

CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH COURTS

June 2021 Edition

OUR MISSION

To constrain the school-to-prison pipelines by providing unique, peer-driven restorative justice models as alternatives to the traditional juvenile justice system

To empower young people to take an active role in addressing criminal offenses of their peers and expand access to justice

**ACT NOW
TO HELP TRANSFORM
“PIPELINES-TO-PRISON”
INTO
“STAIRWAYS-TO-SUCCESS.”**



“Justice for Youth by Youth”

FEATURED YOUTH COURT – Fresno County

Sustainability has been a centerpiece in Fresno County’s Youth Court program, in spite of, and maybe even because of, the pandemic. To put that into context, in 1994, the year we started our program, according to the US Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, there were only 78 youth court programs in the United States, today there are over 1500 programs and over 100 of those are in California. Thanks to leadership from our Court, (Judge Nystrom Geist and Judge Hoff in particular), the Probation Department and the District Attorney’s Office, our program is recognized as a model program by Fresno County’s Juvenile Justice Commission. This is largely due to the fact that our Youth Advisory is flourishing and is giving youth a voice in the youth court process. The Juvenile Justice Commission has been so impressed with the outreach in Fresno County’s Youth Court, that they championed a special award two years ago to honor two individuals who had made it their life’s work to be champions for youth and role models for leadership, integrity and ethics. The Epperson Gladding Leadership Award celebrates Ms. Vonda Epperson, a driving force behind the Juvenile Justice Commission and a former member of the Grand Jury and Mr. Galvin Gladding, a Clovis Unified school administrator with an extraordinary work ethic, who understood youth and knew what it met to risk professionally and personally.

Our youth court approach has intentionally focused on engineering a process that embraces accountability, timeliness, and cost effectiveness. But at the heart of our program, is the focus on restoration which is facilitated almost completely by the youth jurors. In our program, the judges facilitate the process but leave the questioning of offenders and the sentencing completely up to the youth jurors. The youth who come through the program as offenders, must also sit as a youth juror, as part of their mandatory sentence. This aspect may be one of the most powerful aspects of the program because

it brings the youth together in such a way, that they work together to understand the power of a truly restorative

process which also has clear parameters for interventions and consequences. Frankly, in our school discipline systems, we may underestimate the power of consequences to help students develop a moral compass. But in youth court, consequences are linked to creative sentencing strategies that promote understanding about the impact student actions have on others, as opposed to shaming students for their actions. Another feature of our program is the review hearing which is designed to celebrate a youth's success, which 99% of the time we are doing just that. Our recidivism rate is less than 1% and the most important aspect of the process is that youth truly get to make things right and move on, and they do it 99% of the time. In Fresno County's program, this has been the key to reducing the acts of reoffending and our youth jurors are at the forefront, carrying out the restorative process. The hearings are also timely, in that we are hearing cases sometimes as early as a week after the offense, and last year before the pandemic hit, we actually built in more hearings, as needed, to ensure timeliness. Our process is very cost effective because we are addressing behavior early on at school site, in a courtroom like setting, not waiting for behaviors to escalate to hearings at the Juvenile Justice Campus on American Avenue.

Our judges are working on the front line with school administrators to address delinquent behavior, which is a community concern, not just a school concern. Our adult steering committee and youth advisory meets monthly, even during the pandemic, to maintain and build relationships which has contributed greatly to our sustainability plan. There is no question that youth court hearings were one of many normal school and co-curricular activities that came to an abrupt halt when COVID-19 hit our communities. But we continued to conduct essential youth court business by sealing cases as appropriate. As a result of the stay-at-home orders, we cancelled the traditional year-end ceremony to celebrate our students and school districts. We did however recognize jurors and winners of our video contest, by distributing gift cards and tee shirts to school representatives. The Youth Court Steering Committee unanimously agreed to ensure that the funds normally used for the ceremony would be reinvested in our youth. Therefore, each district received a \$250.00 check to support district participation in Youth Court. Each of the four participating school districts (Fresno, Clovis, Sanger, Central) received this amount, in addition to gift cards that were awarded to youth jurors, as a thank you for their service during these difficult times. The history of the partnerships we have created communicates to youth that they matter and they matter so much, that the courts, law enforcement, schools and the community have teamed up to help students turn things around if they have committed an offense on or off campus.

