store employee who found $50 worth of clothing in her bag. Because Angela signed a statement admitting to the charges, essentially entering a plea of no contest, the chief judge moves immediately into the sentencing hearing.

The second prosecutor begins by recommending a sentence. He suggests the court should order Angela to work 29 hours of community service, write an 1800-word essay about the harm shoplifting does to the community, and attend one anti-shoplifting class. The prosecutor notes that this sentence recommendation takes into account that this was Angela's first known offense.

Seeing the prosecutor has finished, the chief judge nods to one of Angela's youth attorneys, who stands and begins to address the court. The attorney points out that Angela has a 3.9 grade point average at school and has received other marks of academic distinction. Her favorite classes are math and science. Angela is involved in sports and other extra-curricular activities, and she plans to attend college and become a lawyer one day. The attorney notes that her client has shown remorse and has assured her parents that she will never do such a thing again. Angela has ended her friendship with the person who tended to get her into trouble in the past, and she has even started filling out the paperwork to become a youth court volunteer herself.

The second defense attorney stands to make the defense team's alternative sentencing recommendation. She begins by summarizing the key mitigating factors that should be taken into consideration, and then asks the court to consider a sentence of 23 hours of community service and a 500-word essay. She begins to sit down, but her colleague whispers to her and gives her a piece of paper from the table. The second attorney seems slightly startled, apologizes to the judges, and asks that she be allowed to submit a letter from Angela's neighbor attesting to her character. The youth prosecutors immediately object that they have not seen the letter, but after a quick glance, they withdraw their objection and the bailiff hands the letter to the chief judge.

One of the judges asks the prosecutor if any recommendations about the case were received from the regular juvenile intake agency, the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice. The state DJJ has legal responsibility for initially reviewing all delinquency matters in Anchorage, and intake workers there sometimes make specific suggestions about sentencing for the cases they divert to Anchorage Youth Court.

Hearing that no recommendations were received from DJJ, the judges review the paperwork associated with the case. Looking at the arrest record, one of the judges says that it doesn't appear to her that Angela freely admitted to the offense at first. The arrest report indicates that Angela initially resisted revealing the contents of her bag to employees at the department store. The judge asks the defense attorneys why they are not recommending that Angela attend the shoplifting class. They repeat their assurance that Angela knows what she did was wrong.

The judges invite Angela to speak to the court one last time before they withdraw to decide upon a sentence. Angela stands rather shyly and addresses the court. She says only that she is sorry for what she did and about her behavior that day she adds, "it wasn't like me." The chief judge thanks her, and as all three judges stand to leave the courtroom, the bailiff says in a loud voice, "all rise." The judges disappear into the hallway through a door just behind their bench. The adult legal advisor, who has been sitting quietly throughout the hearing, stands and follows them.

Judges Deliberate

The mood lightens perceptibly as the judges enter the office they use for sentencing deliberations. For a few moments, they seem like teenagers again, making jokes about the awkward moments between the attorneys, or commenting on someone's personal appearance or clothing. After two or three minutes, the chief judge indicates that she is ready to focus on their assigned task. "O.K.," she says, "let's go." All three judges sit down at a table strewn with the paper forms and case files that were the focus of courtroom attention just moments before.

Almost immediately, the three adolescents seem like veteran sentencing judges, and they resume

their serious tone. The chief judge reads aloud from the neighbor's letter that praises Angela as a good girl who made a mistake. They discuss the practical differences between writing an essay of 500, 800, and 1,800 words. They review the significance of Angela's initial reluctance to open her bag when confronted by store employees, and compare her behavior with other cases in which teenagers have confessed immediately or even gone back to return merchandise after making a successful exit from a store. The adult legal advisor sits in the room and takes notes during these discussions, but says nothing. His role, once again, is to be available to answer the judges' questions and to interject if necessary, but to leave the process to the youth whenever possible.

Each judge looks over the sentencing guidelines provided by the Anchorage Youth Court and begins to "do the math." All three jot down an occasional note, but there is not much discussion. They calculate the effect of mitigating factors – i.e., take a certain amount off for each mitigating factor, add so many hours of community service for every aggravating factor, and increase the essay length if the defendant has had any previous police contacts.

The judges talk about the appropriate length of the essay. Based on Angela's age and offense, they agree that 1,000 words would be "about right." Finally, they add the shoplifting class. The chief judge looks at the visitors in the room and explains that the shoplifting class "is like a given" in any shoplifting case. Having agreed on a sentencing plan, the judges gather up their materials and prepare to go back into the courtroom. They have been gone for about 20 minutes.

Sentence is Announced

The judges ask Angela to remain standing after they have assumed their positions at the bench. The chief judge reads from a prepared statement informing Angela that she has been found to be in violation of the Alaska statute against shoplifting. The sentence is then announced – a 1,000-word essay, shoplifting class, and 26 hours of community service. However, 18 hours of community service will be suspended if Angela successfully joins and completes the training to be a volunteer at the Anchorage Youth Court. Angela seems relieved, almost pleased, as do her parents.

The judges have one last task in Angela's case: a five-minute oration the Anchorage Youth Court calls the "salad bar." Before they left the deliberation room, the judges decided which of them would deliver the salad bar. The AYC judges believe that the salad bar is an important part of the process, and they often coach each other in its fine points. The judge chosen to deliver the salad bar looks Angela in the eye, and with a balance of friendly concern and authoritative scolding, lectures her about what she did wrong and how important it is for her to avoid further trouble.

Salad bar topics often include:

- what happens when a defendant does not complete the AYC sentence;
- how youth that commit crimes contribute to the negative stereotype of teenage behavior, making things worse for everybody;
- how getting into legal trouble damages whatever trust parents and community may have had in young people;
- how crime imposes real costs on the community (e.g., stores raise prices to account for shoplifting);
- that the best way to stay out of trouble is not to associate with kids who get into trouble;
- how lucky they are to have been able to come to AYC and avoid a criminal record; and
- if they are arrested for something like this again, it will turn out much worse.

During salad bars, the judges also give each AYC defendant at least some specific, positive reinforcement for whatever things may be going well, such as getting good grades, having a part-time job, or wanting to go to college. The judges tell defendants that they can meet their goals if they try, and that often the best way to get there is to become a responsible member of their community.

At the end of the salad bar, AYC defendants are told that they have several options. They can: 1) accept the sentence and complete their sanctions as instructed, 2) move for an immediate motion to reconsider the sentence, or 3) appeal within 5 days. Few defendants avail themselves of the last option, but the youth court is ready with a complete appellate process if they do. A separate panel of judges will be convened to reconsider all aspects of the case.

Participants Debrief

When the hearing is over, Angela and her parents are asked to wait a few moments. The judges and both sets of attorneys meet outside the courtroom for five to ten minutes to give each other feedback about their performance. Judges (who are usually older and more experienced) often give the attorneys advice about how to prepare better for their cases, how to coordinate their presentations and be concise, and how important it is to speak clearly and confidently. They may also point it out when attorneys failed to bring up relevant issues during the hearing. Attorneys generally do not give as much feedback to the judges, but they may mention points in the process where they did not understand the judges' instructions or where the process could have been managed more effectively.

After the debriefing, the youth attorneys escort Angela and her parents down to the basement offices of the Anchorage Youth Court where they will meet with the sentencing coordinator and begin to learn what Angela must do to satisfy the terms of her sentence.

From the time Angela arrived at the courthouse, until she is done speaking with the sentencing coordinator, the AYC process has taken a little over two hours.

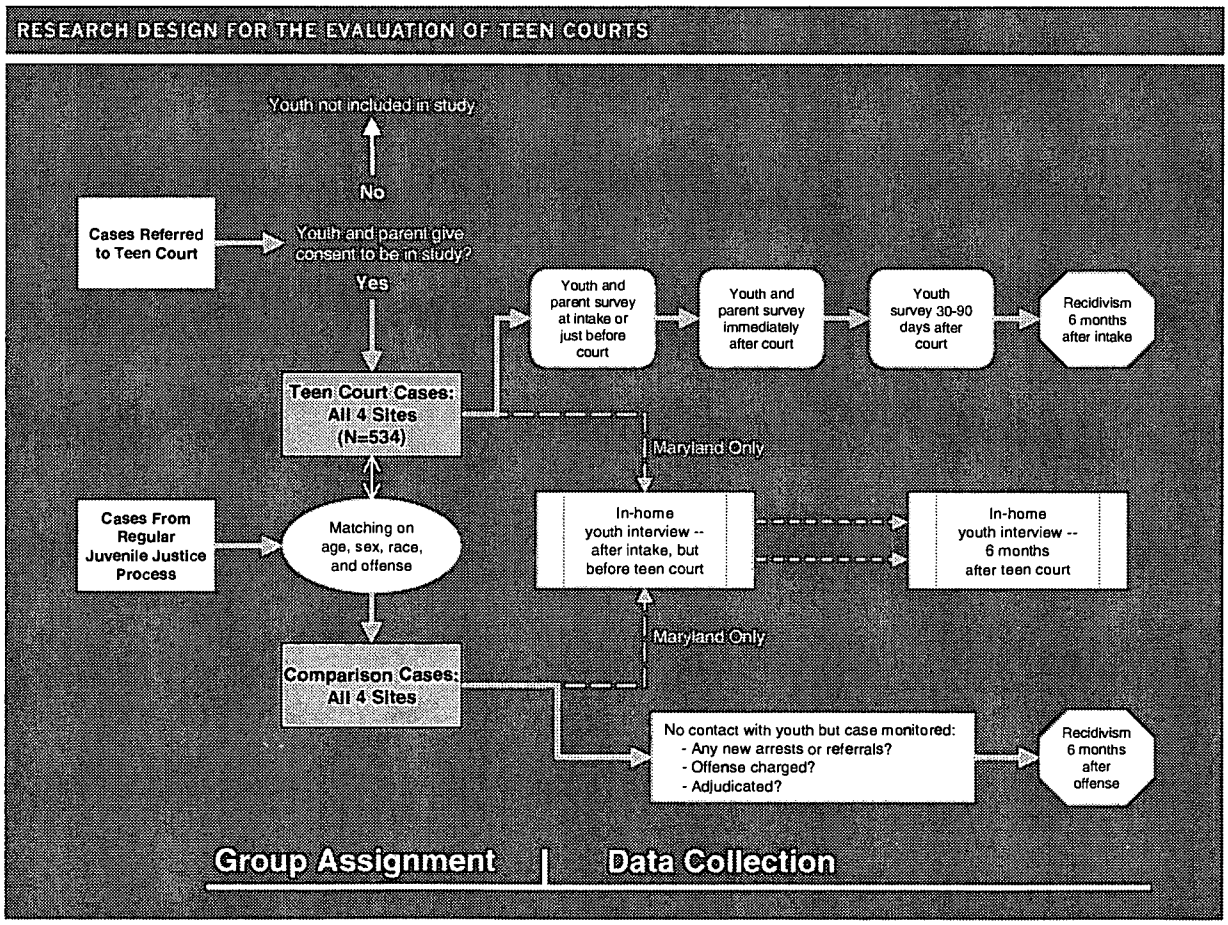
OUTCOME COMPARISONS

By collecting an array of information from four different teen courts, the evaluation was able to produce insights for policy and practice that would be relevant in a broad range of settings. The four study sites varied so widely and in so many ways, however, that it was impossible for the evaluation to control for all of the program differences in its statistical analysis without a far larger investment in data collection. It was also impossible for the evaluation to obtain data on comparison groups that were exactly equivalent across all four sites. Each comparison group had to accommodate the unique configuration of the juvenile justice system, as well as the availability of data in the site.

