

# Youth Courts

Youth courts train teenagers to serve as jurors, judges, and advocates handling real-life cases involving their peers. The goal of youth court is to use positive peer pressure to ensure that young people who have committed minor offenses learn accountability and repair the harm caused by their actions. Youth courts can divert lower level cases from the justice system and can also be a part of a school's disciplinary process as a meaningful alternative to suspension and detention.

## Overview

The Center for Court Innovation launched its first youth court in 1998 as part of the Red Hook Community Justice Center. Today it operates six youth courts across the New York City metropolitan area. Through site visits, resources, hands-on assistance, and trainings, the Center for Court Innovation provides technical assistance to practitioners, institutions, and schools interested in starting youth courts in their communities.

## How It Works

Each youth court varies in response to the needs and resources of its community, but typically youth courts handle cases involving young people, ages 10 to 18, who have been cited for low-level offenses such as vandalism, fare evasion, assault and truancy. The Center's youth courts receive referrals from schools, the New York City Police Department, the New York City Department of Probation, Family and Criminal Courts, and local District Attorney's offices.

Youth courts incorporate the following features:

*Accountability:* Youth courts require young people to take responsibility for their actions and repair the harm to the community. During the youth court hearing, the respondent has the opportunity to tell his/her story and answer questions posed by members of the jury. After considering all of the information, the jury decides on a fair and appropriate sanction. Sanctions typically include community service, letters of apology, and skill-building workshops. Youth court staff work closely with respondents to ensure that they complete sanctions as mandated. Successful completion of sanctions typically results in a favorable disposition of the case by the referring agency.

*Peer Leadership:* To ensure that respondents truly are judged by their peers, youth court members—ranging from 14 to 18 years old—are selected from a range of local high schools and community-based organizations. Youth courts do not require a minimum grade point average or any previous experience. Young people who have previously appeared in youth courts as respondents are strongly encouraged to apply. Participants receive 30 hours of pre-service training on critical thinking, precision questioning, active listening and youth court protocols. In addition, they participate in on-going, intensive youth development and team-building activities to help cultivate their leadership skills.

*Access to Help:* Youth courts also strive to link respondents to training and after-school programs to help them avoid further disciplinary action in their schools and communities.

## Request Assistance

To arrange a site visit, request hands-on assistance, or for more information about youth courts, contact the Center for Court Innovation at [youthcourts@courtinnovation.org](mailto:youthcourts@courtinnovation.org) or 646.386.4462.

## **The Center for Court Innovation's Youth Courts**

### **Brownsville Youth Court**

Brownsville Community Justice Center

Location: 444 Thomas Boyland Street, Room 106, Brooklyn, NY 11212

Catchment area: Brooklyn neighborhoods including Brownsville and East New York

Contact: Sharese Crouther, Program Coordinator, 347-404-9582, [byc@courtinnovation.org](mailto:byc@courtinnovation.org)

Online: <http://www.courtinnovation.org/brownsville-youth-court>

### **Harlem Youth Court**

Harlem Community Justice Center

Location: 170 E 121st street, New York, NY 10035

Catchment area: Manhattan and the Bronx

Contact: Salam Mustafa, Program Coordinator, 212-360-4983, [hyc@courtinnovation.org](mailto:hyc@courtinnovation.org)

Online: <http://www.courtinnovation.org/hyc>

### **Newark Youth Court**

Newark Community Solutions

Location: 31 Green Street, Newark NJ 07102

Catchment area: City of Newark

Contact: Awinna Martinez, Program Coordinator, 201-293-9915, [martinezaw@courtinnovation.org](mailto:martinezaw@courtinnovation.org)

Online: <http://www.courtinnovation.org/newarkyc>

### **QUEST Youth Court**

Queens Engagement Strategies for Teens

Location: 149-18 Jamaica Avenue, Jamaica, NY 11435

Catchment area: Queens

Contact: Cathy Barker-Anderson, Program Coordinator, 718-233-4014 ext. 3304, [qyc@courtinnovation.org](mailto:qyc@courtinnovation.org)

Online: <http://www.courtinnovation.org/qyc>

### **Red Hook Youth Court**

Red Hook Community Justice Center

Location: 88 Visitation Place Brooklyn, NY 11231

Catchment area: South Brooklyn including Red Hook, Park Slope, Sunset Park, Windsor Terrace, Carroll Gardens, and Boerum Hill

Contact: Sabrina Carter, Program Coordinator, 718-923-8260 and 718-923-8261, [rhyc@courtinnovation.org](mailto:rhyc@courtinnovation.org)

Online: <http://www.courtinnovation.org/rhyc>

### **Staten Island Youth Court**

Staten Island Youth Justice Center

Location: 60 Bay Street, 1st Floor, Staten Island, NY 10301

Catchment area: Staten Island

Contact: Jacklyn Romanoff, Program Coordinator 718-675-8925, [siyc@courtinnovation.org](mailto:siyc@courtinnovation.org)

Online: <http://www.courtinnovation.org/siyc>