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**Johnson, Beth C. *Wisconsin Teen Courts: Current Trends and Recommendations***

**Abstract**

Human development professionals have identified teen courts as one youth development program that could improve the lives of many young people and the community in which they reside. Teen court programming has become popular as an effective program that reduces juvenile crime rates.

This study collected and analyzed data from twelve county-based teen court programs in Wisconsin. A paper survey and a postage-paid pre-addressed envelope were mailed to twenty-eight county-based teen court programs. Responses were returned to the Washburn County University of Wisconsin-Extension office. This study aimed to collect common trends in programming to offer suggestions for future programs to be created throughout the state of Wisconsin.

The data found that many programs throughout the state were similar in their programming efforts, most of the programs found funding sources without the use of grants. Many programs were operated from the county's UW-Extension office with the Youth Development Educator taking lead on the program. This research study also concluded that the community must be supportive and willing to volunteer to ensure the success and sustainability of the program. The findings of this study suggest that many factors must be considered before establishing a new teen court program.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Human development professionals have identified one area related to today's youth that could improve the lives of many young people – teen court programming. Recent research published by Dr. Jay Giedd from the National Institute of Mental Health identified that the average brain is not fully developed until age 25 (Hanson & Palmer, 2011). His study suggests that youth lack the cognitive development to fully understand the impact of many of their decisions. Teenagers and young adults, therefore, are prone to making decisions that can lead to negative life-altering consequences. Susan Wolfgram, professor of Human Development and Family Studies at University of Wisconsin-Stout said, “One bad decision can change [one's] life forever” (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 2011, p. 6).

Field professionals often describe teen court programs as “second chance programs.” These programs offer young people opportunities to reverse bad decisions and learn how to make decisions that will be positive and productive. Most teen court programs utilize community volunteers in some way; a volunteer may organize paperwork or help a family understand the process and help them debrief after the hearing. This benefits youth in two ways: First, it provides models of exemplary behavior. Secondly, it provides an opportunity for intergenerational connections. These personal connections are difficult to measure but are often invaluable for a variety of reasons.

One way teen court programs can reduce the impact of poor decision-making is to provide assistance for young people to learn positive new skills. That is why teen court programming can be invaluable to young people and the communities in which they live. By implementing a teen court program or assisting with a currently functioning program, communities can positively influence the lives of its young people who make bad decisions. They will be granted opportunities to learn from their mistakes without being labeled as deviants

or juvenile offenders for the rest of their lives. Other youth, who may be interested in learning more about law related careers, may volunteer to serve on a teen court as a way to gain real life experience.

The term “delinquent youth” is not commonly used today because of the assumption or stigma that it creates. Crimes committed by youth that would not be considered crimes if committed by an adult can also negatively affect their lives. More information about this term can be found in the definition of terms section. Throughout this research paper the terms “youthful offender” and “juvenile offender” are used, but in the survey the term “juvenile delinquent” was used.

Teen court programs in Wisconsin and throughout the United States operate in different ways. Most programs receive referrals from juvenile court authorities, Human Services workers, family social workers, peace and police officers, and other agencies that work with troubled youth. Upon receiving a referral, the program coordinator will make contact with the juvenile and his or her family to explain how the teen court program works. Many programs require the juvenile to admit guilt to the crime of which they are accused. The parents must sign paperwork ensuring they will be supportive and involved throughout the process. An intake assessment may be used to ensure the juvenile qualifies for the program. Following enrollment, there may be more meetings to prepare the juvenile and the family for a court appearance. The program coordinator and/or volunteer staff and teen court youth staff help facilitate other meetings and information sharing opportunities. A teen court program date and time is selected for the juvenile. During the teen court session, peers will question the juvenile offender in order to better understand the motivation to commit the crime and to determine the best dispositions for his or her actions. Many youth are required to serve as future teen court panelists or youth court staff as



part of their dispositions. Upon completion of all dispositions outlined by teen court youth staff, the juvenile offender's record is expunged. Hopefully, the offender will have learned useful information about the justice system and how to be a better citizen and contributing member of society.