The main objective of the ETC Project was to measure post-court changes in individual youth outcomes that were thought to be associated with participation in teen court, and to compare these outcomes with those of similar youth handled in the traditional juvenile justice system. In other words, the evaluation was designed to compare what happens to youth after teen court with what *may* have happened to them had they remained in the regular juvenile justice process.

Ideally, an evaluator would answer this question by randomly assigning arrested juveniles either to teen court or to the traditional process and then tracking differences in post-assignment outcomes. If the assignment process were truly random, youth in teen court (the *treatment group*) would not differ in any systematic way from those in juvenile court (the *control group*), and any post-assignment differences in recidivism could be attributed to the impact of the court process. This is what researchers call an experimental design.

Using an experimental design for program evaluation requires the existence of explicit, testable hypotheses about program effects and the factors associated with them, as well as resources for an extensive data collection effort. Lacking both of these conditions, the ETC Project employed a quasi-experimental design because it allowed the project to



begin the process of building a foundation of knowledge on a broad range of issues relevant to policy and practice and kept the costs of the study within levels established by the funding agency.

Comparison Groups in Alaska, Arizona, and Missouri

In Alaska, Arizona, and Missouri, the project created comparison groups using electronic records of first-time juvenile offenders who were similar to youth in the teen court samples (matched on demographic characteristics and offense), but who had been handled by the traditional juvenile justice system in that jurisdiction. In each site, the ETC Project requested data about juvenile justice referrals from whatever agency had responsibility for intake – i.e., the agency that typically has the first contact with recent juvenile arrestees in the jurisdiction. In Arizona and Missouri, the intake agency was the local juvenile or family court. The Alaska intake agency was the Division of Juvenile Justice, or DJJ.[8]

The project's requests for data resulted in a large pool of potential comparison cases in each of the sites. Each pool of cases involved age-appropriate, first-time juvenile offenders, who had been charged with an offense that could have qualified them for teen court but who were not referred to teen court. In each jurisdiction, the project tried to minimize the influence of selection bias. In other words, comparison pools were chosen in a way that would minimize the chances that the reason a comparison case did not go to teen court was that some person or agency *decided* the case should not go to teen court. This was accomplished slightly differently in the three sites where the ETC Project used electronic records to create comparison groups.

In Alaska, the project had to select an historical comparison group. The Anchorage Youth Court became such a large program during the late 1990s that few offense-eligible youth were not referred to youth court. Furthermore, youth courts have been enthusiastically embraced by the State of Alaska in recent years. By 2001, few communities in the state did not have teen courts, eliminating another possible source for a comparison group. In the mid-1990s, however, the Anchorage program had not yet reached its current size, and most youth arrested for qualifying offenses were handled in other diversion programs, or their cases may have been simply dismissed.

The pool of comparison cases in Alaska, therefore, consists of first-time offenders referred to the Division of Juvenile Justice during 1995, the year before the Anchorage Youth Court began to grow to its present size. While there are threats to validity due to possible historical effects under this design (i.e., cases from 1995 might be different than those of 2001), the ETC Project identified non-teen court cases from 1995 as the best available comparison pool.

The comparison groups in Arizona and Missouri were similar. The teen court programs in these jurisdictions are located in separate municipalities within large, metropolitan communities. The Independence Youth Court is located next to Kansas City, both within Jackson County, Missouri. The Tempe Teen Court and Chandler Teen Court are located just outside Phoenix, Arizona, all within the boundaries of Maricopa County. The study's comparison group data in Arizona and Missouri were drawn from the information systems of the Arizona Superior Court and Jackson County Family Court, respectively.

Once a pool of comparison cases had been identified and the necessary data files had been obtained by the ETC Project, the procedures used to select the actual comparison groups in Alaska, Arizona, and Missouri were much the same. First, the project cleaned the data file and removed any cases that did not meet the selection criteria for teen court in that site (e.g., age 10 or older, charged with a misdemeanor of other non-violent charge, and with no prior referrals for delinquency). This allowed the project to create a data file in each site where every case in the file represented a unique juvenile, referred to the regular juvenile justice system for his or her first delinquency offense, and where that offense was similar to those handled by teen courts.

Cases remaining in the file were stratified by sex, race, age (at the time of qualifying referral), and the offense involved in the qualifying referral. A random numeric weight (between 0 and 1) was assigned to each case. Treatment group cases were then stratified using the same categories used to create strata in the comparison pool. The number of cases in each stratum within the treatment pool served as the target number of cases to be selected from the corresponding stratum

8. The authors would like to express their sincere thanks to the staff in each of the three jurisdictions that provided the project with access to the data files it needed and conducted the computer programming necessary to prepared each file for analysis. These individuals include:

- Robert Buttcane of the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice;
- Alison Vines of the Arizona Superior Court; and
- Dr. Pam Johnson Behle, Jackson County (Missouri) Family Court.

TREATMENT GROUPS AND COMPARISON GROUPS IN THE FOUR ETC SITES

		Treatment Group (Teen Court)	Comparison Group (Juvenile Justice)
ALASKA	Sample Population	Juveniles diverted to Anchorage Youth Court by the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) from September 2000 to July 2001, and who agreed to participate in the ETC Study (N=120).	Anchorage-area juveniles referred to the Alaska DJJ for the first time during 1995 (before the expansion of the Anchorage Youth Court) and charged with a delinquency offense that would have qualified for Anchorage Youth Court in 2001 (N=120).
	Recidivism Measure	New delinquency referral to the Alaska DJJ within six months of the DJJ referral that originally led the youth to be diverted to Anchorage Youth Court.	New delinquency referral to the Alaska DJJ within six months of the original referral to DJJ that qualified the youth for the comparison group.
ARIZONA	Sample Population	Juveniles diverted to the Tempe or Chandler teen courts in Maricopa County from November 2000 to September 2001 who agreed to participate in the ETC Study (N=115).	Juveniles referred to juvenile court in Maricopa County for the first time during between October 2000 and August 2001, not diverted to any teen court, and charged with a delinquency offense that would have qualified for teen court (N=115).
	Recidivism Measure	New delinquency referral to juvenile court in Maricopa County within six months of the referral that originally led the youth to be diverted to teen court.	New delinquency referral to juvenile court in Maricopa County within six months of the original referral to juvenile court that qualified the youth for the comparison group.
MARYLAND	Sample Population	Juveniles referred to Montgomery County Teen Court from August 2000 to October 2001 who agreed to participate in the ETC Study (N=154).	Juveniles referred to the Howard County Maryland Police diversion program for the first time between August 2000 and October 2001, charged with an offense that would have qualified for teen court in Montgomery County (N=118), and who agreed to participate in the ETC Study (N=62).
	Recidivism Measure	New citation or arrest by Montgomery County Police within six months of the arrest that originally led the youth to be diverted to teen court.	New citation or arrest by Howard County Police within six months of the arrest that led to the original referral to police diversion and qualified the youth for the comparison group.
MISSOURI	Sample Population	Juveniles referred to Independence Youth Court from July 2000 to September 2001 who agreed to participate in the ETC Study (N=142).	Juveniles referred to Jackson County Family Court for the first time during 2000 charged with a delinquency offense that would have qualified for Independence Youth Court (N=142).
	Recidivism Measure	New delinquency referral to Jackson County Family Court within six months of the arrest that led to the original referral to Independence Youth Court.	New delinquency referral to Jackson County Family Court within six months of the original family court referral that qualified the youth for the comparison group.

Source: Urban Institute, 2002, Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

in the comparison pool. In other words, if the treatment pool (teen court) had six cases in the stratum for 14-year-old white males charged with shoplifting, six cases were selected from the same stratum in the comparison pool. Within each comparison group stratum, cases were selected based upon the lowest value of the randomly assigned weight until the target number of cases for that stratum had been reached. At the end of this process, the evaluation project had generated a comparison group in each site that was a stratified random sample of all cases in the comparison pool, distributed across the defined strata in a manner identical to that of the treatment group.

Maryland Comparison Group

An entirely different process was used to select comparison cases in Maryland. The study design included a plan to conduct face-to-face interviews with treatment and comparison cases in the Maryland study site.[9] All study cases in Maryland were to be recruited on a rolling basis and interviewed in-person soon after their referral to court and again two to three months later. To avoid costly duplication, the projected needed to locate a comparison group near the Montgomery County Teen Court so that the same team of researchers could interview both the treatment and comparison cases. The Montgomery County Teen Court was large enough that few qualifying juveniles did not go to teen court. Thus, the evaluation needed to consider neighboring jurisdictions.

In addition, the source of recidivism data in Montgomery County was the Montgomery County Police Department's records about juvenile arrests. Thus, a comparison jurisdiction was needed that could provide the study with arrest data rather than court data or juvenile intake data. Furthermore, the study needed to locate a source of first-time juvenile offenders who would not have access to teen court as a program option, but who would likely receive other services and sanctions. Youth likely to receive no services at all after a first arrest would be difficult to locate, less likely to consent to participate in the study, and more difficult to track during the follow-up period.

After considering all of these factors, the project elected to draw the Maryland comparison group from police diversion cases in a neighboring county that did not have a teen court program but that offered a package of diversion services for first-time juvenile

9. The data collection procedures in Maryland were much more extensive, involving two waves of face-to-face interviews with teen court youth and comparison group youth. Data from these interviews were used to develop detailed models of youth recidivism in Maryland and to conduct confirmatory analyses of the project's self-administered questionnaire items in order to improve the construction of item indices in all four sites. These analyses are described in a separate, forthcoming report from the Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

THE COMPARISON GROUP IN MARYLAND WAS QUITE DIFFERENT

	Experience of Teen Court Group	Experience of Comparison Group
Maryland	■ Arrested for a first offense ■ Meet with an intake worker ■ Attend a teen court hearing ■ Receive sanctions ■ Comply with sanctions or face return to the juvenile justice system ■ Recidivism checked 6 months later	■ Arrested for a first offense ■ Meet with a social worker – – ■ Receive sanctions ■ Comply with sanctions or face return to the juvenile justice system ■ Recidivism checked 6 months later
Alaska, Arizona, Missouri	■ Arrested for a first offense ■ Meet with an intake worker ■ Attend a teen court hearing ■ Receive sanctions ■ Comply with sanctions or face return to the juvenile justice system ■ Recidivism checked 6 months later	■ Arrested for a first offense *Juvenile justice system responds in unknown manner, including case dismissal* ■ Recidivism checked 6 months later

Source: Urban Institute. 2002. Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

offenders that was similar to those offered by the Montgomery County Teen Court. The Howard County, Maryland Police Youth Service Division focused on early intervention and required many first-time juvenile offenders to pay restitution, perform community service, and write essays and victim apology letters. The principal differences between the experiences of youth in the Montgomery Teen Court and the youth served in Howard County was the teen court hearing itself and the availability of teen court jury duty. Howard County youth were arrested, met with a police department social worker, and received a package of sanctions and services. Montgomery County youth were arrested, met with the teen court coordinator, *went to teen court*, and then received a similar package of sanctions and services.

