

ILLINOIS YOUTH COURT ASSOCIATION



Winter 2004

Newsletter

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LOLITA JUNK RETIRES AFTER A DECADE OF TEEN COURT SUCCESS

Lolita Junk, former Executive Director of the Knox County Teen Court program, retired on October 1, 2004.

Ms. Junk had been involved with the teen court since she helped start it a decade ago. Seeing a need for a positive solution to rising juvenile crime rates, she turned to her American Legion Auxiliary Unit to promote the idea of teen courts and garner community support. On September 11, 1995, the first trials were held. In addition to her work with the teen court, Ms. Junk has been active on the IYCA Advisory Board since its inception in 2000.

Ms. Junk has been widely recognized for her efforts. The Mayor of her hometown, Galesburg, declared the week of November 14 - 20 "Lolita Junk Week" in honor of her success with the Knox County Teen Court. Moreover, Ms. Junk was acknowledged by the Illinois House of Representatives, who honored her for ten years of "effort, dedication, and hard work" that contributed to the success of the court.

Our best wishes to Lolita!

NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIVERSION PROGRAMS

Under the new Redeploy Illinois pilot program, Macon County and the 2nd Judicial Circuit have been awarded money that otherwise would have gone to juvenile corrections.

The goal of Redeploy Illinois is to reduce the burden on the Department of Corrections by providing incentives to counties that send fewer juveniles to prison. To that end, the pilot program requires that the participating counties limit the number of youth they send to prison to 75 percent of their average commitment over the last three years. In exchange, the county receives the money that would have gone to house the remaining 25 percent. The county must use that extra money for community-based services for juveniles. If a county exceeds the 75 percent commitment limit, it is responsible for the extra cost to the state.

In Macon County, which received over \$578,000 in Redeploy money, \$15,000 has been earmarked for youth court programs that serve first-time offenders. This money will be used over the next 18 months for administrative and transportation costs, and for services that the program would not otherwise be able to access.

David Kidd, Coordinator of the Macon County Youth Court, thinks that Redeploy Illinois and youth courts are a perfect fit for keeping at-risk youth out of the corrections system. According to Kidd, "Redeploy Illinois offers teen courts the opportunity to be part of a community system that is innovative and adaptable to the needs of youth in Macon County. Teen court would be one tool that would assist Macon County youth from becoming a part of the [corrections] system."



*Lolita Junk, right, with State Rep.
Donald L. Moffitt.*

Photo courtesy of The National Youth Court Center

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER INSPIRES YOUTH COURT RESPONDENTS

by Alan Wilson, Volunteer Steward at Fen Nature Preserve

I am a 70-year-old native of London, England, and for the past 16 years, I have volunteered at a nature preserve in my community of Lake of the Hills in McHenry County in northern Illinois. The Fen Nature Preserve serves as a community service site for the McHenry County Youth Peer Jury based on the principles of restorative justice, as well as juvenile court and probation. I provide work opportunities every Saturday and Sunday morning all year round.

The peer jury sends many of their respondents to me and I feel this is a great opportunity to give a youngster a “wake up” call with the chance to make a fresh start. Offenders are often required to work 4 to 24 hours at the preserve in addition to other things such as paying restitution and writing a letter of apology. I keep track of each person and the hours they work and update the court every week.

My personal approach is to tell young people that “I don’t need to know why you are assigned to me...you have community service work to perform and I am here to help you complete it.” They could be washing police cars or the floors at the YMCA, but they will be dirty again tomorrow. [Here] they are given the opportunity to improve one of the highest rated nature preserves in Illinois and it will still be here for them to show their grandchildren. They are helping make the visits to the preserve more enjoyable for the community. I provide short nature walks during our breaks, so they learn the reason for the work they are doing and can see the results of work done by others.

One young lady, Krystal, was assigned to me as a last chance and was not happy when she found out that she would be working outdoors in the snow. However, her first day, I began by asking her to please help with throwing logs onto the fire and thanked her when she did it. She was not used to hearing “please” and “thank you.” During breaks I would share stories and we would laugh and joke together. A couple weeks later Krystal said that she liked working there and that I was cool! When she reported to the judge, he told her that she is doing fine and told her to keep it up! It seems we have got this girl on track and we all have established a relationship.

Another young man sent me a Father’s Day card thanking me for being the father he needed when his was not there for him. Another girl, Jenny, just called me to tell me she graduated today!

Is restorative justice through programs such as youth courts worthwhile? It really does work, maybe not for everyone, but every success sure inspires you to keep going.

NEW BILL TO HELP FUND YOUTH COURTS, OTHER YOUTH PROGRAMS

As of January 1, 2005, a new law (PA 93-0892; House Bill 307) authorizes county boards to require that county clerks collect a fee of up to \$5 from defendants who violate the Illinois Vehicle Code or the Unified Code of Corrections. This money can then be used to fund teen courts, peer courts, peer juries, youth courts, or other youth diversion programs.

When the bill was under debate in the General Assembly, several Assembly members noted the positive effect a youth court can have on recidivism rates. Rep. Donald Moffitt, a sponsor of the bill, noted that recidivism rates among youth who do not participate are 60 to 80 percent, while recidivism rates among youth who do participate drop to 10 to 12 percent.

To take advantage of this bill, a county board must pass a resolution adopting the fee. Several counties, including Knox, Iroquois, and Macon, have already adopted the fee.

If you are interested in obtaining a copy of these resolutions for use in your county, contact the following IYCA members:

Knox: Paula Johnson
309-345-3800

Iroquois: Iroquois County Teen Court
815-432-6969

Macon: David Kidd
217-875-7211,
ext. 575

Prefer Email?