Programs differ regarding the type and numbers of offenders they will accept. Some programs are limited by jurisdiction or by the number of cases they can process. The program coordinator may limit the caseload to certain offenses to ensure the teen court youth staff understand the crime and can deliver an effective consequence for the juvenile offender's criminal actions. Each teen court program determines which offenses qualify for programming based on many factors including severity of offense or location where the offense occurred (i.e., on school grounds, within city limits, on community property, etc.).

According to the American Bar Association's Youth Cases for Youth Courts Desktop Guide published in 2006, teen court programs were started as a grassroots initiative to reduce youthful recidivism. The programs have quietly emerged as effective forms of intervention not associated with the judicial branch of government. Teen courts have experienced a rapid increase due to documented benefits for first time youthful offenders and the communities in which they live. It's unclear exactly how many programs currently exist as programs are being started while others have ceased to exist for various reasons.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the 2008 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 16% of all violent crime arrests and 26% of all property crime arrests in the United States were committed by juveniles (2009). Information from the National Association of Youth Courts website ([www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net)) cites that teen court programming exists in 37 counties throughout

Wisconsin. Each program aims to reduce juvenile delinquency by providing restitution to the community (if applicable), providing restitution to victims (if applicable), helping youth become better citizens, and allowing youth the opportunity to learn about the judicial system (Wisconsin Supreme Court: Volunteers in the Courts, 2000). There is much to be learned from other counties where programming is currently utilized as an alternative to the juvenile justice courts that are often overburdened (Pearson & Jurich, 2005). Many research articles present data about current teen court programs and their effectiveness, but few offer data specific to county-based programs in Wisconsin. The American Probation and Parole Association created a resource that compiled national data regarding teen court programming. However, this data did not specifically center on county-based programs in Wisconsin.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify common trends within current, county-based teen court programs in Wisconsin. The investigator became intrigued with teen court programming after interviewing a member of the Barron County Restorative Justice Program team in 2010 and working with youth development in Washburn County during an interim role with University of Wisconsin-Extension. The investigator began exploring resources related to the potential start-up of a program in that county. Programming information related to getting a program started was limited with very little peer-reviewed research specific to Wisconsin's teen court programming available.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

As there are different terms assigned to programming efforts, the investigator of this study chose to use "teen court." Other terms may include the following: peer court (Peterson, 2009; Peterson, 2011; Nessel, 1998; Godwin, 1996; Fisher, 2006), youth court (Peterson, 2011;

Nessel, 1998; Godwin, 1996), delinquency court (Peterson, 2011) youth justice (Peterson, 2011), student court (Peterson, 2009; Peterson, 2011; Nessel, 1998; Fisher, 2006), youth peer court (Peterson, 2009), and youth peer panel (Peterson, 2011). Regardless of the name, youth prevention programs are voluntary alternative court programs led by other youth. They inform and educate youth about democratic laws of this country and their roles as productive, knowledgeable citizens (Pearson, 2003).

Another assumption the investigator has made is that individuals who completed the survey did so with as much accuracy as possible. Instructions in the survey's cover letter explained that the survey should be completed as accurately as possible and also encouraged individuals to seek out correct information or leave items blank if unknown.

Readers of this research should assume that all surveys were analyzed completely by the investigator and that she accurately tabulated and analyzed data within the scope of her abilities.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Juvenile delinquency** can be legally defined as "a single act or multiple acts that violate the law by a minor, generally under age 18" (Smith, 2008).

**Juvenile** is defined as a "youth under the age of majority". There are currently no guidelines suggesting a specific age for participants other than a maximum age of 18 or 19 (Peterson, 2011). In Wisconsin, according to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program website, the Juvenile Court has exclusive jurisdiction over all cases involving youth from age 10 to 17 who are suspected of breaking a law (Bilchik, 1998).

**Recidivism** in Webster's Third New International Dictionary is defined as "a tendency to relapse into a previous condition or mode of behavior; repeated relapse into criminal or delinquent habits" (Babock, 1981, p. 1895). The Juvenile Justice and Criminal Justice Systems

use the following criteria to determine recidivism rates: re-arrest of juvenile, conviction of crime by juvenile, and incarceration of juvenile offender (Peterson, 2011).