The selection of Howard County as the comparison group made the Maryland evaluation design distinctly different from the evaluation design in other three sites. In Alaska, Arizona, and Missouri, juveniles in the comparison groups were sampled from the general population of first-time offenders regardless of what may have happened to them in the juvenile justice system. Many youth in these three comparison groups, in fact, may have received no services at all. Some of them probably received nothing more than a warning letter and notice that their case would be dismissed if they stayed out of trouble. The Howard County comparison group cases, on the other hand, were sampled from cases *known* to have received services and sanctions, often in combinations very similar to those provided by teen courts.

TEEN COURT CASES AND COMPARISON GROUP CASES RECEIVED SIMILAR SANCTIONS AND SERVICES IN MARYLAND

	Montgomery County Teen Court	Howard County Police Diversion
Community service	100%	42%
Essay	31%	40%
Apology letter	19%	33%
Restitution	21%	5%
Crime prevention classes	13%	11%
Jury duty	100%	--

Source: Urban Institute, 2002. Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

DATA COLLECTION

The data collection methods for each program site were developed in conjunction with local officials and teen court program directors from that community. Soon after the four sites were selected and approved by OJJDP, the evaluation team visited each program. During these visits, ETC evaluators met with staff from the teen court program and their key service-delivery partners, as well as any state and local officials from the courts and juvenile justice system that were considered important for the project's case recruitment or data collection tasks. The evaluation team also began to observe the courtroom procedures and case processing techniques used in each teen court.

Data about teen court cases were collected from multiple sources in each jurisdiction. Principal data sources included: (1) self-administered questionnaires (SAQs) completed by youth and their parents; (2) teen court program files and administrative records; (3) police and court records; and (4) face-to-face interviews with teen court defendants (Maryland only).

Measuring Youth and Parent Attitudes: Self-Administered Questionnaires (SAQs)

Youth and parent questionnaires were used to measure the respondents' baseline attitudes and opinions prior to their exposure to the teen court, their perceptions of teen court after they emerged from the hearing, and any changes in perceptions and attitudes that may have been associated with their experiences in teen court.[10] The SAQ data were collected from each teen court defendant and one parent or guardian for each youth using five different questionnaires. Three questionnaires were completed by the youth: *YQ1* (pre-court, 32 items), *YQ2* (post-court, 20 items), and *YQ3* (post-sanctioning, 32 items). Two questionnaires were completed by the parents: *PQ1* (pre-court, 20 items) and *PQ2* (post-court, 20 items).

The youth SAQ items included measures of delinquent behavior, peer associations, attitudes toward delinquency and the justice system, and a limited set of demographic characteristics. Parent questionnaires were similar in content and structure to the youth instruments and focused on attitudes about the justice system, the parent's perception of his or her child's behavior, and opinions about the child's peer associations. Parent questionnaires also contained items about socio-economic status (educational attainment,

10. The content and design of these questionnaires is described in a separate, forthcoming report from the Evaluation of Teen Courts.

employment and housing status, and material possessions, including whether the family owned a cellular phone and a computer).

The response format for the key items on all five questionnaires was a four-category, Likert-type scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree). The questionnaires were usually completed by respondents in fewer than five minutes. Urban Institute researchers were available in each site to obtain written, affirmative consent from each youth and parent who participated in the study, and they were also available to assist respondents with the administration of the surveys as needed, but very few youth or parents required assistance.

Where possible, respondents completed their questionnaires in a semi-private setting. The Alaska site, for example, designated two office cubicles for parents and youth to complete the study questionnaires. In Maryland, respondents had a spacious courthouse reception area with sofas and chairs that allowed them to spread out and complete the questionnaires in privacy. Tight quarters and semi-chaotic courthouse lobbies in the other two sites made administration of the questionnaires more challenging, and SAQ completion rates in Missouri and Arizona were slightly lower, perhaps as a result of these more difficult environments.

The second parent and youth questionnaires were completed immediately after the teen court hearing concluded. Respondents received the second set of questionnaires following the imposition of sanctions and their brief exit interview with program staff. Completion of the second questionnaire concluded the parents' involvement in the data collection process.

A third questionnaire was administered several weeks after teen court. The response rate varied considerably among the four sites. The response rate in Alaska exceeded 90 percent, but the rate was far lower in Arizona, Maryland, and Missouri. In these three sites, the third youth survey (YQ3) was mailed to the respondents at about the same time that they were scheduled to complete their teen court sanctions. The surveys were mailed along with a letter from the ETC project manager and a postage-paid, self-addressed envelope. The letter thanked the youth for his or her participation in the study, discussed the reason for the survey, and provided instructions for mailing the completed survey to the Urban Institute.

In Alaska, the third survey was not mailed to respondents. Instead, youth received the questionnaire when they returned to the AYC office to submit documentation that their sanctions had been completed satisfactorily. Youth completed the third questionnaire at the AYC office, sealed it in an unmarked envelope, and dropped it into a confidential ballot-style box. Project researchers picked up the completed questionnaires several times a week.

The project would have preferred that all four sites handle the third questionnaire in this manner, but it proved to be feasible only in Alaska, and this resulted in far higher rates of completion in that site. The project received completed YQ3 surveys from 97 percent of the youth respondents in Alaska. Despite multiple reminder letters, response rates in the other sites were 49 percent in Maryland, 40 percent in Missouri, and 36 percent in Arizona.

Measuring Program Activity: Teen Court Records

The ETC Project collected information about cases processed in each teen court by reviewing program case records. The study collected detailed information on the youth that were recruited for the evaluation and at least some basic demographic information about youth who were processed by the teen courts during the recruitment period but who were either not approached for consent or who chose not to participate in the study. Comparisons of the two groups of cases suggested that youth recruited for the ETC study were representative of youth handled by the teen courts during the study period (see Appendix 2).

Program records furnished data about various aspects of the teen court process in each site, including the courtroom model used for each case and the mix of sanctions received by each youth. In Alaska, this information was provided in spreadsheet form; information was collected manually in the other sites. In each site, the project collected data about the youth's personal characteristics (age, sex, race), the offenses for which they were referred to teen court, the range of sanctions imposed, the severity of those sanctions (i.e., hours of community service, length of essays assigned) and whether the youth completed the sanctions.

Measuring Recidivism: Police and Court Data

Recidivism data were obtained by analyzing official records from the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice, the Jackson County (Missouri) Family Court, the

Maricopa County (Arizona) Juvenile Court Center, and the Montgomery County and Howard County (Maryland) Police Departments. Each data source allowed the evaluation to estimate the rate at which youth in the treatment group and those in the comparison group came into contact again with the juvenile justice system. Because identical data elements could not be collected across all sites, recidivism was defined either as a subsequent police contact (Maryland) or a subsequent referral to juvenile justice intake (Alaska, Arizona, and Missouri).

These definitions create a potential bias for analyses that compare the Maryland site with the other study sites. Recidivism among Maryland youth would be expected to be higher than in the other sites since new contacts with the juvenile justice system in Maryland were measured at an earlier point in the process – i.e., police contact versus referral to juvenile intake following police contact.

Before collecting recidivism data, the ETC Project conducted a series of interviews to learn about the structure and content of the information systems in each site and the reliability of data entry. Data from each agency were used to verify key information about the arrest incidents that qualified respondents for either one of the teen court programs or the comparison groups (referred to as the "qualifying arrest"). Data collected about qualifying arrests included the date of the arrest, the type and severity of the offense(s) involved, the disposition of the arrest (referred to court or not, etc.), and date of disposition.

To detect subsequent offenses, the project received electronic data files from the Alaska DJJ and from the Maricopa County Juvenile Court Center. These data were extracted from operational management information systems maintained by those agencies, namely the PROBER® system in Alaska (a statewide database for child and youth services) and the Juvenile On-Line Tracking System (JOLTS) in Maricopa County. In Missouri and Maryland, recidivism data were collected manually using automated data systems. Researchers queried each database using combinations of case numbers, names, and birth dates in order to locate the records of all study subjects. Data began to be extracted from the information systems of each agency in mid-2001, as the project was beginning to conclude its subject recruitment efforts in each jurisdiction. The final data extracts were received in March 2002, when more than 90 percent of all cases recruited for the study had reached or exceeded a six-month follow-up period.

RESULTS

The ETC Project collected data from more than 500 youth across the four program sites (table 1). During the study recruitment period in 2000 and 2001, more than 100 youth from each program consented to be in the evaluation, 120 from the Anchorage Youth Court, 118 from the Maricopa County teen courts, 154 from the Montgomery County Teen Court, and 142 from the Independence Youth Court.

Profile of Teen Court Cases

Analyses of the demographic characteristics of the youth who consented to be in the study revealed few important differences between the four programs. Approximately 40 percent of the youth in each program were female and between one-third and one-half of the youth were under age 15 at the time of their referral to teen court. Teen court youth in Alaska, Arizona, and Maryland were slightly more racially diverse than youth in the Missouri program, where more than 90 percent of the youth were white.

Cross-site differences in parent and family indicators were more pronounced (table 2). The parents or guardians who accompanied youth to their teen court hearings were predominantly female, from 61 percent in Alaska to 76 percent in Missouri. Parents in Maryland were much older than were parents in the other three sites. Only 16 percent of the parents of teen court youth in Maryland were under age 40, compared with 35 percent in Alaska, 44 percent in Arizona, and 55 percent in Missouri. Parents in the Missouri program were less likely to have any higher education (45 percent), although they were slightly more likely to be employed full-time (77 percent).

The families of teen court youth in Maryland were of a slightly higher economic status compared with families in the other three study sites, at least judging from the indicators of social and economic status collected by the ETC questionnaires. More than three-fourths (76 percent) of the families of teen court youth in Maryland owned their own homes, compared with 70 percent in Alaska, 59 percent in Arizona, and 58 percent in Missouri. The Maryland families were also the most likely to own computers (94 percent) and cellular phones (85 percent).

Recidivism Comparisons

The bottom-line result of the Evaluation of Teen Courts Project is captured by the six-month recidivism measure collected in each of the four sites. The comparisons of recidivism within six months of each

youth's original referral indicate that teen court youth were significantly less likely to re-offend than were comparison group youth in two of the four study sites. In Alaska, six percent of the teen court youth were referred again to the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice, compared with 23 percent of the non-teen court youth. In Missouri, 9 percent of the youth from the Independence Youth Court re-offended within six months, compared with 28 percent of similar youth handled by the Jackson County Family Court. Both of these differences reached the level of statistical significance (χ^2, d.f.=1; $p < .01$).

In Arizona, the difference in recidivism between teen court youth and youth handled by the regular

Table 1. SUBJECT RECRUITMENT AND SAMPLE SIZE

	Alaska	Arizona	Maryland	Missouri
Youth referred to teen court during recruitment	236	192	270	621
Youth eligible for the ETC evaluation*	197	148	260	506
Youth approached by ETC researchers**	139	124	203	187
Refused	19	6	49	45
Consented	120	118	154	142
Consenters as percentage of youth approached	86%	95%	76%	76%
Consenters as percentage of eligible youth	61%	80%	59%	28%
Youth who provided at least some survey data	119	115	152	137

* Youth were ineligible for the study for various reasons, including being too young (i.e., under age 10), having been to teen court before (the study was designed to focus on first-time offenders), and not being accompanied by a parent or guardian on the night of the teen court hearing.

