

WHAT IS YOUTH COURT?

Youth Court is a program run by our youth for our youth. Juvenile offenders, between the ages of 10 and 17, who have committed a misdemeanor crime, have their cases heard by a jury of their peers. Youth Court volunteers perform the roles of prosecuting and defense attorneys, bailiff, clerk and jury. A local volunteer attorney presides as Judge and is the only adult directly involved in the Court proceedings. Juvenile offenders who successfully complete the program avoid formal prosecution.

PURPOSE OF YOUTH COURT

The purpose of Youth Court is to interrupt the developing pattern of criminal behavior in juveniles by promoting self-esteem, motivation for self-improvement and forming a healthy attitude toward authority. The offenders assume responsibility for their behavior and accept the consequences of their actions through community service work, serving on the Youth Court jury and any punishment sanctioned by a Youth Court jury of their peers.

Youth Court provides an educational experience for the offender and juvenile volunteers. They are given "hands-on" experience with the legal process, become familiar with the Court system and learn about various career opportunities the Court system has to offer. The offenders also learn about various career opportunities through the community service they perform.

Youth Court enables young people a unique challenge and opportunity to demonstrate to adults and themselves their capacity for self government and responsible citizenship.

HOW YOUTH COURT WORKS

Cases heard in Youth Court are crimes such as shoplifting, possession of alcohol, criminal mischief and many other misdemeanor offenses. Sources of referral are law enforcement, Department of Juvenile Justice and the State Attorney's Office.

The juvenile offender comes before Youth Court having acknowledged guilt. The offender and their parent/guardian meet with the Youth Court Coordinator for a pretrial interview to go over the rules and guidelines of the program. Once the juvenile has been accepted into the program, a Waiver of Speedy Trial is signed.

In the Court session, after the Youth Court Clerk calls the case the Judge explains the offense committed. Then either a Grand Jury directly questions the Defendant or defense and prosecution attorneys present the case to the Youth Court Jury. Both utilize the testimony of the offender, the incident report and a pretrial information sheet compiled by the Coordinator. After carefully listening to the facts, the Youth Court Jury deliberates the case and decides a constructive sentence for the offender.

The offender and their parent/guardian then meet with the Coordinator to sign a contract to complete the sentence they have received from the Jury. Once the offender completes their sentence a Successful Completion report is sent to the State Attorney's Office, Department of Juvenile Justice and the referring agency. If the offender does not complete their sentence or rejects the Youth Court Jury sentence, then their case is returned to the appropriate referral source for prosecution.

WHEN IS YOUTH COURT?

Youth Court is held every Monday evening on the third floor of the Hernando County Government Complex. All volunteers must sign in by 5:30 p.m. The actual court session begins promptly at 6:00 p.m. **ATTIRE MUST BE APPROPRIATE FOR COURT. SHORTS, CAPRI PANTS OR CROP PANTS ARE NOT ALLOWED IN THE COURTROOM. SHIRTS MAY NOT HAVE ANY WRITING, SLOGANS OR LOGOS AND MUST BE ABLE TO BE TUCKED INTO PANTS OR SKIRT.**

- WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS**
- FOR YOUTH COURT VOLUNTEERS?**

Youth Court volunteers must meet the following criteria:

- Must be between the ages of 10 and 17
- Must abide by the rules of the program
- Must sign and respect the "Oath of Confidentiality"
- Must demonstrate maturity and sensitivity

Student volunteers interested in serving as jurors, prosecutors, defense attorneys, bailiffs and clerks are always needed. Training sessions are scheduled periodically throughout the year.

For additional information about the Hernando County Youth Court Program, contact:

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HERNANDO COUNTY



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