

# The Youth Justice Board

The Youth Justice Board is an after-school leadership development program that gives young people a voice in public policies that affect their lives. During their current program cycle, which runs from fall of 2016 to the summer of 2018, members of the Youth Justice Board are focusing on the relationship between youth homelessness and the justice system in New York City. The Board will examine challenges facing homeless young people, and identify opportunities to better support them, minimize justice system involvement, and prevent homelessness in the future.

## How It Works

Each program cycle, a team of 20-25 youth between 14 and 18 years old from across New York City investigates a current juvenile justice or public safety issue, formulates policy recommendations, and works to implement its recommendations. The Youth Justice Board has two primary goals: first, to help members develop skills that will benefit their communities, their families and their futures; and second, to contribute young people's perspectives to public policy discussions. The Board aims to foster ongoing dialogue between policymakers and informed youth leaders.

In the first year of the program's two-year cycle, Board members conduct extensive research on a selected issue, develop and publish informed policy recommendations, and present them to policymakers and key stakeholders. During the second year, members work to implement the recommendations. Each school year, new teens representing a cross section of students from diverse neighborhoods and backgrounds are selected based on their experiences, interests, and commitment to working on a long-term project. Participants include those with firsthand experience of the issues—such as foster care or juvenile justice—addressed by the program. After

completion of the project, many alumni stay engaged with the program and pursue other civic engagement activities in their neighborhoods or at school. For example, alumni have served on local community boards, been appointed to statewide government commissions, and held positions in school government.

The following four-phase curriculum builds Board members' leadership, research, and public speaking skills and helps members develop substantive and actionable policy recommendations.

*Training:* During the first weeks of the program, members receive intensive training on research strategies, listening, interviewing, and public speaking. Members also learn how local government works. The training phase includes a kick-off weekend retreat that provides members with background information on the current cycle's topic and lays a foundation for teamwork.

My work with the Youth Justice Board is a large part of the reason why I qualified for a scholarship at my college... My experience with the Board has been nothing less than life changing.

**Shane A.J. Correia, Defense Attorney**

*Fieldwork:* The Board designs and implements a research plan that includes interviews, focus groups, and site visits with a wide range of sources. During this stage, members meet with experts in the field, community members, and public officials. Members design and lead focus groups of young people affected by the issue under investigation to learn how it affects their peers.

*Policy Development:* The Board's research culminates in the development of targeted policy proposals. The Board issues a final report and presents its recommendations directly to government officials and policymakers.

The Youth Justice Board gave me a sense of purpose. It allowed for interaction with decision makers, and allowed us to be heard. ... It also provided a venue for Duke University to see what type of student I am—one that is determined and cares about her community.

**Elizabeth, 18**

**Undergraduate Student at Duke University**

*Implementation:* The Board works to influence practice in the field through action and advocacy. Board members design, develop and pilot new initiatives based on their policy proposals. Members also work to convince decision-makers and service-providers to implement their recommendations. Strategies include campaigning directly to officials at key agencies and collaborating with stakeholder organizations.

### **For more information**

To download the Board's publications, please visit:  
[www.courtinnovation.org/yjb](http://www.courtinnovation.org/yjb)