



Judicial Branch of Arizona in Maricopa County

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Newsrooms: Video of this program can be found here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= FoLCRt2wFM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoLCRt2wFM)

Additional B-roll footage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VP5KXclZ1nY>

Teen Court Empowers Students, Avoids Formal Court Hearings *Students learn by hearing Juvenile Probation Diversion cases at school*

PHOENIX (June 21, 2022) – By bringing a courtroom atmosphere into the classroom, kids are learning from hearing real-life Diversion cases involving youth.

Teen Court is a program facilitated through the Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department, part of the Judicial Branch of Arizona in Maricopa County. Teen Court youth volunteers do not determine guilt or innocence but learn about the court process by assigning consequences to hold peers accountable using established guidelines.

Teen Court is one of the Juvenile Probation Department’s Diversion program options. This option provides a responsible and efficient pathway toward offense resolution without a formal court process and allows youth to engage in a meaningful restorative justice practice. Participation requires an acknowledgement and admission of the offense. In the event a youth does not wish to admit, the Maricopa County Attorney’s Office determines if a formal delinquency petition is appropriate and the matter is scheduled for a court hearing.

“For most of these kids this is their first and probably their last mistake,” said Juvenile Probation Officer Gary Egbert. “In most of the cases, they were in the wrong place at the wrong time and made a poor choice. So, we try to divert them toward the right path once again.”

Diversion Supervisor Jaime Sandoval says each student volunteer who participates in Teen Court is given a role such as a judge, prosecuting attorney, defense attorney, jury, bailiff, clerk or victim advocate in a courtroom atmosphere.

“The actual hearing is not to determine guilt. Kids are asking questions as to why Diversion youth committed the offense, to help determine which consequence they will assign,” said Sandoval. “The consequence includes offering youth services based on the reason behind committing the offense.”

Some of those consequences can be jury service, community service, tutoring, counseling or being assigned to complete a workbook. Diversion youth are then given two months to complete the consequence.

From August 2020 through February 2022, the top three offenses heard in Teen Court, making up 59% of all offenses, were assault, shoplifting and criminal trespassing. Apart from the learning and accountability benefits to the youth, the process of deflecting delinquency matters from the court results in considerable savings to Maricopa County by avoiding legal proceedings.

“The benefit to youth is that they get a chance to keep their record clean,” Egbert said. “They get to experience restorative justice and Teen Court helps them make amends and make things right with the people that they’ve affected.”

Teen Court was first introduced in Maricopa County in 1994. Currently, the Juvenile Probation Department facilitates 20 Teen Courts in 15 Valley schools and others in local municipal courts.

“It’s not a mock trial, it’s a real hearing so student volunteers learn about leadership skills because they are running a courtroom. They also learn public speaking skills because they have to make an open and closing statement to the jury and interviewing skills if they’re playing the role of a defense attorney,” explains Egbert. “Once they graduate high school, they can put on their resume for college that they were a volunteer for Juvenile Court and that could help them get scholarships or get into a college of their choice.”

Sandoval says the goal of Teen Court is restorative justice, creating stronger teens and turning them into future leaders in the community.

“The kids that we are most proud of are those who end up completing their Diversion program and stay on as Teen Court volunteers because at that point we know we’ve truly made a positive impact in their lives,” said Sandoval.

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The Judicial Branch of Arizona in Maricopa County is comprised of Superior Court, Adult Probation and Juvenile Probation, which includes juvenile detention. The Judicial Branch in Maricopa County is the fourth largest trial court system in the nation and, along with its 3,200 employees, is dedicated to providing a safe, fair and impartial forum for resolving disputes, enhancing access to services, and providing innovative, evidence-based practices that improve the safety of the community and ensure the public’s trust and confidence in the Judicial Branch. For more information, visit www.superiorcourt.maricopa.gov.