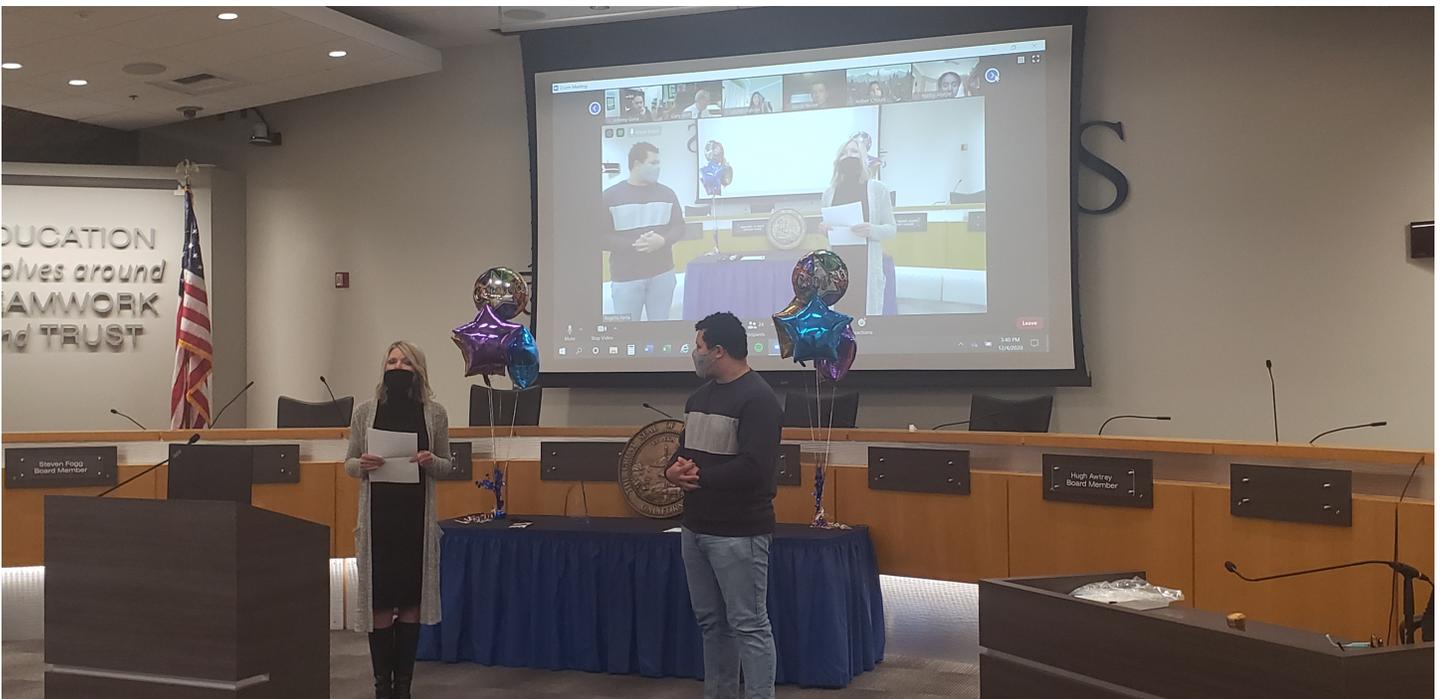
Youth Court plays on the most powerful influence in a young person's life and that is the peer pressure, but in youth court it is positive and compassionate peer pressure, youth helping youth think through potentially costly decisions. This has been the driving force for engaging our youth in community outreach endeavors such as the California Association of Youth Courts (CAYC) Roundtables. The purpose of the Roundtable lead by our youth and several community partners, was to help participants build capacity within their own youth court programs by engaging unexpected partners in their youth court programs. The Roundtable delivered a panel discussion about the Youth Court process in relationship to what is on the minds of youth right now in this pandemic, utilizing some "unexpected" partners: Youth provided insight to address the following questions: 1. What are youth worrying about? 2. What kinds of behaviors are troubling youth most? 3. How can adults talk to youth about their worries and their habits? 4. How can youth courts support youth IN and OUT of session? And lastly, how can youth courts partner with each other to support one another? This Roundtable actually helped forged a commitment from the California Teaching Fellows and the California Health Collaborative's Above the High program, to continue to be part of an outreach effort to engage in candid conversations about the issues on the minds of youth and the relevance of these issues to helping youth courts build capacity to support youth development and social emotional wellness. As a result of CAYC's Roundtable our Youth Advisory was invited to speak at the quarterly Board Meeting at the end of March.