** Not all youth were approached to participate in the study because recruitment usually occurred in the midst of a busy courtroom lobby and only one research assistant was usually in each location to recruit subjects. The ETC staff was instructed to select subjects at random.

Source: Urban Institute, 2002. Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

Table 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF TEEN COURT SAMPLES BY STUDY SITE

	Alaska	Arizona	Maryland	Missouri
Teen Court Youth				
Female	43%	38%	39%	39%
Under age 15	33	48	34	50
White	71	66	70	93
Parent/Guardian Accompanying Youth to Teen Court Hearing				
Female	61%	68%	68%	76%
Under age 40	35	44	16	55
Education beyond high school	68	73	81	45
Employed full-time	76	71	73	77
Family Status				
Homeowner	70%	59%	76%	58%
Family owns a computer	86	78	94	67
Family owns a cell phone	78	71	85	62

Note: Percentages represent the proportion of cases with the indicated characteristic.

Source: Urban Institute, 2002. Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

In two of the four sites, teen court youth had significantly lower rates of recidivism than the comparison group. In the other two sites, differences in recidivism failed to reach statistical significance. In one of these sites, however, the direction of the difference favored teen courts.

juvenile justice process also favored the teen court programs, but the size of the difference failed to reach statistical significance. Youth were re-referred to juvenile court in 9 percent of cases from the Tempe and Chandler teen courts, compared with 15 percent of the comparison group cases handled by the juvenile court. The analysis also examined youth recidivism for each of the courtroom models used by the programs in the Arizona site. There was virtually no difference in rates of re-offending between youth handled with the adult judge model and those handled with the peer jury model (8 percent and 10 percent, respectively).

In Maryland, the analysis of recidivism slightly favored the comparison group, but again the magnitude of the difference failed to reach the level of statistical significance. In other words, the difference in recidivism between teen court youth and comparison group youth could not be distinguished from a finding of no difference. While 8 percent of the youth handled by the Montgomery County Teen Court were re-arrested within six months, the same was true for just 4 percent of the youth in the comparison group. The low base rate of recidivism in the Maryland programs, combined with the small sample sizes prevents further conclusions about differences in recidivism.

Thus, in two of the four sites, teen court youth had significantly lower rates of recidivism than the comparison group. In the other two sites, differences in recidivism failed to reach statistical significance. In one of these two sites, however, the direction of the difference favored teen courts.

Characteristics of Youth and Parents

The ETC Project analyzed data from the self-administered questionnaires to investigate youth and parent attitudes and how they varied among the four teen court programs. By examining the opinions of parents and youth before and after their teen court hearings, the evaluation was designed to learn about the subjective experiences of teen court clients and

Table 3. SIX-MONTH RECIDIVISM RESULTS, TEEN COURTS VERSUS COMPARISON GROUPS

	Teen Court Model	Cases*	Cases Recidivating	Percent Recidivating	Statistical Significance: Teen Court vs. Comparison**
ALASKA					
Comparison Group		114	26	23%	
Anchorage Youth Court	Youth Tribunal	114	7	6%	$p < .01$
ARIZONA					
Comparison Group		113	17	15%	
Maricopa County Teen Courts	Both Models	110	10	9%	n.s.
	Adult Judge	65	5	8%	n.s.
	Peer Jury	39	4	10%	n.s.
	Unknown	*6*	*1*		
MARYLAND					
Comparison Group		100	4	4%	
Montgomery County Teen Court	Both Models	135	11	8%	n.s.
	Adult Judge	58	7	12%	n.s.
	Peer Jury	64	3	5%	n.s.
	Unknown	*13*	*1*		
MISSOURI					
Comparison Group		131	37	28%	
Independence Youth Court	Youth Judge	107	10	9%	$p < .01$

* Some cases could not be included in the six month recidivism analysis, usually for one of two reasons: 1) the youth "aged out" of the juvenile justice system (i.e., turned 18 years of age, 17 in Missouri) prior to reaching the end of the six-month follow-up period, or 2) the youth was recruited very late in the study period and had not reached the end of the six month follow-up period when recidivism data were collected. Both types of cases are available for subsequent analyses that do not require standard follow-up periods, including "time to failure."

** Statistical differences were measured using both the Chi Square test of significance and Fischer's Exact test (n.s. = no significant difference).

Source: Urban Institute, 2002. Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

whether they were related to subsequent recidivism.

The analysis revealed that youth in the Missouri site were significantly more likely to report lower attachment to pro-social institutions and to hold negative opinions of the legal system (table 4). For example, youth in the Missouri site were more likely to agree with the statement, "I will probably be arrested again someday" (21 percent). They also had the

Table 4. SUMMARY OF YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES – BEFORE COURT

	Percent "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"				
	Alaska	Arizona	Maryland	Missouri	Significance
Pro-Social Attitudes					
Most police officers try to do a good job.	96%	96%	88%	83%	
I will probably be arrested again someday. R	6	4	6	21	$p < .01$
My friends think teen court is a joke. R	12	18	13	29	$p < .01$
Getting into a good college is important to me.	95	91	93	77	$p < .01$
Teen court is a waste of my time. R	7	11	12	18	$p < .01$
Teen court makes you think about your future.	86%	89%	88%	73%	$p < .01$
It's worth getting into a little trouble to have fun. R	14	12	20	21	
You can learn a lot about the law in teen court.	96	88	91	86	$p < .01$
I think I will have a good job someday.	98	97	97	97	$p < .01$
Being in teen court makes you a better person.	82	76	68	62	$p < .01$
I wish I had gone to regular court, not teen court. R	3%	5%	3%	4%	
I will never get into serious trouble again.	89	91	93	85	$p < .01$
Going through teen court is easy.	45	46	27	37	$p < .01$
Teen courts are too hard on kids.	16	21	18	18	
My behavior is no worse than other kids my age.	66	74	69	67	
Pro-Social Bonds					
I can talk to my parent(s) about almost anything.	79%	74%	69%	73%	
My teachers are proud of me.	72	87	80	77	
My parent(s) are proud of me.	77	75	84	80	
My parent(s) take the time to really listen to me.	76	78	83	75	
We fight a lot in my family. R	22	18	20	30	$p < .01$
My parent(s) usually don't care what I think. R	16%	13%	15%	20%	
Getting good grades in school is important.	91	93	96	93	
The police are usually fair to people like me.	76	74	60	54	$p < .01$
My parent(s) always know where I am.	79	68	79	71	
The police in my town do not like kids my age. R	32	26	43	46	
Delinquent Peer Associations					
Most of my friends drink (alcohol).	32%	30%	37%	28%	
My friends get into trouble more than I do.	39	46	46	38	
Most kids shoplift from stores at least once.	74	66	61	63	
Most of my friends steal at least a little.	28	38	39	38	
Most of my friends have smoked marijuana.	50%	34%	45%	50%	
Most of my friends are honest. R	88	82	87	80	
I've done a lot of bad things no one knows about.	22	14	19	27	

R = Reverse coded in later analyses.

Significance = Statistical significance of differences between the four groups, measured with the F statistic.

Note: Tests of statistical significance were calculated using the original variables, in which responses were measured on a four point scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Source: Urban Institute. 2002. Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

highest reported agreement (29 percent) with the statement, "My friends think teen court is a joke." There were also more youth in the Missouri study site that agreed with the statement, "Teen court is waste of my time" (18 percent).

Overall, it appeared that the youth from the study sites in Alaska and Maryland were the most likely to hold pro-social attitudes prior to their appearance in youth court. More than four in five (82 percent) of the youth in the Alaska site, for example, agreed that "being in teen court makes you a better person," compared to 62 percent in the Missouri site. More than three quarters of Alaska youth (76 percent) agreed with the statement, "The police are usually fair to people like me." Missouri youth were only slightly more likely to agree (54 percent) than to disagree with the same statement.

The responses of the parents largely paralleled those of their children (table 5). For example, parents of teen court youth in Missouri were more likely to agree with the statement, "My child doesn't care much about school" (34 percent). They were less likely to

Table 5. SUMMARY OF PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES – BEFORE COURT

	Percent "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"				
	Alaska	Arizona	Maryland	Missouri	Significance
Pro-Social Attitudes					
My child doesn't care much about school. R	23%	18%	16%	34%	$p < .01$
Getting good grades is important to my child.	77	77	85	71	
My child will probably get in trouble again. R	10	13	9	15	$p < .01$
Going to a good college is important to my child.	78	86	91	61	$p < .01$
The police are usually fair to people like me.	88	85	76	78	$p < .01$
My child thinks it is fun to get into trouble.	8	5	3	5	
Delinquent Peer Associations					
My child's friends get into trouble a lot.	19%	23%	19%	24%	
I think most of my child's friends drink (alcohol).	20	21	20	19	
Most of my child's friends have shoplifted.	23	14	11	16	
Most of my child's friends seem to be honest.	81	85	89	78	$p < .01$
Parent Child Relationship					
I am proud of my child.	78%	86%	91%	61%	$p < .01$
Sometime it's hard for me to talk to my child.	35	37	34	42	
My child won't listen to me anymore.	17	10	6	16	$p < .01$
I have to yell at my child a lot at home.	17	10	10	21	$p < .01$
I usually know where my child is at any time.	93	88	91	83	
View of Teen Court as a Remedy					
Teen court will probably be a waste of our time. R	7%	5%	6%	6%	
Teen court will make my child straighten up.	77	87	79	71	
My child will probably benefit from teen court.	97	99	98	93	$p < .01$
Teen court will go easy on my child.	29	47	38	34	
I don't know much about how teen court works.	64	69	41	66	$p < .01$

R = Reverse coded in later analyses.

Significance = Statistical significance of differences between the four groups, measured with the F statistic.

Note: Tests of statistical significance were calculated using the original variables, in which responses were measured on a four-point scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Source: Urban Institute, 2002, Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

agree with the statement, "Going to college is important to my child" (61 percent), compared with 86 percent of parents in the Arizona site and 91 percent of parents in Maryland.

The parent questionnaire explored attitudes about the teen court process as well. Parents differed less on these items, with a majority of respondents in each site expressing hope and confidence that their children would benefit from their experience in teen court. More than 90 percent of the parents in all four sites, for example, agreed with the statement, "My child will probably benefit from teen court."

Parents and youth completed a second set of questionnaires immediately after their teen court hearings, and these responses revealed remarkably high levels of client satisfaction (tables 6 and 7). Large majorities of youth and parents believed that the teen court process was fair, that youth appearing before the court had ample opportunity to express themselves, and that the volunteers and staff working in teen court treated them with respect and cared about their legal rights. Across all four of the program sites, more than 90 percent of parents said they were happy they had an opportunity to go to teen court rather than going to a traditional juvenile court.

