

# Teen Court

Making a Difference in Teens' Lives

## Reneson Jean-Louis Teen Court's Latest Intern

**F**rom watching criminal behavior on the hard streets of Miami to pursuing a criminal law degree, Reneson Jean-Louis is the first student volunteer to return to Miami-Dade County Teen Court as a college intern. Reneson is currently attending Huntington University in Huntington, Indiana where he is majoring in Pre-Law/Bible and Religion. Through the University he was able to intern with Miami-Dade Economic Advocacy Trust's Teen Court Program and received credit for the internship.

Reneson grew up in a poverty-stricken neighborhood where drug-dealing, prostitution, and criminal activity was prevalent. He says, "Seeing the police enforcement storm through my neighborhood to rid us of our community parasites and cancers became the norm. Since I was five, I knew that the legal field was something I would be interested in. It was only until high school where my interest would soon transform into ambitions and aspirations."

In Reneson's first year of high school, he decided to explore the vacuum of law by joining the school's Law Studies program. There he was introduced to Mock Trials; this gave him a better understanding of how the legal system works and specifically about courtroom etiquette and procedures. It would be two years later that Reneson would participate on a traveling mock trial team.

In the inception of Reneson's senior year, a close friend of his by the name of Luis Salazar introduced him to Teen Court. He became involved in the program and fell completely in love with it. According to Reneson, the theme of Teen Court was simple and direct. The agenda offers a second chance to teen offenders. The straightforward program provides restorative justice to juveniles who have issues and are struggling with stealing, damaging property,



Reneson Jean-Louis

### Miami-Dade County Teen Court

Miami-Dade County Teen Court (M-DCTC) is an alternative sanctioning program for first-time youthful offenders who agree to allow their peers to determine sentencing instead of the juvenile justice system. Through youth participation, the program helps decrease juvenile delinquency by interrupting the beginning stages of criminal behavior. Unlike any other diversion program in Miami-Dade County, Teen Court serves a range of youth within its peer sanctioning process such as teens needing a second chance and youth looking for opportunities to serve their community.

#### How to Qualify for Teen Court

- ☛ Youth must be under the age of 18 at the time of the commission of the offense
- ☛ Must NOT have a prior record of a criminal (misdemeanor or felony) offense
- ☛ The State Attorney's Office or another designated approving agency must first refer the youth for consideration
- ☛ The juvenile must admit his/her guilt
- ☛ The juvenile and parent/guardian must sign a "Waiver of Speedy Trial" form

#### Teen Court Locations

Monday–Thursday, evenings beginning at 5:30 p.m. (except holidays)

- Richard Gerstein Justice Building  
(1st, 2nd and 3rd Monday of every month)  
1351 NW 12th Street, Miami, FL - Courtroom 1-5
- Black Precinct & Courthouse Museum  
(4th Monday of every month)  
480 NW 11th Street, Miami, FL 33136
- South Dade Government Center (Tuesdays)  
10710 SW 211 Street, Miami, FL - Courtroom 2-2
- North Dade Justice Center (Wednesdays)  
15555 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami, FL - 2nd Floor
- Hialeah City Hall  
(2nd and 4th Thursday of every month)  
501 Palm Ave., Hialeah, FL (Commission Chamber)

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# TEENS REPORT

Teen Stories & Editorials

## My Experience With Teen Court

Godfrey Murray

Teen Court - North Dade Justice Ctr  
12th grade

I can't even begin to describe how much Teen Court has affected my life. There have been so many opportunities that have been given to me just by saying that I participate in it. You really learn so much from this program.



The Teen Court program offers an experience that is unlike any other volunteer program that I know of, which is the experience of working and helping real

people that have done real crimes and receive real punishments. Through this program, I am able to help people with their adversities and other mistakes that they have done in their lives. I think that the greatest thing about Teen Court is that it really builds confidence. I believe that

if you can go in front of 50 people and speak in a refined and orderly manner without fear, then there is nothing you cannot handle in your life.

This program is excellent for people who desire to become lawyers and even for those who do not wish to pursue that profession because of the experience that it brings. I thank God that I can be part of something that is so revolutionary, innovative and just almost unreal. This is truly an amazing program that helps you build friends in high places and gives you the experience of your life!