In closing, as a collaborative, we are grateful for the resilience of the human spirit and especially our youth, and we are hopeful that Youth Court is among many activities that will continue, perhaps in a different way, until it is safe to fully return to school.

Respectfully submitted by Dr. Terri Pieretti, Co-Chair, Fresno County Youth Court



FEATURED STUDENT – Matthew Bethea - This school year's recipient of Fresno County's Youth Court program was Matthew Bethea, a graduate of Clovis Unified. Matthew was selected both for his leadership on the local Youth Advisory as well as his leadership on the CAYC. CAYC was created for the purpose of connecting youth courts from throughout California and even the United States, to better exchange information about creating effective strategies for holding youth accountable, to promote a more equitable social justice system and its youth advisory model does exactly that. In addition to Matt's contributions at both the state and the local youth advisories, he took the lead to engage youth in serious discussions around bullying and bringing youth with diverse backgrounds together to become more involved in the Youth Courts at their individual schools. His school district, Clovis Unified, has been an integral part of the history of partnerships in our youth court and was the first school district to engage middle school students in the process which is now being replicated in other school districts. Clovis Unified was also the pioneer in diverting students to youth court before charges are referred to the Probation Department. (Photo below)



“JUSTICE FOR YOUTH BY YOUTH”

FEATURED PERSON/BOARD MEMBER



Judge David S. Wesley

Judge Wesley was born and raised in the Los Angeles (LA) area. His father owned and operated a local meat market where he worked assisting in the family business. He is a graduate of Hamilton High School and later served in the US. Marine Corp. After his military service, he attended and graduated from Southwestern University School of Law with his Juris Doctorate (J.D.) degree in 1972, and for 9 years served with the LA County Public Defender’s Office. In 1981, he became a “Partner” with the law firm of Overland, Berke, Wesley, Gits, Randolph and Levanas, where he served in the private sector arena after which he spent two years in private practice.

On August 1, 1993, Judge Wesley was appointed to the California State Bar as a Hearing Judge, serving two hearing sensitive, complex matters involving members of the State Bar.

In May 1995, he was appointed by LA County Superior Court Commissioner in Juvenile Court where he served for two years. In 1997, he was appointed by Governor Pete Wilson, Judge of the LA County Superior Court, Criminal Division where he served for three years. In 1997, he was subsequently promoted to Assistant Supervising Judge Criminal Division where he served for two years.

For two periods of time, between 2003 – 2006 and 2008 – 2010, Judge Wesley served as Supervising Judge of LA Courts Criminal Division. He was subsequently appointed Assistant Presiding Judge where he served two years, and Presiding Judge for two additional years. In 2015, he assigned himself to the Inglewood Juvenile Courts until his retirement in 2017.

Judge Wesley continued to serve in juvenile courts throughout LA County as an Assigned Judge until March 2020 at the onset of Covid.

During his tenure, Judge Wesley participated in numerous Superior Court, Judicial Council, LA County Bar Association Committee’s, including the California Attorney General’s Advisory Committee on Criminal History Records and Improvement. He is the recipient of numerous meritorious service awards in and around the LA basin for his services in the legal arena. Most notably the County of LA Commendation Award (2018), California Judges Association “Alba Witkin Humanitarian Award (2014), and Peace Officers Association of LA Lifetime Achievement Award (2015).

