

**United Youth Courts of Alaska**

**Fact Summary**

*Youth Courts in Alaska…*

1. Handle an average of **1,000** cases per year.
2. Produce an average **reoffense rate of 10.6%**, compared to 23% under the regular court system.
3. **Save** the State of Alaska an estimated **$10,686 per defendant**.
4. **Generate** **$98,930** worth of Community Work Service work product every single year – at no cost to our communities or the State.
5. **Reduce crime rates by 11.1%** overall.
6. Offer a wide range of **classes and mediation services** to offenders.
7. Provide real-world career and criminal justice **training to 2,300 Alaskan youth** volunteers each year.

*Did you know?*

1. Alaska has already entrusted youth courts with the most comprehensive legislation in the nation (AS 47.12.400, AS 4.16.050).
2. There are 12 youth courts in Alaska: Anchorage, Bethel, Juneau, Kenai, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Mat-Su, Nome, North Star/Fairbanks, Sitka, Valdez, and Wrangell.
3. Nationally, there are 1200 youth courts in 49 states and Washington, D.C.



**United Youth Courts of Alaska**

**Fact Detail**

**1. 1,000 Cases Per Year**

Based on FY2007-2009 statistics, 12 youth courts in Alaska hear over 1,000 criminal cases each year, around 65% referred by Juvenile Probation and 35% by District Court. Additionally, other agencies such as schools send referrals to youth court, but they have not been tracked before FY10. While programs throughout the state differ slightly, all of the youth courts in Alaska hear first time or non-habitual juvenile offenders for misdemeanors, violations, and infractions per State and Municipal laws.

**2. 10.6% Reoffense Rate**

Based on the national Urban Institute study titled “The Impact of Teen Court on Young Offenders" by Jeffrey A. Butts, Janeen Buck, and Mark B. Coggeshall, the short-term (6 month) reoffense rate for juvenile offenders in the traditional court system is 23%.

For the 65% of cases referred by DJJ, youth courts in our state have an average reoffense rate of 10.6%, meaning that **89.4% of juvenile offenders served by youth court do not commit further crimes within six months.** Some youth courts track reoffense for District Court and other agency referrals as well, but there is no statewide average for this.

Additionally, youth courts in Alaska have a lower reoffense rate compared to those in other states, which may be due to our unique court structure that allows teens to be judged—literally—by their peers, not by adults. According to the study done by the Urban Institute, there are seven principles that make youth court effective:

1. “Peer justice,
2. Procedural justice,
3. Deterrence,
4. Labeling
5. Restorative justice and repentance,
6. Law-related education, and
7. Skill building.”

**3. Savings Per Defendant**

In the report, “Criminal Justice Economics” by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, October 2009, Teen Courts were identified as an “effective program.” Youth Courts **save the state $11,683 per defendant** based on the cost of crime on victims and taxpayers. The average **cost of teen courts per defendant was $997, for a net benefit/savings of $10,686 per offender.**

**4. Volunteer Work Product**

Statewide, youth courts sentence Community Work Service as part of sanctions to repair the harm for the crime that has been committed. The type of work done for CWS might be cleaning up litter and debris on roadways or public parks, helping at soup kitchens, repairing damages caused by the crime, working at animal shelters, or helping elders in nursing homes. Based on statistics from the Division of Juvenile Justice, juvenile offenders successfully completed 19,786 hours of CWS in FY2009. The State of Alaska values CWS at $5.00 per hour, which means that the value of **CWS completed through youth court last year was $98,930 at no cost to our communities or the State**.

The work products of other sanctions are not taken into consideration for these figures, but are also valuable contributions to the health of the community. Examples of other sanctions include: restitution to victims, essays, behavior modification classes, apology letters, alcohol or drug classes and counseling, and mediation programs (see “6. Classes and Mediation Services”).

**5. Reducing Crime Rates**

In 2006, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy completed an exhaustive study of many adult and juvenile prevention and intervention programs. In the report, youth courts were identified as an effective program. Citing five evidence-based studies, the Institute found that **youth courts reduce crime rates by 11.1%.** This reduction in crime rates contributes to overall taxpayer savings (see “3. Savings Per Defendant”).

Youth courts have been proven to reduce crime and reduce reoffense, and they do it by linking the crime to swift, efficient consequences and offering **“a continuum of community-based services”** to address the issues underlying the crime (DJJ Annual Report, FY2004).

By providing diversion services for District and Superior Court Judges as well as Juvenile Probation Officers, youth courts allow these officials to focus on the more serious offenses or repeat offenders. Because of this and other reasons, judges, clerks, attorneys and Juvenile Probation staff across the state show their support for youth court by instructing classes, volunteering time, serving on Boards of Directors, and offering legal advice on cases.

While youth court programs benefit the juvenile justice system and juvenile offenders, it is important to note youth courts contribute to the social and economic well-being of our communities.

**6. Classes and Mediation Services**

The 3 main principles of **Restorative Justice** are **Accountability, Community Protection, and Competency Development**—principles which have long been used in the field of juvenile justice to address the root causes of juvenile crime. Across the state, youth courts offer evidence-based and creative ways for offenders to educate themselves and end the cycle of crime. The following youth courts directly provide these classes and mediation services; other youth courts utilize a network of community-based services.