Ashley Sands

Teen Court - North Dade Justice Ctr  
11th grade

My experience with Teen Court so far has been outstanding! The amount of things I've learned in Teen Court, are things that I can take with me throughout my career in law and life. Being part of Teen Court has been one of the best decisions I have made since I have an interest in law. Being able to meet different attorneys is interesting because they are able to give us constructive feedback which could



only make us better. Getting hands on experience on what an attorney does is priceless; being a volunteer for Teen Court is for me just the

first step in pursuing a career as an attorney in the future.

Christopher Ramirez

Teen Court - North Dade Justice Ctr  
12th grade

I became interested in the law field while exposed to some law classes at my High School and had an aspiration to become an attorney since. My mother and I had been searching for a place or someone who could guide me and give me insight to courtroom protocol, and the basic ways lawyers do their work. When



I found out about Teen Court, I was overflowing with joy because I had been looking for it so long. Funny enough, I wasn't alone in my search and I found out

later that my friends at school were also a part of the program, and it only made the experience better. Being also a part of the annual St. Thomas University's Law School- Teen Court sponsored training made my goals in life better defined. I have learned however that the program is not just for volunteering or learning to be an attorney, but assisting the community and doing better by the people living in the community and helping the troubled children in our community who are referred to Teen Court become productive citizens to our community by offering them a second chance.

## teen stat

According to the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice it has seen a five year trend that reflects burglary as the felony offense committed most often by juveniles. During FY 2011-12, there were 10,124 delinquency arrests where the most serious offense was burglary.

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or fighting, and other misdemeanors. Teen Court provides counseling and mentoring to all teens in the program. The program also has a multitude of opportunities for students who are interested in the legal system to participate in. A student may participate as a bailiff, a juror member, a clerk, and or an attorney (Defense Attorney or State Prosecutor).

Reneson states, "What I loved most about Teen court was that it is real. The judges, the jury members,

and cases are all real; also the love and dedication the program directors have for the teen offenders and their future are impactful. Because of Teen Court I can truly say that I am steps ahead and steps closer to reaching my career goal to becoming an attorney. "

Miami-Dade County Teen Court was very lucky having this young man assist in the day to day Teen Court processes, and wishes him the very best in all his future endeavors.

## Miami-Dade County Teen Court's New Team Member

**D**r. Ischaji Nyerere Robertson is the newest member of the Teen Court Staff. Dr. Robertson moved to South Florida during October, 1999. A major hurricane threatened as people drove north on I-75. However, he drove south as he planned to fulfill a year-long commitment at a mental health center which would allow him to accomplish his dream of conducting psychotherapy sessions in Spanish. Over a decade later, he has worked in the educational, public mental health and private practice arenas in South Florida. Dr. Robertson states, "I am overjoyed to have landed a job with Miami-Dade County Teen Court to help further the desire to provide a service to the diverse community in Miami-Dade County, especially, with the underserved youth population."

Ischaji Nyerere Robertson was born in St. Louis, Missouri, and his name is a combination of his maternal grandfather's name, Isaac and his father's name, Charles, with the last two initials representing his beloved Aunt Joan and Uncle Isaac, Jr.



*Dr. Ischaji Nyerere Robertson*

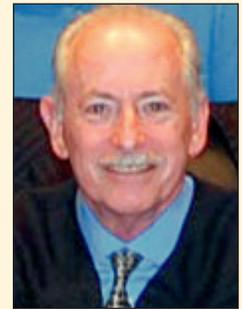
Dr. Robertson completed his undergraduate studies at Anderson University in Indiana in 1990, and has a Doctor of Psychology degree from the University of Denver (completed in 1998). He has been licensed in Florida since 2000. His career focus has been on completing psychological evaluations; adolescent and adult psychotherapy, and clinical supervision for masters and doctoral students. Dr. Robertson's hobbies include studying Chinese Martial Arts, writing, and being active in South Florida's chapter of the Association of Black Psychologists.

Teen Court welcomes and is very excited to have Dr. Robertson as a team player.