If you received a hard copy of this newsletter and prefer to receive future Youth Court Newsletters by email in a pdf. format, please send your email address to Amy Zimmerman at azimmerman@atg.state.il.us.



TEEN COURT MAKES LASTING IMPRESSIONS

Sabrina Stroops enjoyed serving as a volunteer in the Knox County Teen Court so much that she decided to become a lawyer. A Galesburg native, Sabrina was among the first teens to volunteer when teen court began in 1995. The experience encouraged Stroops to pursue a law degree. She recently graduated from Northern Illinois University School of Law and has passed the bar, making her the first local teen court volunteer to become a lawyer. She has since returned to Knox County Teen Court to serve as a judge. "It was interesting to be on the other side of the bench," Stroops said.

A major benefit of the teen court program is the education it gives its volunteers. Stroops was "a bashful teenager," according to former Program Director Lolita Junk. "After volunteering at teen court, she blossomed and you could see the difference."

Training for teen court taught Stroops how to pose questions and speak properly in court. "In many ways, it was similar to the training in law school," Stroops commented. Mock trials held in preparation for teen court helped Stroops during mock trials in law school. She praised the program for using "alternative punishment you wouldn't normally see in the Juvenile Court System."

IYCA WELCOMES NEW COORDINATOR

Welcome to Amy Zimmerman, Children's Policy Advisor to the Attorney General, who has taken over as IYCA's new coordinator. Amy has been a practicing lawyer since 1991 and has spent her legal career focusing on issues that impact children.

Jessica Ashley, the former IYCA coordinator, recently took a position with the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. Many thanks to Jessica for her years of hard work and dedication to IYCA efforts.

FACING THE FACTS

Ateen court respondent wrote the following poem as an apology to her parents as a part of her teen court disposition.

Facing the Facts *Dedicated to My Parents*

I feel like I am carrying a great weight
Thinking I might be in jeopardy of losing my faith
I would hate for anyone to have to relate to what I'm going through
Just to think all you might have left is your crew
My stomach drops as I think about court
All I want to do is to be two again and hide in my little fort
The jury might have to be mean
But that doesn't bother me
I just wish I could be strong like a marine
In front of all these teens
I feel like I hit the ground
I finally think I saw what I wanted to be found
All of my dreams are of me wishing to be crowned
Like a queen who never frowns
But I know I just have to do the work
No matter how much it hurts
I will do so much of this
Even if it starts to hurt my wrist
I am going to fight through the mist
I just wish I could get that one final kiss of strength
To help me get through what I am about to do
Just when I saw their faces
I only wished I could have given them perfect aces
I am going to try and try
Even if I start to fry
Just to become my dad's perfect little pie
I'm not ever going to give up on life
If I ever need faith, I have Christ
I do and I always will love them
I'm going to try to mend their hearts back again
I'm sorry for all of my sins
I hope you'll say it again
That you'll love me and be with me 'til the end

ILLINOIS YOUTH COURT ASSOCIATION



www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov

THE IYCA AND THE NATIONAL YOUTH COURT CENTER SEARCH FOR ALL YOUTH, TEEN, PEER, AND STUDENT COURT PROGRAMS

Both the Illinois Youth Court Association and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's National Youth Court Center (NYCC) are updating their listings of youth court programs (also called teen, peer, and student court).

If you operate a youth court or know of a youth court in your community, please take a moment to check both the Attorney General's Web site and the NYCC Web site to see if it is listed correctly. Updated contact information will allow groups to receive timely information on training and grant opportunities, newsletters, technical assistance, and other benefits.

To check your listing on the Attorney General's Web site, visit www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/communities/youthadvocacy/rpt_iyca_by_program.pdf. Please contact Amy Zimmerman at 312-814-2823 or azimmerman@atg.state.il.us with any additional youth court program listings or corrections to existing program listings.

To check your listing with the NYCC, visit www.youthcourt.net/national_listing/overview.htm. On this Web site, you can check to make sure your youth court is listed with the NYCC, make changes to program contact information, and add information about a new youth court program. If you have questions, contact the NYCC by calling 859-244-8193, e-mailing nycc@csg.org, or visiting the Web site at www.youthcourt.net.

ISSUES FACING URBAN YOUTH COURTS

Jessica Ashley, former IYCA coordinator, published an article in the Fall 2004 issue of *In Session*, the newsletter of the National Youth Court Center. In her article, Jessica explores the advantages and challenges that shape urban youth courts, studying programs in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.



Jessica writes that urban youth courts have the advantage of easy access to resources such as community service placements, educational classes, and libraries, as well as public transportation, which allows more youth to participate. This is contrasted against unique challenges that are more prevalent in urban areas: distrust of the justice system and the threat of gang involvement of both respondents and volunteers.

The full text of Jessica's article can be found online at: www.youthcourt.net/Newsletter/Fall2004NL.pdf.

OPPORTUNITY TO EXAMINE THE ROLE OF TEEN COURTS IN THE REDUCTION OF YOUTH SMOKING

Researchers at DePaul University's Center for Community research are in the process of submitting a grant proposal to the National Institutes of Health to study the impact of teen courts vs. civic fines as consequences for Illinois youth who violate Tobacco Possession, Use, and Purchase (PUP) Laws. The study will involve the collaboration of 20 communities over a four year period. To facilitate any necessary program expansion, the grant proposal includes approximately \$5,000 to be provided to communities that are randomly assigned to the teen court condition. If you would like to learn more, please contact Dr. Steven Pokorny at 773-325-1892.