On a number of items in the post-court questionnaire, youth in Missouri reported lower levels of satisfaction and more cynicism about the teen court process. For example, while 93 percent of the youth in Alaska agreed with the statement, "I think I was treated fairly in teen court," just 68 percent of the youth in Missouri agreed with the same statement. Similarly,

Table 6. SUMMARY OF YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES – AFTER COURT

	Percent "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"				
	Alaska	Arizona	Maryland	Missouri	Significance
Perceptions of Teen Court					
I think I was treated fairly by the teen court.	93%	79%	79%	68%	$p < .01$
Teen court people don't know what they're doing. R	4	12	14	19	$p < .01$
The kids working in teen court were o.k.	92	87	82	80	$p < .01$
Teen court was more interesting than I expected.	74	81	77	52	$p < .01$
Teen court people care about my rights.	88	82	83	69	$p < .01$
I was treated about the same as other kids here.	92%	85%	78%	79%	
I was treated worse than the other kids here. R	4	9	22	18	
Teen court made me want to know more about law.	64	63	71	43	$p < .01$
I'm glad I came here rather than a real court.	93	97	92	85	$p < .01$
I didn't get to talk enough in teen court. R	15	20	15	34	$p < .01$
I wish they would've explained teen court better. R	19%	34%	24%	45%	$p < .01$
Kids who work in teen court are mostly geeks. R	17	11	15	32	$p < .01$
The punishment I got was not very tough.	29	42	29	36	
Sense of Personal Responsibility					
Coming to teen court was a waste of time. R	4%	9%	12%	29%	$p < .01$
What I did (my offense) wasn't really that serious. R	30	34	27	49	$p < .01$
Teen court people weren't really interested in me. R	14	20	18	44	$p < .01$
I faked being sorry when I was in teen court. R	6	4	4	17	$p < .01$
I've done a lot of bad things nobody knows about. R	20%	12%	17%	24%	
It was unfair that I had to come to teen court. R	7	8	13	28	$p < .01$
It was my fault that I had to come here.	92	93	93	84	

R = Reverse coded in later analyses.

Significance = Statistical significance of differences between the four groups, measured with the F-statistic.

Note: Tests of statistical significance were calculated using the original variables, in which responses were measured on a four-point scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Source: Urban Institute, 2002. Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

Missouri youth were more likely to agree with the statement, "I didn't get to talk enough in teen court" (34 percent, compared with 15 percent in Alaska and Maryland). One of the largest differences between the sites in the post-court questionnaires was found with the statement, "Teen court people weren't really interested in me." In the Missouri site, 44 percent of the youth agreed or strongly agreed with this item, compared with 14 percent in Alaska, 18 percent in Maryland, and 20 percent in Arizona.

Characteristics Related to Recidivism Among Teen Court Youth

The next important question for the analysis was whether any of the differences among youth in the four study sites were related to their subsequent recidivism. Data from the self-administered questionnaires were used to investigate the range of youth and parent factors that might be associated with recidivism among the teen court youth (table 8). Very few comparisons resulted in differences that reached the level of statistical significance, largely because the small samples of study youth in each site limited the power of statistical tests.

When differences were found, however, they were often in a direction that was consistent with the study's expectations. In general, youth that reported high social bonds and more pro-social attitudes prior to teen court were less likely to re-offend after their appearance in teen court. In one of the comparisons that was statistically significant, for example, 12 percent of Alaska youth reporting low social bonds recidivated within six months of their court appearance, while none of the youth reporting high social bonds recidivated.

Table 7. SUMMARY OF PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES – AFTER COURT

	Percent "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"				
	Alaska	Arizona	Maryland	Missouri	Significance
Pro-Social Attitudes, Perceptions of Teen Court					
Coming to teen court was a waste of my time. R	5%	4%	4%	6%	
Teen court was pretty easy on my child.	35	52	34	42	
I think my child was treated fairly.	92	93	89	89	$p < .01$
Teen court people don't know what they're doing. R	2	4	9	10	$p < .01$
What my child did wasn't really that serious. R	10	14	16	20	
The teen court was not really interested in us. R	4%	6%	9%	18%	$p < .01$
I'm glad we came here and not a real court.	96	96	96	91	$p < .01$
My child did not get enough time to talk in court. R	5	7	7	15	$p < .01$
The kids working in teen court seem o.k.	96	92	96	94	$p < .01$
My child did not seem to take this seriously. R	4	6	1	11	$p < .01$
They explained everything to me before court.	94%	85%	95%	94%	$p < .01$
I wished they would have scared my child more. R	23	32	18	37	
It was unfair to make my child come here. R	4	4	3	8	
No one here really cared about my child's rights. R	4	4	6	4	
I wish I could have talked more in teen court. R	28	20	23	23	
I think the teen court sees my child as a bad kid. R	8%	7%	9%	19%	$p < .01$
Teen court will help my child stay out of trouble.	96	94	91	82	$p < .01$
My child was treated about the same as other kids.	94	87	89	92	
My child will get better grades in school after this.	59	63	58	46	
I am grateful to teen court for trying to help us.	95	96	95	91	$p < .01$

R = Reverse coded in later analyses.

Significance = Statistical significance of differences between the four groups, measured with the F statistic.

Note: Tests of statistical significance were calculated using the original variables, in which responses were measured on a four-point scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Source: Urban Institute, 2002. Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

Table 8. RECIDIVISM OF TEEN COURT YOUTH BY CASE CHARACTERISTICS

	All sites	AK	AZ	MD	MO
Youth Characteristics					
Youth Gender					
Male	9%	7%	7%	12%	10%
Female	7	4	13	4	8
Youth Age					
Under age 15	9%	5%	11%	8%	11%
Age 15 and older	7	7	8	8	7
Offense Leading to Teen Court					
Theft	7%	6%	8%	7%	11%
Other charges	9	8	14	9	9
Attitudes Before Teen Court					
Youth's Pro-Social Attitudes					
Low	13%	11%	17%	10%	14%
High	5	2	4	8	4
Youth's Pro-Social Bonds					
Low	11%	12%	15%	9%	11%
High	5	0	4	8	8
Youth's Delinquent Associations					
Low	7%	2%	6%	10%	10%
High	9	9	15	7	8
Parent's Assessment of Youth's Delinquent Peer Associations					
Low	6%	5%	8%	7%	3%
High	10	6	10	11	13
Parent's Pro-Social Expectations for Youth					
Low	12%	8%	12%	15%	16%
High	4	2	8	5	0
Parent's Expectations of Teen Court as a Remedy					
Low	10%	8%	12%	8%	11%
High	7	6	8	10	3
Attitudes After Teen Court					
Youth's Perceptions of Teen Court					
Low	10%	6%	17%	7%	10%
High	6	7	4	9	3
Youth's Sense of Responsibility					
Low	10%	8%	13%	12%	8%
High	7	5	8	7	8
Parent's Pro-Social Attitudes					
Low	10%	6%	11%	10%	12%
High	6	6	8	7	0

* Highlighted comparisons are statistically significant: Fischer's Exact test ($p < .05$). P-values are not adjusted for multiple comparisons.

Note: Questionnaire items were dichotomized into "Low" and "High" categories using item indices. Subjects were divided on each index at the 50th percentile to determine low and high scores. See Appendix 3 for more information about the construction of item indices.

Source: Urban Institute, 2002, Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The Evaluation of Teen Courts Project employed a quasi-experimental design to measure differences in recidivism between youth handled in teen courts and those handled by the traditional juvenile justice system. Any difference, or lack of difference, should be interpreted with care. Readers should view the results of each analysis in the report as one possible finding drawn from a larger pool of potential findings, much like the results of a single opinion poll should be seen as suggestive, but not definitive, evidence of the public's views about political or social issues.

The findings of the ETC Project suggest that teen courts represent a promising alternative for the juvenile justice system. In Alaska and Missouri, the results indicate that youth referred to teen court were significantly less likely to be re-referred to the juvenile justice system for new offenses within six months of their initial offense. In Arizona, teen court may have been associated with a reduced probability of re-referral, although the difference was not statistically significant. In these three sites, teen court cases were compared with case outcomes for an average group of young, first-time offenders. Many youth in the comparison groups may have had their charges dismissed; some probably received nothing more than a warning letter. Teen court seemed to out-perform the traditional juvenile justice process under these circumstances.

In the fourth site (Maryland), teen court was compared with a more proactive, police diversion program that provided many of the same services and sanctions offered by teen courts. Youth were ordered to pay restitution, perform community service, and write apology letters, just as they would in a teen court. The entire process, however, was managed by police officers and a police department social worker. Young offenders were not required to appear in court. Recidivism in this site was slightly higher among teen court cases, but re-offending rates for both the treatment group and the comparison group were low (under 10 percent), and the difference between them was not statistically significant.

These findings indicate that teen court may be preferable to the normal juvenile justice process in jurisdictions that do not, or cannot, provide meaningful sanctions for all young, first-time juvenile offenders. In jurisdictions that do provide meaningful sanctions and services for these offenders, teen court may perform just as well as a more traditional, adult-run program. Moreover, the fact that teen courts operate with largely volunteer labor and very low budgets suggests that they may be a particularly cost-effective alternative for some juvenile offenders. Of course, these results are from just one evaluation. More research must be conducted to measure the effectiveness of teen courts more precisely.

Are the Youth Judge and Youth Tribunal Models More Effective?

Practitioners and policymakers may want to know why the Alaska and Missouri programs seemed to have good results. One conclusion may be that these two programs were effective because they give youth more responsibility for the actual conduct of teen court hearings. One of the strongest prima facie arguments for the use of teen courts is that they expose young offenders to the pro-social influence of non-delinquent peers. When a young person charged with a minor offense appears before a court of similarly aged peers, it may help to counter the adolescent notion that criminal behavior is "cool" and that "everyone does it." If this theory of teen court effectiveness is accurate, the impact of a youth's experience in teen court should be directly related to the quantity and quality of his or her interactions with pro-social, non-delinquent peers.

The Anchorage Youth Court handles cases using the youth tribunal model. The Independence Youth Court uses the youth judge model. Both of these courtroom models rely heavily on youth volunteers to manage the teen court process, to hear the facts of each case, and to impose the proper sentence on each offender. Young offenders that appear before these courts witness first hand that other young people their own age can be responsible, socially engaged, and respected by the community. In other teen court models, where adults manage the courtrooms and announce the sanctions imposed on offenders, the effect of exposing young delinquents to the influence of pro-social peers may be diluted.