## volunteer corner

### Teen Court Judge Volunteer, Allen Gruber, Esq.

**A**llen Gruber has served as a judge of the Miami-Dade County Teen Court since 2008, and has been practicing law for nearly 40 years. He has dedicated a great deal of time assisting helping students pave their ways to brighter futures. Mr. Gruber is engaged in private practice and specializes in Personal Injury, Criminal Defense and Estate Planning. Mr. Gruber is a Miami native and a University of Florida alumni.



*Judge Allen Gruber*

After being sworn in to the Florida Bar in 1974, Mr. Gruber gained exposure in the legal world by practicing with several law firms and continues his dedication to our community through his involvement in various youth programs. He served as an advisor to Hurricanes AZA Young Men's association for 20 years and coached baseball, basketball, and softball in local youth leagues. Mr. Gruber currently focuses on community programs such as the "Put Something Back" pro-bono program, sponsored by the Miami-Dade Legal Aid association, and serves as a Partner for Habitat for Humanity.

In 2009 Mr. Gruber's practice expanded and became Gruber & Gruber, P.A., when he was joined by his son, Matthew A. Gruber. Mr. Gruber is honored to serve as a Miami-Dade County Teen Court judge. Mr. Gruber expresses, "I strongly believe the program is unique in that it gives opportunities to youthful offenders as well as a glimpse into the practice of law for students who participate in the program."

## teen law fact

### Florida State Law on Teen Dating Violence

Fla. Stat. § 784.046 reads as follows: "A victim of dating violence that has reasonable cause to believe he or she is in imminent danger of becoming the victim of another act of dating violence, or any person who has reasonable cause to believe he or she is in imminent danger of becoming the victim of an act of dating violence, or the parent or legal guardian of any minor child who is living at home and who seeks an injunction for protection against dating violence on behalf of that minor child, has standing in the circuit court to file a restraining order against the accused dating violence abuser."

## Volunteering for Teen Court

### Youth Opportunities

Become a youth volunteer; teens can participate as a defense or prosecuting attorney, juror, clerk, and/or a bailiff. It is a beneficial hands-on experience showing the reality of what happens in a courtroom. This volunteer program is magnificent for teens who are interested in careers associated with the judicial system.

### Adult Opportunities

Guide our youth by becoming a volunteer and impact their future and our community in a positive manner. Adults can volunteer as court monitors. If proper requirements are met, an adult with a legal background may volunteer as a judge. This rewarding volunteer experience will make a difference in the life of a youth and set an example for them to follow.

**For more information on volunteering, please contact LaVerne R. Carlile Dean at 305-622-2592 or email her at [LAV@miamidade.gov](mailto:LAV@miamidade.gov).**

*Teen Court is a Miami-Dade Economic Advocacy Trust (MDEAT) Program.*

**MDEAT Mission:** *To ensure the equitable participation of Blacks in Miami-Dade County's economic growth through advocacy and monitoring of economic conditions and economic development initiatives in Miami-Dade County.*

# Teen Court

NEWS

### Miami-Dade County Teen Court

111 NW 1 Street, Suite 2032

Miami, FL 33128

Main Office: 305-375-5661

North Office: 305-622-2592

<http://www.miamidade.gov/economicadvocacytrust>

### STAFF

John E. Dixon Jr., *MDEAT Executive Director*  
Anthony D. Williams, *Youth Division Director*  
LaVerne Carlile Dean, *Teen Court Administrator*  
Joseph Aleandre, *Juvenile Services Specialist*  
Juan Aspajo, *Juvenile Services Specialist*  
Shirley Sieger, *Juvenile Services Specialist*  
Frank J. Tarrau, *Training Specialist*  
Dr. Ichaji N. Robertson, *Clinical Psychologist*  
Melba C. Gasque, *Marketing Administrator*  
Araceli Acosta, *Office Support Specialist, Lead Worker*  
Bernadette Artistide, *Office Support Specialist*

*Special thanks for photos provided by Melba C. Gasque and Frank J. Tarrau.*

Miami-Dade County  
**Teen Court** 

*Delivering Excellence Every Day*  
Miami-Dade Economic Advocacy Trust  
111 NW 1 Street Suite 2032  
Miami Florida 33128

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY