

Teen Court

Summer 2011 • Issue 6

Making a Difference in Teens' Lives

The State of Youth in Miami-Dade County

Miami-Dade County Teen Court and The MDEAT Youth Action Committee (YAC) hosted the first of a series of community forums: The State of Youth in Miami-Dade County on Tuesday, March 22, 2011 at Sweet Home Missionary Baptist Church. This is part of the Miami-Dade Economic Advocacy Trust (MDEAT)/ Teen Court series of forums in Dade neighborhoods. This initiative allowed citizens in South Dade to voice their concerns about how crime and other issues impact their community and specifically the youth.

Participants addressed issues on crime, jobs, economic development, affordable housing, education, and youth development, and provided recommended actions. All of the recommended actions that were provided by the community will be compiled and reviewed by the MDEAT/Teen Court Youth Action Committee and presented to lead authorities.

The Forum was led by a panel that provided their perspective on criminal justice, education, and employment. The panel consisted of: Chief Charles Hurley,

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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



Front row: Morris Copeland, Director, Juvenile Services Dept.; Valmarie Rhoden, Administrator/ School Operations for Miami Dade County Public Schools; Commissioner Lynda Bell, District 8; Commissioner Dennis C. Moss, District 9; Kayla Terrero, Student Attorney Volunteer; John E. Dixon, Jr., Executive Director, MDEAT; Stephanye Johnson, Board Member, MDEAT. Back row: Chief Charles Hurley, Miami-Dade Public Schools Police Dept.; Rick Beasley, Executive Director, South Florida Workforce; Edward B. Harris, Director, Special Projects, Office of Community Advocacy, Miami-Dade County.

The State of Youth in Miami-Dade County

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Miami-Dade Public Schools Police Department; Valmarie Rhoden, Administrator/ School Operations for Miami Dade County Public Schools; Rick Beasley, Executive Director, South Florida Workforce; Morris Copeland, Director, Juvenile Services Department, Miami Dade County; and Kayla Terrero, Student Attorney Volunteer, Miami-Dade County Teen Court. Edward B. Harris, Director, Special Projects, Office of Community Advocacy, Miami Dade County was the Forum's moderator.

One of the special highlights of the Forum was the attendance of Miami-Dade County Commissioners Lynda Bell, District 8 and Dennis C. Moss, District 9. The Commissioners gained first-hand information from youth and other constituents about the issues they face on a daily basis.

teen law fact

At least 14 states have laws that urge or require school boards to develop curriculum on teen dating violence. Many states have also adopted teen dating violence awareness weeks or months, in an effort to draw the public's attention to a national campaign that promotes prevention, safe dating practices, and offers information and resources. In 2011, at least eight states introduced legislation to address teen dating violence.

Florida Laws on Teen Dating Violence:

2010 Fla. Laws, Chap. 217 Requires a comprehensive health education taught in the public schools to include a component on teen dating violence and abuse for students in grades 7 through 12. Would require district school boards to adopt and implement a dating violence and abuse policy and provides policy requirements. Also would require the Department of Education to develop a model policy that includes school personnel training. (SB 642 and HB 467 of 2010)

Fla. Stat. § 784.046 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.

The Fourth Annual Miami-Dade County Teen Court Conference Youth Speaking Out Against Violence: Advocating for Change

Miami-Dade Economic Advocacy Trust (MDEAT) hosted the Fourth Annual Miami-Dade County Teen Court Youth Speaking Out Against Violence Conference: Advocating for Change on May 9, 2011. The day-long event took place in Downtown Miami at the Hyatt Regency.

Over 500 students attended from the following Miami-Dade County High Schools: Booker T. Washington, Dr. Michael Krop, Homestead, Miami Carol City, Miami Central, Miami Edison, Miami Killian, Miami Norland, Miami Southridge, North Miami, Miami Northwestern, South Dade, Miami Beach, and Law Enforcement Officers' Memorial. In an effort to get younger students involved, Brownsville Middle and South Miami Middle School also attended the Teen Court Conference.