* North Star Youth Court, located in Fairbanks, offers a comprehensive and year-round **Mediation Program**; the three types of mediation offered are victim-offender, parent-teen, and peer-to-peer. Mediation is based on the philosophy of Restorative Justice, the purposes of which are to put key decisions into the hands of those most affected by crime, to reduce the likelihood of further offenses and to provide closure for all parties and a strengthened community. North Star Youth Court also offers an **Alcohol Awareness Class**, as well as a **Parent Information Class on MCAs**.
* Mat-Su Youth Court offers a **Juvenile Anti-Shoplifting class** as part of sanctions for offenses involving theft and concealment of merchandise. MSYC also provides a peer-led **Minor Consuming/Risk Factors class** for youth defendants charged with alcohol and drug crimes. The class covers risk factors youth face every day that influence their future behavior.
* Ketchikan Youth Court provides a certified **PRIME for Life® alcohol and drug prevention/intervention class** for offenses involving alcohol or controlled substances. KYC also offers a **Money Education Class** for offenses involving theft, concealment of merchandise, or destruction of property; the goal is to provide an overview of community economics and discuss how each person’s actions (spending, saving, stealing, etc.) affect other people financially.
* Anchorage Youth Court utilizes a variety of classes to address different issues within their client community. AYC classes include: **Anti-Theft Class, Thinking Patterns, Victim Impact, Drug & Alcohol Assessment and Follow-up, Fire Stoppers, and Weapon Safety.**
* Sitka Youth Court offers classes on **Victim Impact** and **Anti-Theft**.
* Nome Youth Court, in partnership with the court system, offers a certified **PRIME for Life® alcohol and drug prevention/intervention class.**

**7. Training 2,300 Alaskan Youth Annually**

Youth volunteers who are directly involved in the youth court process receive a minimum of 10 hours of legal training before they can begin working on cases. Throughout the time they volunteer for youth court, volunteers are required to attend workshops, CLEs (continuing legal education), and other trainings to enhance their skills. Most youth courts have a Bar Association that helps to facilitate these trainings and enforce court policies.

Some courts also require juvenile offenders to take these trainings, so that they can better understand the process of justice and perhaps become a part of youth court. Those individuals who start out as offenders are often the most effective and compassionate judges, jurors, and attorneys.

**8. Youth Court Legislation in Alaska**

Alaska was identified in another recent national study as the one state with the most comprehensive Youth Court legislation, in that our statute **AS 47.12.400** specifically entrusts Youth Courts with adjudicatory as well as dispositional authority. (See “The Organization and Operation of Teen Courts in the United States, A Comparative Analysis of Legislation”, Michele Heward, JD, Juvenile and Family Court Journal, Winter 2002.) The legislature has also entrusted Youth Courts with the authority to handle first time minor consuming alcohol violations under **AS 4.16.050**.

In 2003 and again in 2005, youth courts from around the state mobilized to introduce a bill into the state legislature. The Alaska State Legislature considered **HB 303**, a bill to secure sustainable funding for youth courts for the first time: "An Act relating to youth courts and to the recommended use of criminal fines to fund the activities of youth courts; and relating to accounting for criminal fines." HB 303 passed through the House Judiciary Committee, and every member of that committee added their name as co-sponsors. HB 303 made it to the House Finance Committee, but the session ended before it could be heard. During the 24th Legislative Session, **HB 155, the second “Youth Court Bill”**, was approved through several committees and passed the Alaska House of Representatives in March 2005. The Senate version of that bill was handed over to the Finance Committee but never came up for a hearing.

**9. Youth Courts in Alaska**

There are 12 community-based youth courts in Alaska: **Anchorage, Bethel, Juneau, Kenai, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Mat-Su, Nome, North Star/Fairbanks, Sitka, Valdez, and Wrangell**. Many of these courts have been in operation over 10 years; Anchorage has the longest-standing youth court in the state, having been incorporated in 1989.

Communities throughout Alaska who hear about the benefits of youth court continually express interest in beginning their own, and it is a goal of UYCA to facilitate emerging youth courts through mentoring and providing technical assistance.

United Youth Courts of Alaska is a statewide organization which seeks to work in partnership with Alaskan communities and the formal juvenile justice system to develop and sustain innovative youth courts. All of the above named courts are members of UYCA, and use it as a platform to network and support each other’s programs through conferences and technical assistance. For more information on UYCA and its members, visit [www.alaskayouthcourt.org](http://www.alaskayouthcourt.org).

**10. Youth Courts in the United States**

There is only one state, Connecticut, that does not have youth courts due to their juvenile justice system. In 2006 more than 120,000 youths volunteered to hear more than 130,000 cases, and more than 20,000 adults volunteered to facilitate peer justice in youth court programs.

The National Association of Youth Courts (NAYC) was started with support from four federal agencies: Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Education and the Corporation for National and Community Service, and the National Highway & Traffic Safety Administration.  This effort was started in 2003 when OJJDP recognized the huge movement of youth court programs springing up all over the country due to studies showing their effectiveness.

NAYC became a 501(c)3 association in 2007. Some current objectives are:

* Encourage the development and expansion of youth courts and state associations of youth courts;
* Provide a forum for training youth and adult volunteers, sharing ideas, and providing ‘best practices’ and other critical resources for the operation of youth courts;
* Enhance connections to and relations with government agencies and community-based programs or organizations; and
* Educate public and private agencies, businesses and individuals on the benefits of youth courts.

Many youth courts choose to have membership in NAYC to stay abreast of national program trends and to attend conferences. Mat-Su Youth Court Co-Director Lisa Albert-Konecky is Alaska’s representative on the NAYC Board of Trustees. Visit [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net) for more information.

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