This explanation, however, is only speculative. When the ETC study looked at the recidivism rates of youth handled under the adult judge and peer jury models used by the Arizona and Maryland programs, it did not appear that there was a clear advantage to either one. The peer jury model is more like the youth judge or youth tribunal models in terms of the role played by youth in the hearing process. Thus, cases handled by peer juries might be expected to have better results. In the Arizona program, however, cases handled using the peer jury model seemed to have virtually the same rate of recidivism as those handled

FACTORS THAT MAY INFLUENCE THE FINDINGS

	ETC Finding	Evaluation Design Features That Could Make Teen Courts Look More Effective	Evaluation Design Features That Could Make Teen Courts Look Less Effective
ALASKA	**Significant Difference** — teen court recidivism lower than comparison group	Teen court youth consented to be in the study, and consenting youth may be more pro-social and less delinquent. Comparison group cases were from 1995, near the peak of the national rise in violent crime. Youth from 1995 may have been inherently more crime prone and thus had higher rates of recidivism.	All cases in the ETC study were non-serious, non-violent offenders. Comparing re-referral rates for such cases in 1995 and 2001 could show lower recidivism for the 1995 cases, as police and other juvenile justice agencies could have been occupied with growing numbers of serious juvenile offenders at that time and may have been less likely to formally process non-serious cases.
ARIZONA	**No Significant Difference** — but teen court recidivism lower than comparison group	Teen court youth consented to be in the study, and consenting youth may be more pro-social and less delinquent. Comparison cases were from anywhere in Maricopa County, including Phoenix, a major metropolitan area. Treatment cases were from two smaller municipalities in Maricopa County.	The juvenile court in Maricopa County has a rich assortment of diversion programs. Comparison group cases may have received interventions that were equal in intensity to those the treatment group cases received from teen court.
MARYLAND	**No Significant Difference** — teen court recidivism higher than comparison group	The comparison jurisdiction (Howard County) offers a broad array of police diversion services for juveniles. Police officers there may be more willing to make juvenile arrests involving minor charges because they know their Department has services to offer. The study did not attempt to collect data from the Washington, DC police on contacts they may have had with study youth from Montgomery County, MD, a nearby suburb.	Treatment cases were from Montgomery County, a commuter suburb of Washington, DC. Comparison cases were from Howard County, a suburban area between Washington, DC and Baltimore, Maryland. Recidivism rates in Maryland were very low. It is difficult to detect meaningful differences in small samples on an indicator with a low base rate. Approximately half of the comparison group cases in Howard County, Maryland consented to be in the study so that researchers could interview them face-to-face. These youth may be more similar to the consenting teen court youth.
MISSOURI	**Significant Difference** — teen court recidivism lower than comparison group	Teen court youth consented to be in the study, and consenting youth may be more pro-social and less delinquent. Comparison cases were from anywhere in Jackson County, MO, including Kansas City, a metropolitan area. Treatment cases were more likely to be from Independence, a smaller municipality. Due to the large caseload of Independence Youth Court, the study could not recruit every eligible youth (only 37 percent were asked to participate). Research assistants were trained to approach subjects randomly, but the training could have failed and staff could have subconsciously approached socially attractive subjects first.	Comparison cases were drawn from first-time referrals to family court, and the study did not collect police data to detect whether these youth had previous police contacts. One third of the treatment cases, on the other hand, were known to have had at least one prior police contact.

Source: Urban Institute, 2002, Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

with the adult judge model. In Maryland, the results seemed to favor the adult judge model, if only slightly. Neither finding reached the level of statistical significance, in part because of small sample sizes.

Another factor that might explain the strength of findings in Alaska and Missouri is the authority wielded by the young people working in teen court, at least as that authority is perceived by teen court defendants. The programs in Alaska and Missouri are finders of fact. Teen courts in Arizona and Maryland are not. They have only the power to decide how to sanction defendants, while teen courts in Alaska and Missouri may "acquit" or "adjudicate" youth who appear in court. This additional authority may provide the young attorneys and judges in Anchorage and Independence with a degree of autonomy that young defendants understand. By contrast, from the perspective of the typical teen court defendant, the youth attorneys and peer juries in Arizona and Maryland may appear to play their roles at the behest of the adults who run the courtroom. The independent authority of the teen courts in Anchorage and Independence may enhance the respect defendants have for the court and its process and, thereby, increase the salience of the teen court experience in shaping the subsequent behavior of defendants.

These results only raise more questions about the relative effectiveness of the various courtroom models; they cannot answer them definitively. The strength of the findings in Alaska and Missouri, however, suggest that future research should investigate these issues more closely.

Are Teen Courts More Effective than Other Early Intervention Programs?

All four of the teen courts in the ETC study had relatively low rates of recidivism. The six-month recidivism figures among the sites ranged from 6 percent in Alaska, to 8 percent in Maryland, to 9 percent in Arizona and Missouri. The Maryland rate of 8 percent is especially significant because the definition of recidivism in Maryland was different than in the other three sites – i.e., re-arrest instead of re-referral to juvenile intake – and this would normally be expected to result in a higher rate of recidivism among Maryland cases.

The fact that the recidivism rate in Maryland was comparable to the rates found in Alaska, Arizona, and Missouri may suggest that the Maryland program is just as effective or even more effective than the other sites. Yet, outcomes among youth from the Montgomery County Teen Court were no better than outcomes among youth in the comparison group from Howard County, Maryland. As noted above, the sanctions and services offered by the Howard County Police were similar to those offered by the Montgomery County Teen Court. The primary difference between the two groups of youth may have been the experience of the teen court hearing itself. Thus, one could argue that the evaluation design in Maryland was a more rigorous test of teen court effectiveness because it came closest to isolating the impact of the one feature of teen courts that is unique to teen courts – peer-to-peer justice in a courtroom setting.

What does this suggest about the overall value of teen courts? Could it mean that the primary benefit of teen court programs is their ability to ensure the delivery of early interventions for first-time delinquent offenders, or is there something about teen courts that make them a more effective vehicle with which to deliver services and sanctions for this population? This is an important question for juvenile justice policy, but it cannot be answered by a quasi-experimental study such as the ETC Project. It will require additional studies with more focused, experimental designs.

CONCLUSION

The Evaluation of Teen Courts Project examined the effectiveness of teen courts in achieving reductions in recidivism among adolescents charged with minor law violations. Teen courts vary considerably across the United States. This evaluation was not designed to isolate and compare the relative impact of all varieties of teen courts. Despite their differences, however, the one guiding idea behind all teen courts is the same – if peer pressure can lead young people into delinquency, maybe it can help keep them out of delinquency. The results of the Evaluation of Teen Courts Project suggest that there may be something to this supposition.

Clearly, however, more investigation is necessary to identify just what it is that makes teen courts effective. There are too many unanswered questions. Is it, for example, the quality and quantity of peer-to-peer interaction that makes teen courts work? Is it the fact that teen courts help make it possible for communities to ensure that every juvenile offender is held accountable in some way for his or her first illegal act? Is it the seriousness with which youth volunteers in a teen court approach their work, or the authority they appear to hold in the eyes of young defendants? Future research should focus on these questions.

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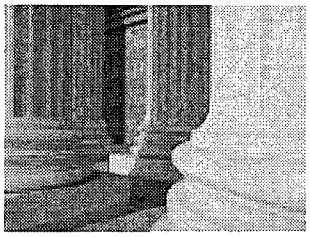

Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Evaluation of Teen Courts Study Sites

Programs	Administrative/ Agency Host	Court Cases per Year	Courtroom Models Used
ALASKA			
Anchorage Youth Court Sharon Leon, Executive Director P.O. Box 102735 Anchorage, AK 99510 (907) 274-5986 ayc@alaska.net	Private agency with close ties to local court	400	All cases handled using youth tribunal model.
ARIZONA			
Teen Courts of the Tempe Justice Court and the Chandler Justice Court c/o Arizona Superior Court in Maricopa County, Juvenile Department Gary Egbert, Coordinator 1810 South Lewis Street Mesa, AZ 85210 (602) 506-2627 garegb@juvenile.maricopa.gov	Local court	300	50% of cases handled using peer jury model 50% handled using adult judge model
MARYLAND			
Montgomery County Teen Court Pam Troia, Coordinator 50 Maryland Avenue Judicial Center -5th Floor Rockville, MD 20850 (240) 777-7388 troiap@co.mo.md.us	Local prosecutor	225	50% of cases handled using peer jury model 50% handled using adult judge model
MISSOURI			
Independence Youth Court Judge Susan Watkins, Executive Director 111 East Maple Independence, MO 64050 (816) 325-7750 youthct@indepmo.org	Private agency with close ties to local court	500	All cases handled using youth judge model

APPENDIX 2.

Youth Included in the ETC Study, Compared with Youth from Same Program but Not Included in the ETC Study

	ALASKA		ARIZONA		MARYLAND		MISSOURI	
	ETC	Not ETC	ETC	Not ETC	ETC	Not ETC	ETC	Not ETC
	n=120	n=179	n=115	n=34	n=154	n=119	n=139	n=181
Sex								
Male	59%	67%	65%	65%	57%	49%	60%	64%
Female	41	34	35	35	43	51	40	36
Age								
Under 13	3%	8%	10%	6%	2%	2%	14%	18%
Age 13-14	31	32	39	35	31	25	34	28
Age 15	30	23	21	24	22	24	29	22
Age 16	23	25	22	21	22	25	23	29
Age 17	13	12	8	15	23	24	--	2
Race								
White	69%	65%	64%	65%	65%	69%	91%	82%
Other	31	35	36	35	36	31	9	18
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Urban Institute. 2002. Evaluation of Teen Courts Project.

Note: Non-ETC youth are representative samples of youth handled by the teen courts during the ETC recruitment period, but not included in the ETC study for various reasons, including those who were ineligible (too young, not with parents, etc.), those who were not approached due to high caseloads, or those who refused consent.

APPENDIX 3.

Creation of Factors from Individual Items in ETC Self-Administered Questionnaires

The ETC Project collected data about respondent attitudes and opinions using five self-administered questionnaires (SAQs) that included 124 measures. The three questionnaires administered to the youth included 84 attitudinal measures. Of these measures, 32 were included on the Time 1 questionnaire (just before their court hearing). The same 32 questions were included, in a different order, on the Time 3 questionnaire (post-sanctions, usually about 30 to 60 days after court). Twenty different questions were asked of the youth at Time 2 (immediately after their teen court hearings).

Forty measures of parental attitudes were also collected. These were evenly divided between the Time 1 and Time 2 questionnaires. The Time 1 parent questionnaires and Time 1 youth questionnaires were administered simultaneously to each youth-parent dyad. Likewise, the Time 2 parent and youth questionnaires were administered simultaneously. Parents and their adolescent children were encouraged to complete their questionnaires separately, seal them in an envelope provided by the ETC Project, and place them in a voter-style box.

Each attitudinal measure was scored on scale ranging from 1 to 4 where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

To simplify the task of analyzing the 124 items, they were subjected to exploratory factor analysis. All of the attitudinal measures from each of the questionnaires were factor analyzed independently of the attitudinal measures on the other four questionnaires. That is, the five questionnaires required five factor analyses. Squared multiple correlations were estimated as prior communality estimates. Factors were initially extracted using the principal axis method. Factors were retained if they explained more than 10 percent of the total variance of the included items. The retained factors were rotated by the promax (oblique) method to allow nonzero correlations between the latent factors. An item was said to have loaded on a factor if its factor loading from the factor pattern matrix was greater than .40 and its factor loading on the other retained factor(s) was less than .40.

In each of the tables included with this appendix, the items that loaded on Factor 1 are listed first, followed by those that loaded on Factor 2, and so on. Items that did not load on any factor are displayed last. The column on the far left displays the descriptive name assigned to each factor. The factor loadings are taken from the factor pattern matrix. The loadings may be interpreted as the standardized regression coefficients that would be estimated if it were possible to regress the latent factors on each of the items. The loadings express the strength of association between the retained factors and the items controlling for the other retained factors. By contrast, the coefficients from the factor structure matrix are comparable to bivariate correlation coefficients between the latent factors and the items. They express the strength of association between the factors and the items without controlling for the other retained factors. The communality estimates express the proportion of the variance on the questionnaire items accounted for by the all of the retained factors combined.

The first table in the appendix (YQ1) shows that 11 of the items from the questionnaires administered to youth at Time 1 loaded on Factor 1, six items loaded on Factor 2, and five items loaded on Factor 3. The remaining nine items did not load on any of the three retained factors. Factor 1 was named "pro-social attitudes," Factor 2 was labeled a measure of "pro-social bonds" with parents and teachers, and Factor 3 was labeled "delinquent peer association." Similar interpretive labels were applied to the factors that emerged from analyzing the data from all of the questionnaires.