Judge Wesley has also been involved in numerous community programs including, Director of the LA Teen Court Program, Dorsey High School Teen Court, SHADES (Stop Hate and Delinquency by Empowering Students) Program and Kids in Court (LA County Bar Barrister Section). He is one of the original developers and founders

of the California Association of Youth Courts (CAYC) where he served as President from 2011 – 2017. To this day he remains an active member of this Association.

Judge Wesley is dedicated to the cause of youth/teen courts, and is a firm believer that this program is at the forefront of today's juvenile justice and delinquency programs. We are extremely proud of him and his service and accomplishments. We look forward to his guidance, direction and participation in the years to come. Thank you, Judge Wesley, for you all you have done in making this Association the premiere program of the future.

A WORD FROM PARENTS, EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS IN ACTION (PESA)

“RISING TO THE OCCASION” - How we learned to meet—and even beat—the challenges of a global pandemic

This month marks the one-year anniversary of the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. In a time like no other, PESA and its staff faced the same challenges and hurdles endured by so many around the world: Panic, fear, helplessness and hopelessness. But that was the early weeks of the scourge, and in short order, the organization resolved to meet the challenges head on and do whatever was necessary to continue its mission. One year later, we're proud of what we've accomplished.

In those first days, it was all about sanitizing and disinfecting the office,” recalls PESA's Executive Director Seymour Amster. “But quickly, understandably,” he says, “there was a growing reluctance on the part of the team to meet with people. When the news began covering the quarantining of cruise ships anchored off the California coast, I thought, this is getting serious. We're going virtual.”

Senior staff began crafting a plan ... for a situation they'd never imagined. For a nonprofit whose core mission is people-based—supporting Teen Court, where proceedings often grow to many dozens of attendees; social workers meeting one-on-one with diverted youth in therapy, mentoring and tutoring sessions; staffers providing educational sessions to classrooms full of students in underserved districts—turning on a dime to a virtual model was daunting, to say the least.

“Right away, we got set up with Zoom, Doxy.me [a secure telehealth portal] and DocuSign,” says Amster, and they were underway.

As for Teen Court, it took some time to be able to convince some judges that a virtual platform would work for Teen Court. But once they tried it and saw firsthand that it worked, they were all in, and on June 8th, the first online proceedings were held. It's quite a task, wrangling jurors, judges, youthful offenders and their parents and guardians, interpreters and attendees onto a single Zoom call with breakout rooms for deliberations, but ultimately, it worked. And while challenges of the program and the pandemic in general mean overall case numbers are lower than prior years, some individual sessions have drawn record numbers of participants. One recent case with Taft High saw 300 attendees!

On the counseling, tutoring and mentoring front, PESA faced similar challenges of creating a safe and secure environment for one-on-one meetings, and the aforementioned Doxy.me filled the bill. Surprisingly, the program in some ways quickly became even more successful than its pre-pandemic iteration. “We saw a dramatic decrease in appointment cancellations, and a dramatic increase of youth opening up in therapy sessions,” says Amster, who attributes the former to kids not having to rely on working parents to drive them to appointments, and the latter to “meeting” in the comfort of their own homes. “Telehealth is the way of the future,” says Amster, adding that he foresees PESA continuing with its kid-friendly virtual model for one-on-one sessions even after the pandemic.

On the educational front, southland school closures famously resulted in distance learning, which has proven challenging at best. Once again, PESA stepped up to the task by providing a suite of

virtual educational sessions adjustable for grades K-12 on topics ranging from anti-bullying to tolerance to environmentalism. In the past year, 124 educational programs have been presented, resulting in nearly a quarter-million hours of student engagement! And PESA's County of Heroes, a program with an art-contest component aimed at educating youth about the ravages of racism, was specifically created in anticipation of the violence currently being perpetrated against the Asian American community in the wake of pandemic.

