



FAQs: Frequently Asked Questions

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1. Why do we need youth courts? It is impossible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), to respond fully to all delinquent acts committed by juveniles. Instead, incidents are prioritized and division resources are devoted to the most serious cases. Low-priority cases, such as first time shoplifting, may result either in no personal contact (a warning letter) or a referral for outside services. Youth who commit these offenses are left with the impression that their criminal actions are deemed acceptable, if there has been no consequence for the crime they committed. Studies indicate, however, that early intervention in lower-priority cases can be very effective in preventing more serious problems from developing in the future. There is an urgent need for communities to complement DJJ's services by providing responses to lower-priority cases. The community suffers each time a crime is committed. Youth courts are a method for the community to respond to delinquency. This voluntary alternative to the juvenile justice system is a form of early intervention designed to foster a sense of well being in the community. [Back to the top](#)

2. What are youth courts? Youth courts are innovative alternatives to the juvenile justice system. Youth volunteers participate in various roles (attorney, judge, bailiff, juror) while youth offenders are offered an alternative sanction from the formal juvenile justice system. Youth courts are implemented in response to the need or concerns of each community. Although the model may vary in style, substance and procedure, the recurring themes among youth court programs are:

Accountability

Youth courts ensure an offender is held accountable for their behavior, requiring them to make amends for the damage they have caused to the community. Offenders are called by peers, family, friends, school staff and/or other caring adults to answer for their crimes.

Significant Peer Influence

Youth volunteers send the message that they don't condone law-breaking behaviors. Positive peer influence.

Competency Skills

Youth court programs teach competency and leadership skills: listening, problem solving, communication, cooperation and conflict resolution. Youth courts also provide real-world career and criminal justice skills to youth volunteers who participate in the court process. Youth courts provide youth offenders and volunteers with a better understanding of the legal system, and also promote more positive attitudes towards law enforcement.

Empowering and Involving

Youth courts allow youth to assume leadership roles and address the source of crime in their communities.

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3. Why do we need a state association? United Youth Courts of Alaska was incorporated in 1998 as a non profit corporation based on the fundamental principal that youth courts need to have the operational flexibility to accommodate the diverse communities throughout Alaska. While engaging the community in partnership with the juvenile justice system, UYCA works with Alaskan communities to increase awareness of youth court programs and to reduce juvenile crime in Alaska. The association provides education and training materials to established and emergent youth courts throughout Alaska. Youth court members will receive technical assistance and training. UYCA reduces the need to 'reinvent the wheel' by networking to create a united voice for Alaskan youth courts. [Back to the top](#)

4. How many youth courts are there? There are currently 12 established and emerging youth courts in Alaska, and others that are developing their programs! Nationally, there are around 1,200 youth courts in 49 states and the District of Columbia. [Back to the top](#)

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