Exceptional Circumstances

Procedures deviated somewhat from conventional exploratory factor analysis when analyzing the items from the questionnaire administered to parents at Time 1. Three of the items on the PQ1 questionnaire seemed to measure bonds between parent and child. When the items were included in the factor analysis with the other 17 items from the questionnaire, these three measures of the parent-child bond loaded on two different factors. Consequently, those two factors were considered un-interpretable; the mix of items that loaded on them made it impossible for us to attribute a single descriptive label for the factors. Rather than discard both factors and the variables that loaded on them, the three troublesome measures of the parent-child bond were excluded.

Two factors were retained by the proportion of variance criterion from the items on the questionnaire administered to parents at Time 2 (PQ2). Only one item loaded on the second factor, however, so that factor was disregarded even though it was retained for purposes of preparing the estimates.

Factor-Based Scores

Factor solutions for the five questionnaires were used to compute factor-based scores. For each respondent and each factor, the factor-based score was equal to the mean of the respondent's answers to the items that loaded on the factor. By this procedure, each item that loaded on a factor was given equal weight in the computation of the factor-based score. Respondents who had not made a valid response to one or more of the items that loaded on a factor were assigned a missing value on that factor-based score. The 124 items from the five questionnaires yielded 12 interpretable factors and an equal number of factor scores were computed.

Reliability

Cronbach alpha coefficients were computed for the items comprising each factor-based score to assess the inter-item reliability of the scores. The alpha coefficient may be interpreted as a measure of the correlation between the items comprising a factor-based scale. Higher values of alpha (i.e., those approaching unity, or 1.0) indicate greater internal consistency for the factor-based score. The alpha coefficients for the 12 factor-based scores for the entire sample (i.e., all four sites) indicated acceptable reliabilities. Alpha was estimated separately by site for each of the 12 factor-based scores to examine whether the reliability of the scores was acceptably high for each site. The lowest of the 48 alpha coefficients (.46) was that for the score measuring parental expectations that teen court would serve as a delinquency remedy in the Maryland site. All other alpha coefficients exceeded .50.

Validity

The final step in the data-reduction procedure was to examine whether the pattern of correlation among the factor-bases scores themselves met expectations. Zero-order correlation coefficients were computed for each bivariate combination of the 12 factor-based scores. Listwise deletion excluded any respondent who had a missing value on one or more of the 12 factor-based scores from the computation of the correlation coefficients. Consequently, the correlation coefficients were based on data from only 149 respondents. In general, the strength and direction of the correlations were consonant with expectations. The pro-social attitudes and bonds of youth at Time 1 were positively correlated with their pro-social attitudes and bonds at Time 3. Delinquent peer association was negatively correlated with pro-social attitudes and bonds.

YQ1 — Youth Responses at Time 1, Pre-Court: Questionnaire Items and Factor Loadings

Factor Name	Questionnaire Item	Loadings from Rotated Factor. . . Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 1	Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 2	Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 3	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 1	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 2	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 3	Communality[c] (h^2)
Factor 1: Pro-Social Attitudes	Most police officers try to do a good job	0.46	0.17	0.04	0.52	0.36	-0.19	0.30
	I will probably be arrested again someday*	0.57	0.01	-0.07	0.60	0.28	-0.29	0.36
	My friends think teen court is a joke*	0.45	-0.14	-0.33	0.51	0.17	-0.45	0.36
	Getting into a good college is important to me	0.44	0.21	0.12	0.48	0.35	-0.11	0.27
	Teen court is a waste of my time*	0.62	-0.03	-0.08	0.64	0.27	-0.31	0.42
	Teen court makes you think about your future	0.58	0.12	0.09	0.60	0.35	-0.17	0.37
	It's worth getting into trouble to have fun*	0.42	-0.10	-0.24	0.46	0.16	-0.36	0.26
	You can learn a lot about the law in teen court	0.60	-0.08	0.02	0.55	0.17	-0.18	0.31
	I think I will have a good job someday	0.41	0.26	0.24	0.44	0.36	0.00	0.27
	Being in teen court makes you a better person	0.56	-0.05	-0.04	0.56	0.21	-0.24	0.31
	I wish I had gone to regular court, not teen court*	0.54	-0.13	0.09	0.45	0.07	-0.06	0.22
	I will never get into serious trouble again	0.55	0.00	-0.10	0.59	0.28	-0.31	0.35
Factor 2: Pro-Social Bonds	I can talk to my parents about almost anything	-0.03	0.57	-0.05	0.24	0.58	-0.23	0.34
	My teachers are proud of me	0.28	0.48	0.08	0.46	0.57	-0.19	0.38
	My parents are proud of me	0.02	0.71	0.12	0.29	0.68	-0.14	0.48
	My parents take the time to really listen to me	-0.15	0.80	-0.05	0.21	0.75	-0.27	0.58
	We fight a lot in my family*	-0.08	0.57	-0.17	0.24	0.60	-0.34	0.38
	My parents usually don't care what I think*	0.06	0.48	-0.19	0.34	0.57	-0.38	0.37
Factor 3: Delinquent Peers	Most of my friends drink (alcohol)	-0.11	-0.04	0.62	-0.35	-0.30	0.67	0.46
	My friends get into trouble more than I do	0.02	0.12	0.52	-0.12	-0.05	0.47	0.24
	Most kids shoplift from stores at least once	0.14	-0.15	0.53	-0.13	-0.28	0.53	0.30
	Most of my friends steal at least a little	0.07	-0.06	0.68	-0.21	-0.27	0.68	0.46
	Most of my friends have smoked marijuana	-0.06	-0.07	0.69	-0.35	-0.33	0.73	0.55
No sig. loading	Getting good grades in school is important to me	0.39	0.34	0.17	0.48	0.45	-0.09	0.32
	Going through teen court is easy	-0.08	0.16	0.12	-0.05	0.09	0.09	0.03
	The police are usually fair to people like me	0.40	0.14	-0.09	0.49	0.34	-0.28	0.27
	Most of my friends are honest	0.09	0.31	-0.23	0.31	0.43	-0.37	0.24
	My parents always know where I am	0.17	0.22	-0.25	0.36	0.39	-0.39	0.25
	My behavior is no worse than other kids my age	0.04	0.04	0.25	-0.04	-0.03	0.22	0.05
	The police in my town do not like kids my age	-0.32	-0.06	0.27	-0.45	-0.30	0.41	0.27
	I've done a lot of bad things no one knows about	-0.25	-0.18	0.32	-0.45	-0.40	0.48	0.34
	Teen courts are too hard on kids	-0.31	0.07	0.09	-0.32	-0.10	0.19	0.11

[a] Equivalent to standardized regression coefficients from regressing the latent factors on the questionnaire item.
[b] Equivalent to zero-order correlation coefficients between the latent factor and the questionnaire item.
[c] Proportion of the variance on the questionnaire item accounted for by the retained factor(s).
* Reverse-coded items.

Note: All questionnaire items were scaled as follows: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree.
Source: Evaluation of Teen Courts, The Urban Institute, 2002

YQ2 — Youth Responses at Time 2, Post-Court: Questionnaire Items and Factor Loadings

Factor Name	Questionnaire Item	Loadings from Rotated Factor... Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 1	Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 2	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 1	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 2	Communality[c] (h^2)
Factor 1: Positive Perceptions of Teen Court	I think I was treated fairly by the teen court	0.71	0.11	0.78	0.57	0.61
	Teen court people don't know what they're doing*	0.43	0.37	0.67	0.65	0.53
	The kids working in teen court were ok	0.78	-0.17	0.67	0.35	0.47
	Teen court was more interesting than I expected	0.59	0.13	0.67	0.52	0.46
	Teen court people care about my rights	0.65	0.12	0.73	0.55	0.55
	I was treated about the same as other kids here	0.71	-0.02	0.69	0.44	0.48
	I was treated worse than the other kids here*	0.62	0.13	0.70	0.54	0.51
	Teen court made me what to know more about law	0.41	0.25	0.58	0.52	0.37
Factor 2: Sense of Responsibility	Coming to teen court was a waste of time*	0.32	0.51	0.66	0.72	0.58
	What I did wasn't really that serious*	-0.04	0.64	0.38	0.61	0.37
	Teen court people were not really interested in me*	0.25	0.44	0.54	0.61	0.40
	I faked being sorry when I was in teen court*	-0.15	0.80	0.37	0.70	0.51
	I've done a lot of bad things that nobody knows about*	-0.09	0.52	0.25	0.46	0.22
	It was unfair that I had to come to teen court*	0.22	0.57	0.59	0.72	0.54
	It was my fault that I had to come here	-0.09	0.55	0.27	0.49	0.24
No sig. loading	The punishment I got was not very tough	0.30	-0.22	0.16	-0.02	0.05
	I'm glad I came here rather than a real court	0.34	0.23	0.50	0.46	0.28
	I didn't get to talk enough in teen court	-0.19	-0.37	-0.44	-0.50	0.27
	I wish they would have explained teen court better	-0.28	-0.22	-0.43	-0.41	0.21
	Kids who work in teen court are mostly geeks	-0.39	-0.26	-0.57	-0.52	0.36

[a] Equivalent to standardized regression coefficients from regressing the latent factors on the questionnaire item.
[b] Equivalent to zero-order correlation coefficients between the latent factor and the questionnaire item.
[c] Proportion of the variance on the questionnaire item accounted for by the retained factor(s).
* Reverse-coded items.

Note: All questionnaire items were scaled as follows: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree.

Source: The Urban Institute. 2002. Evaluation of Teen Courts.