Students were astounded when our morning motivational speaker, James Young, author of "I Wanted To Be Bad" spoke about his personal experiences. Later in the day, students were mesmerized listening to the keynote luncheon speaker, Shirlyon McWhorter-Jones, Esq., Florida International University Director of Equal Opportunity Programs and Diversity, Miami-Dade County Judge and Teen Court Volunteer Judge; as she gave students a life sentence to be motivated to succeed.

Students participated in workshops such as "Bullying in the Community/Schools", "Gun Violence in America", "Youth and Media Advocating for Change", "Pros and Cons of Electronic Communication Devices", and "Violence in Dating and Love Relationships". Attendees provided recommended actions, which will also be referred to lead authorities for implementation.



volunteer corner

Kayla Terrero

Kayla is in the 11th grade now, and has been one of the most dedicated youth volunteers in Teen Court. Recently, Kayla had a school assignment where she wrote a letter expressing how she felt about the Teen Court program, and we would like to share that with you.

"Throughout my life, I have accomplished many things that give me great pride. Of the many sports, activities, and elective academic courses I have partaken in throughout the course of my time in high school, what I am most proud of is my involvement in Miami Dade Teen Court.



Teen Court is a program in which minors receive the rare opportunity to expunge a misdemeanor off their record. The program consists of mock trials in which only teens participate. The defendants receive sanctions such as community service essays, and letters of apology. If the teens complete the program successfully the misdemeanor is completely expunged from their record.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Teen Court program. It offers the experience of presenting cases, it is a great source of community service, and a place for me to learn.

I consider my involvement in Teen Court a great accomplishment indeed. To begin with, I play a role of leadership in the Teen Court program. In addition, the program has helped me to overcome my fear of public speaking. Finally, the biggest accomplishment that I have achieved through this program is helping the community.

Primarily, I have a very important leadership role in the Teen Court program. When I began I was a court clerk and bailiff. I mastered filling out court reports and documenting the facts of the case as well as the verdicts including sanctions. I played a major role in assisting the jury to decide on unanimous verdicts. Eventually, I completed a two day attorney training. I now prosecute fellow teens that have disobeyed the law. In addition, I train new volunteers on how to be clerks and bailiffs. These roles have taught me responsibility, organization, and leadership skills. In fact, these three roles play an important part in my everyday life; and I have mastered these roles solely due to the Teen Court program.

Furthermore, as a result of participating in Teen Court I have overcome my fear of public speaking. I have a

strong personality so most people would never even imagine me as a shy person. However, when I encounter unfamiliar people or an uncomfortable setting, I get stage fright. For example, I feel a tremendous fright and I become so consumed in my thoughts of becoming tongue tied that I completely forget what I was supposed to say originally. Therefore, my presentation does not have the desired results. However, in Teen Court I have to read police reports and docket information, provide opening and closing statements, question defendants, and much more. Thus, I have learned not to succumb to this fear. I have learned not to think negative thoughts before speaking publicly; I simply imagine that whatever I am presenting is my show and there is no one better. I now speak louder and more confidently, and my fear of public speaking is a thing of the past. I do not think I would have gotten over my public speaking phobia had it not been for Teen Court.



Ultimately, the most important accomplishment I have achieved through Teen Court is helping the community. I perform a great deal of community service every Wednesday just to ensure that a teen that made a bad decision has a second chance. This also keeps our community safe because it provides something for teens to do with their time and a place for them to socialize with other teenagers in similar circumstances. Finally, it teaches teens valuable lessons to not only respect the law but also their parents. Moreover, I believe that at the end of the day, if the whole program can help one teen, then all the hours dedicated to the program will be worthwhile.

Consequently, to me Teen Court is more than just a source of community service. It is a home away from home on Wednesday nights. It's a place for me to learn, grow and accomplish great things that will help prepare me for life. "

teen stat

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that one in 11 adolescents say they have been the victim of physical dating violence.

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 at 305-622-2592 or email her at LAV@miamidade.gov.

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

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.*



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Special thanks for photos provided by Joey Walker, Melba C. Gasque and Frank J. Tarrau.