Indeed, difficult days have been turned into some pretty crowning achievements for PESA. "We have been able to anticipate what was going to happen this past year," says Amster, "and meet the needs of the community."

LATEST NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Programs Committee

- In light of COVID-19, CAYC is currently planning a "Virtual Summit" for June 24-26, 2021. Specific details highlighting this unique and innovative method of recruiting, training and educating future students in youth courts will be forthcoming. Stay tuned and please check our website for specific details, times and events. The Summit theme is ***Empowered Youth Ending the School to Prison Pipeline***.
- As some of you have already heard, we have been able to secure the California Secretary of State, Shirley Weber Ph.D. as one of our keynote speakers for the upcoming "Virtual" Summit 2021. Dr. Weber will be speaking to us live on June 25th at 11 am. We are continuing to reach out to a variety of potential keynotes; the opening keynote speaker on June 24th is San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin.
- Noah Block, Special Projects Manager for CAYC and his team have been hard at work to get out a call for proposals/presentations and the Summit Registration flyer is now posted on the CAYC website www.calyouthcourts.com and through Constant Contact and personalized outreach.
- We ask presenters to fill out the Google form (<https://forms.gle/RNJ896XZUgQ1uHxv7>). We would love to have the young people in our Teen Court programs present at our Summit. We are happy to support the development of workshops in any way we can. We have already secured commitments for 20 workshops.
- Noah is working with Frank Balderrama from *Balderrama Designs*¹ to ensure the summit is "front and center" on the website. We will be making sure that the website is fully functional and professional.
- Joseph Ramirez, our Summit Sponsorship Coordinator continues to reach out to a variety of potential sponsors for our summit, we are very optimistic about creating an ongoing relationship between CAYC and prospective sponsors.
- Finally, while our contract is for the state summit, we view our role as attempting to create a sustainable relationship between our young people and the association. In this vein, we are in the final stages of creating direct outreach messaging to engage our Youth/Teen Court alumni with the association. We hope you will support us in this effort.
- The California Association of Youth Courts (CAYC), in partnership with the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Nevada, Reno, and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, School of Social Work has initiated a study of the effectiveness of select youth courts in California. This impact assessment will begin with the collection of individual case-level data from several existing youth court programs. The researchers are interested in violation data, outcome data, case dispositions and offender demographic information. As stated in our January Edition of the CAYC Newsletter, the research will be administered by Eric Lambert,

¹ www.balderramadesign.com

Ph.D., Chair of the Department of Criminal Justice, and Matthew Leone, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Associate Director of the Grant Sawyer Center for Justice Studies at UNR and Dr. Rebecca Dillard MSW, PhD., Assistant Professor in the Greenspan College of Urban Affairs School of Social Work at UNLV. Once data availability has been determined by the researchers, the research plan will be submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UNR for approval. The IRB's goal is to ensure that the research does no harm and that the data are de-identified and secured in a manner that assures the safety and privacy of the research subjects.

The objective of this research is to show how the school-to-prison pipeline might be constrained using unique, peer-driven, restorative justice programming as an alternative to the traditional juvenile justice system. To date, there have been too few comprehensive examinations of the effectiveness of the youth court process. Research of this type is necessary to both show the effectiveness of such programming and to guide future changes in the youth court process.

If you are interested in having your program participate in this important study, please contact Karen Green, karengreen@peercourt.com; 916-663-1272. She will assist in connecting you with the project leaders and answer any of your questions.

Virtual Roundtable(s)

- Our next Virtual Roundtable entitled “Trauma-Informed Youth Court Protocols” is scheduled for Tuesday, May 18, 2021 from 3:30 – 4:30 pm. The presentation will be conducted by Don Carney from Youth Transitioning Justice.
- All Roundtable events are recorded and available on the CAYC website

The purpose of these webinars is to provide education and training for youth court members for the year 2021-2022. They are free of charge, and we invite anyone and everyone with special interest in this arena to please visit them on our website (www.calyouthcourts.com).