YQ3 — Youth Responses at Time 3, Post-Sanctions: Questionnaire Items and Factor Loadings

Factor Name	Questionnaire Item	Loadings from Rotated Factor. . . Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 1	Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 2	Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 3	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 1	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 2	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 3	Communality[c] (h^2)
Factor 1: Pro-Social Attitudes	Teen court is a waste of my time*	0.67	-0.03	-0.06	0.68	0.34	-0.31	0.46
	My friends think teen court is a joke*	0.52	-0.03	-0.29	0.62	0.34	-0.49	0.46
	Most police officers try to do a good job	0.65	0.08	-0.04	0.71	0.43	-0.32	0.51
	Teen court makes you think about your future	0.66	0.03	0.11	0.63	0.34	-0.15	0.41
	The police are usually fair to people like me	0.53	0.01	-0.12	0.59	0.33	-0.33	0.36
	I wish I had gone to regular court, not teen court*	0.43	0.13	0.14	0.45	0.31	-0.07	0.22
	Teen courts are too hard on kids*	0.54	-0.01	-0.09	0.57	0.31	-0.29	0.33
	Being in teen court makes you a better person	0.70	0.05	0.09	0.70	0.39	-0.20	0.49
	You can learn a lot about the law in teen court	0.74	-0.06	0.20	0.62	0.26	-0.06	0.43
	The police in my town do not like kids my age*	0.55	-0.06	-0.21	0.60	0.30	-0.40	0.39
Factor 2: Pro-Social Bonds	Getting good grades in school is important to me	0.13	0.54	0.02	0.41	0.60	-0.21	0.38
	My teachers are proud of me	0.23	0.43	-0.01	0.46	0.56	-0.25	0.35
	My parents are proud of me	0.02	0.68	0.02	0.37	0.69	-0.22	0.47
	Getting into a good college is important to me	0.13	0.59	0.14	0.39	0.61	-0.11	0.40
	I will probably be arrested again someday*	0.17	0.55	-0.03	0.47	0.65	-0.28	0.44
	I can talk to my parents about almost anything	-0.09	0.69	0.01	0.27	0.64	-0.19	0.42
	My parents take the time to really listen to me	-0.02	0.71	0.00	0.35	0.70	-0.23	0.49
	My parents always know where I am	-0.09	0.54	-0.23	0.28	0.57	-0.38	0.37
	I think I will have a good job someday	-0.07	0.63	0.17	0.19	0.54	-0.02	0.32
	My parents usually don't care what I think*	0.13	0.53	-0.03	0.42	0.61	-0.26	0.38
Factor 3: Delinquent Peers	Most of my friends drink (alcohol)	0.01	-0.01	0.74	-0.28	-0.26	0.74	0.55
	My friends get into trouble more than I do	0.12	0.14	0.55	-0.02	0.02	0.46	0.26
	Most kids shoplift from stores at least once	0.02	0.09	0.55	-0.14	-0.09	0.52	0.27
	Most of my friends have smoked marijuana	0.00	-0.14	0.68	-0.34	-0.37	0.73	0.55
	Most of my friends steal at least a little	-0.13	0.03	0.63	-0.36	-0.25	0.66	0.45
No sig. loading	Going through teen court is easy	0.04	-0.02	0.13	-0.02	-0.04	0.12	0.02
	It's worth getting into a little trouble to have fun	-0.27	-0.20	0.22	-0.46	-0.42	0.39	0.29
	Most of my friends are honest	0.02	0.20	-0.31	0.25	0.32	-0.39	0.19
	We fight a lot in my family	0.11	-0.39	0.31	-0.21	-0.43	0.40	0.27
	I will never get into serious trouble again	0.37	0.31	-0.02	0.54	0.51	-0.27	0.37
	I've done a lot of bad things no one knows about	-0.11	-0.29	0.32	-0.38	-0.46	0.46	0.32
	My behavior is no worse than other kids my age	-0.07	0.06	0.31	-0.16	-0.08	0.32	0.10

[a] Equivalent to standardized regression coefficients from regressing the latent factors on the questionnaire item.
[b] Equivalent to zero-order correlation coefficients between the latent factor and the questionnaire item.
[c] Proportion of the variance on the questionnaire item accounted for by the retained factor(s).
* Reverse-coded items.

Note: All questionnaire items were scaled as follows: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree.
Source: Evaluation of Teen Courts, The Urban Institute, 2002

PQ1 — Parent Responses at Time 1, Pre-Court: Questionnaire Items and Factor Loadings

Factor Name	Questionnaire Item	Loadings from Rotated Factor. . . Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 1	Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 2	Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 3	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 1	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 2	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 3	Communality[c] (h^2)
Factor 1: Delinquent Peers	My child's friends get into trouble a lot	0.68	-0.06	0.07	0.67	-0.40	-0.29	0.46
	I think most of my child's friends drink (alcohol)	0.57	-0.03	0.04	0.57	-0.33	-0.26	0.33
	Most of my child's friends have shoplifted	0.63	0.06	-0.05	0.62	-0.32	-0.33	0.39
	Most of my child's friends seem to be honest	0.60	-0.06	-0.02	0.64	-0.40	-0.35	0.42
Factor 2: Pro-Social Attitudes	My child doesn't care much about school*	-0.06	0.62	0.00	-0.41	0.65	0.37	0.43
	Getting good grades is important to my child	0.00	0.76	-0.09	-0.37	0.70	0.32	0.50
	My child will probably get in trouble again*	-0.10	0.44	0.16	-0.42	0.58	0.45	0.37
	Going to a good college is important to my child	-0.03	0.63	0.06	-0.42	0.69	0.43	0.48
Factor 3: TC Remedy	Teen court will probably be a waste of our time*	0.17	0.18	0.42	-0.13	0.31	0.43	0.21
	Teen court will make my child straighten up	-0.12	-0.01	0.54	-0.39	0.36	0.60	0.37
	My child will probably benefit from teen court	-0.16	-0.05	0.61	-0.43	0.38	0.66	0.45
No sig. loading	I am proud of my child	-0.23	0.29	-0.03	-0.38	0.40	0.24	0.20
	Teen court will go easy on my child	-0.04	0.17	-0.19	-0.03	0.08	-0.08	0.03
	Sometimes it's hard for me to talk to my child	0.13	-0.33	0.09	0.27	-0.35	-0.15	0.14
	I don't know much about how teen court works	-0.01	-0.24	0.17	0.05	-0.15	0.03	0.04
	My child thinks it's fun to get into trouble	0.36	-0.33	0.02	0.54	-0.53	-0.34	0.36
	The police are usually fair to people like me	0.02	-0.10	0.25	-0.05	0.03	0.18	0.04
	My child won't listen to me any more	These items were excluded from the factor analysis. Including them made the factors uninterpretable.						
	I have to yell at my child a lot at home							
	I usually know where my child is at any time							

[a] Equivalent to standardized regression coefficients from regressing the latent factors on the questionnaire item.
[b] Equivalent to zero-order correlation coefficients between the latent factor and the questionnaire item.
[c] Proportion of the variance on the questionnaire item accounted for by the retained factor(s).
* Reverse-coded items.

Note: All questionnaire items were scaled as follows: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree.

Source: Evaluation of Teen Courts, The Urban Institute, 2002

PQ2 — Parent Responses at Time 2, Post-Court: Questionnaire Items and Factor Loadings

Factor Name	Questionnaire Item	Loadings from Rotated Factor. . . Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 1	Pattern Matrix[a] Factor 2	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 1	Structure Matrix[b] Factor 2	Communality[c] (h^2)
Factor 1: Pro-Social Attitudes	Coming to teen court court was a waste of my time*	0.62	-0.08	0.59	0.17	0.36
	I think my child was treated fairly	0.49	0.31	0.61	0.50	0.46
	Teen court people don't know what they're doing*	0.69	-0.13	0.63	0.13	0.42
	What my child did wasn't really that serious*	0.50	-0.14	0.44	0.05	0.21
	The teen court was not really interested in us*	0.73	-0.17	0.66	0.12	0.46
	I'm glad we came here and not a real court	0.49	0.08	0.52	0.27	0.28
	My child did not get enough time to talk in court*	0.67	-0.06	0.65	0.20	0.43
	The kids working in teen court seem ok	0.41	0.23	0.50	0.39	0.29
	My child did not seem to take this seriously*	0.55	-0.30	0.44	-0.08	0.27
	They explained everything to me before court	0.58	0.02	0.59	0.25	0.35
	It was unfair to make my child come here*	0.66	-0.04	0.65	0.22	0.42
	No one here really cared about my child's rights*	0.70	0.05	0.72	0.33	0.52
	I wish I could have talked more in teen court*	0.46	0.03	0.47	0.21	0.23
	I think the teen court sees my child as a bad kid*	0.59	0.11	0.63	0.34	0.41
	Teen court will help my child stay out of trouble	0.43	0.32	0.55	0.49	0.39
	I am grateful to teen court for trying to help us	0.46	0.31	0.58	0.49	0.42
	Teen court was pretty easy on my child	-0.15	0.44	0.03	0.38	0.16
No sig. loading	I wished they would have scared my child more	-0.21	0.35	-0.07	0.27	0.11
	My child was treated about the same as other kids	0.39	0.39	0.54	0.54	0.42
	My child will get better grades in school after this	0.20	0.30	0.32	0.38	0.18

[a] Equivalent to standardized regression coefficients from regressing the latent factors on the questionnaire item.
[b] Equivalent to zero-order correlation coefficients between the latent factor and the questionnaire item.
[c] Proportion of the variance on the questionnaire item accounted for by the retained factor(s).
* Reverse-coded items.

Note: All questionnaire items were scaled as follows: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree.
Source: The Urban Institute. 2002. Evaluation of Teen Courts.

CORRELATIONS — Zero-Order Correlations and Cronbach Alpha Estimates for Factor-Based Scales from Self-Administered Questionnaires

	Zero-Order Correlations[a]												Valid	Cronbach
Variable	yq1PSAtt	yq1PSBnd	yq1DPeer	yq2PosTC	yq2PSAtt	yq3PSAtt	yq3PSBnd	yq3DPeer	pq1DPeer	pq1PSExp	pq1TCRem	pq2PSPrt	N	Alpha
yq1PSAtt	1.000												450	0.829
yq1PSBnd	0.540 ***	1.000											497	0.787
yq1DPeer	-0.403 ***	-0.433 ***	1.000										498	0.752
yq2PosTC	0.494 ***	0.269 ***	-0.293 ***	1.000									455	0.877
yq2SResp	0.756 ***	0.396 ***	-0.391 ***	0.714 ***	1.000								465	0.804
yq3PSAtt	0.596 ***	0.454 ***	-0.342 ***	0.609 ***	0.669 ***	1.000							261	0.853
yq3PSBnd	0.541 ***	0.658 ***	-0.294 ***	0.339 ***	0.492 ***	0.571 ***	1.000						267	0.852
yq3DPeer	-0.288 ***	-0.420 ***	0.748 ***	-0.301 ***	-0.305 ***	-0.341 ***	-0.289 ***	1.000					275	0.762
pq1DPeer	-0.260 **	-0.342 ***	0.443 ***	-0.183 *	-0.230 **	-0.181 *	-0.272 ***	0.446 ***	1.000				471	0.724
pq1PSExp	0.401 ***	0.344 ***	-0.302 ***	0.150	0.325 ***	0.189 *	0.390 ***	-0.281 ***	-0.561 ***	1.000			491	0.768
pq1TCRem	0.341 ***	0.118	-0.136	0.219 **	0.380 ***	0.371 ***	0.182 *	-0.212 **	-0.373 ***	0.335 ***	1.000		472	0.640
pq2PSPrt	0.264 **	0.116	-0.027	0.331 ***	0.368 ***	0.331 ***	0.095	-0.066	-0.227 **	0.126	0.580 ***	1.000	404	0.888

*** $p<.001$
** $p<.01$
* $p<.05$
[a] Pearson correlation coefficients were computed after listwise deletion. $N=149$

yq1PSAtt YQ1:Pro-Social Attitudes
yq1PSBnd YQ1:Pro-Social Bonds with Parents, Teachers
yq1DPeer YQ1:Delinquent Peer Association
yq2PosTC YQ2:Positive Perception of Teen Court
yq2SResp YQ2:Sense of Responsibility
yq3PSAtt YQ3:Pro-Social Attitudes
yq3PSBnd YQ3:Pro-Social Bonds with Parents, Teachers
yq3DPeer YQ3:Delinquent Peer Association
pq1DPeer PQ1:Youth's Delinquent Peer Association
pq1PSExp PQ1:Pro-Social Expectations of Youth
pq1TCRem PQ1:Expectations of TC as a Delinquency Remedy
pq2PSPrt PQ2:Pro-Social Attitudes of Parent
Source: Evaluation of Teen Courts, The Urban Institute, 2002

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