

## YOUTH COURT OVERVIEW

All hearings take place at:

**The First Reformed Church of Jamaica**  
**159-29 90th Avenue**  
**Jamaica, NY 11432**

By Train: Take the E, J or Z train to Jamaica Center

Walk north toward Jamaica Avenue. Continue onto Parsons Blvd and turn right onto 90th Avenue. The Youth Court is housed in the First Reformed Church of Jamaica halfway down the block.

By Bus: Serviced by several MTA bus lines that serve the Jamaica Center / Archer Avenue transportation hub. Call the MTA helpline at (718) 330-1234 for exact bus line(s).

When you arrive, please enter through the courtyard to the left of the main doors. The entrance to the building will be on your right.

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The QUEST Youth Court is a program for young people aged 10 – 18 referred by the Queens Family Court Law Department, probation officers and criminal court for offenses such as vandalism, disorderly conduct and trespassing. These young people appear before a judge and jury of their peers – other neighborhood teens – who determine fair and appropriate responses.

Before the youth court hearing, the referred youth – the “respondent” – meets with a “Youth Advocate,” a young person who represents the respondent throughout the case. During the hearing, the respondent describes what happened and is questioned by members of the jury. Unlike in a traditional court, the purpose of the jury’s questioning is not just to learn more about the offense, but to understand better what led to the incident, how the respondent feels about the experience, and to prompt the respondent to reflect on past behavior. After considering all of the information and the respondent’s personal strengths, the jury decides on a fair and appropriate sanction that holds the youth accountable, restores harm done to the community, and assists the youth to avoid trouble in the future. Youth court staff members monitor the completion of sanctions and then report back to the referral source. Most cases move through this process, from intake to resolution, in two months, depending on the respondents’ ability to complete sanctions in a timely manner.

The QUEST Youth Court is a restorative justice program that emphasizes:

Responsibility: Youth court teaches young people that actions have consequences. Because this message comes from other young people, it is more likely to be heard and understood. The youth court process asks respondents to reflect on their actions and understand how their behavior affects others around them.

Restoring the Community: Respondents are often sanctioned to restore the harm done to their community through service, apologies and other actions. For example, youth have been sanctioned to help plant trees in local parks, help community groups set up for local events, and assist in local activities for younger children.

Help: The youth court links young people and their families to services such as counseling, and provides workshops to help youths make better decisions and avoid future involvement with the justice system.

Leadership: Youth court teaches young people how to be leaders. Members are trained in group-decision making, critical thinking and public speaking. The program provides a positive opportunity for young people to engage with judges, lawyers, criminal justice officials and the court system. In addition to this, former respondents are encouraged to become members.