- ALUMNI – CAYC continues its efforts to reach out to peer court alumni. If you have ever participated in any peer, youth or student court, not only in California but other states as well, we would love to hear from you. We are establishing a data base of alumni, so please feel free to go to our website and add your contact information. We will add you to the list and keep you informed on upcoming events.
- STATE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE REVIEW BOARD (SARB) – As a team, CAYC and SARB are continuing to strive together to combat school absenteeism. For the latest details, please feel free to contact Board Member Amir Alavi at aalavi@rcoe.us.
- ANNUAL CAYC MEETING – If you would like to attend any of our meetings, please feel free to contact us either by phone at (916) 663-1272 or via email at inquiry@calyouthcourts.com.

Administration Committee

Two new members have joined the CAYC Board of Trustees; Amir Alavi, Esq, Riverside County Office of Education and Jonathan Block Verk.

AMIR ALAVI – Amir sits on the California State SARB Board and will be assisting CAYC with efforts to transition the school to prison pipeline into successful futures for our California youth.

JONATHAN VERK – Jonathan is respected globally as a startup, turn-around and sales-driven leader. He developed optimal teams, built lasting brands and grown companies across technology, sports media, television, advertising and social venture categories. Currently he is founder and CEO of HYPHENUS located in the LA basin. HYPHENUS is founded access to justice/on-demand mediation startup in legal-

tech sector, raised \$5.5M+ in seed capital, and is currently in the process of merging with Fusion Interactive.

For the period of January 2014 to March 2015, Jonathan was Executive Vice-president of Television for Shazam (LA); spearheading the company's television strategy which generated over \$20M in media exposure through distribution partnerships with The Grammys, American Music Awards, Dick Clark Productions, ABC, NBC, CBS, AMC and others.

For the period of November 2007 to December 2013, Jonathan served as President & CEO of Promax BDA (LA), leading the association out of insolvency and into profitability in the first 18 months by launching profitable business units focused on publishing, events, professional development & industry diversity. During this time, he increased global membership 300% over four years.

Additionally, Jonathan has served as Chief Marketing Officer for "One Laptop Per Child" located in Boston, MA; EVP, Group Publisher for Brunico Communications (Boards Magazine) located in Toronto, Canada; Founder of OotNabot located in NY, NY; Director of Sales for Extend- Media located in Toronto, Canada and Director of Sales & Marketing for Chuck Gammage Animation also located in Toronto, Canada.

Jonathan has Bachelor of Arts from Concordia University, Montreal, QC. We welcome him to the CAYC Board and look forward to years of service.

Fundraising/Marketing Committee

The Fundraising/Marketing Committee is pleased to announce the appointment of Jonathan Block Verk as Assistant Manager, and Derek Beverly to Manager. Seymour Amster will continue to serve on the Committee as Senior Advisor. With these changes and the addition of Mr. Verk to the team, we anticipate a number of changes to the "ways and means, and direction" of this program. Stay tuned for more great things to come.

***DONATE TODAY, KEEP CAYC STRONG
VISIT OUR WEBSITE – www.calyouthcourts.com***

***JOIN OUR ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NOW
SUBSCRIBE TODAY, FREE MEMBERSHIP***

BE SURE TO CHECK US OUT ON FACEBOOK, PINTEREST, AND TWITTER!

"LINKS" TO SUCCESS

BACK TO SCHOOL TIPS:

<https://sandyhookpromise.app.box.com/s/c6pdg1x4s3docyu003din87ed782mj9z>

Teen Courts – Do They Work and Why?

<https://drj.fccourts.org/uploads/Teen%20Court%20Article.pdf>

WHY YOUTH COURT?

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/15py645XH4M14n3WeXwziL-EDEn8uQ4jTp6i9oMbDShs/edit?usp=gmail&ts=5f62bdca>

YOUTH COURTS AND THE COMMISSION OF CIVIL RIGHTS:

<https://www.usccr.gov/press/2019/07-23-Beyond-Suspensions-Report-PR.pdf>
<https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/2019/07-23-Beyond-Suspensions.pdf>

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of
YOUTH COURTS

"Justice for Youth by Youth"

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