**Misdemeanor crimes** or status offenses may include theft, vandalism, disorderly conduct, assault, or possession of marijuana (Pearson & Jurich, 2005). Each teen court program can determine which offenses qualify for programming based on many factors including severity of offense or location where the offense occurred (i.e., on school grounds, within city limits, on community property, etc.).

A **delinquent youth** is “a minor who committed an act that would be considered a crime if committed by an adult” (Peterson, 2011). This term is not commonly used because it leaves many questions to be asked related to crimes committed by youth that would not be considered crimes if committed by adults such as possession or use of tobacco products, curfew, or possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages.

**Diversion programs** provide an alternative service after a youth takes responsibility and admits guilt for a crime he or she is suspected to have committed. Each case is handled through non-judicial methods with the cooperation of both parent/guardian and young person (Peterson, 2011; Dick, Geertsen, & Jones, 2003). Teen court is categorized as an intervention program that does not fit into the judicial branch of government and thus is a non-judicial method (American Bar Association, 2006).

**Peer Jury Model** of teen court programming employs a panel of teen jurors who question the offender directly. The judge is an adult volunteer. No youth prosecutor or defense attorneys are utilized (Nessel, 1998).

**Adult Judge Model** of teen court programming employs an adult judge to rule on courtroom procedures and to clarify legal terms while youth volunteers serve in the roles of

defense and prosecuting attorneys. There is also a jury comprised of youth volunteers who decide the dispositions for the actions of the youthful offender (Nessel, 1998).

**Youth Judge Model** of teen court programming is similar to the adult judge model but the judge position is filled by a youth volunteer (Nessel, 1998). The position of judge is usually one that requires the volunteer to serve many times as an attorney in teen court proceedings and understands the different parts of the teen court process. This creates an opportunity for someone who is interested in law to learn more about a potential career in that field.

**Tribunal Model** of teen court programming does not utilize a peer jury; instead, the prosecuting and defense attorneys present cases to a juvenile judge who determines sentencing (Nessel, 1998).

**Restorative Justice** is a victim-centered response to crime that provides the victim, offender, their families, and the community to directly respond to the harm caused by the crime (Umbreit, 1999). Restorative justice has the primary goal of repairing harm that has been done to victims. Reconciliation between victim, offender, and community, along with offender reintegration, are secondary goals (Bilchik, 1997).

**Expunge**, as defined in the Webster Third New International Dictionary, is “to strike out, obliterate, or make for deletion; to treat or cause to be regarded as nonexistent” (Babcock, 1981, p.803).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of this study include the following: Only county-based teen court programs in Wisconsin were used. School-based, tribal-based, and city-based programs were not included. This study was also limited to the state of Wisconsin. For these two reasons, results of this study should not be generalized outside of county-based teen court programs in Wisconsin.

## **Methodology**

A survey questionnaire was created using open-ended questions seeking qualitative data. One question utilized a Likert scale style question. Three questions utilized radio-button style response questions but two of those three questions included an option to write in a response.

Upon IRB approval, a list of current teen court program coordinators was solicited from the President of the Wisconsin Teen Court Association. This list included program names, names of the current coordinators, and mailing addresses. A packet of information including the cover letter, survey, and postage paid return envelope was sent to each of twenty-eight counties. The President of the Wisconsin Teen Court Association included an email reminder to complete the survey. She also promoted completion of the survey at a Wisconsin Teen Court Association meeting approximately one week after the letters were sent out.

Completed surveys were sent to the Washburn County UW-Extension Office in Spooner where one of two support staff opened and shredded the envelope after putting the completed survey in a file folder. There was no identifiable information available when the surveys were coded and compiled. Qualitative themes and quantitative numbers were sought from the completed research survey as appropriately identified during the creation of the survey instrument.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Current Trends

The most effective programs for reducing recidivism and promoting positive youth development, when intervention is recommended for a troubled young person, are those supported by the community outside the juvenile justice system (Justice Policy Institute, 2009).

Teen court programs are set apart from other juvenile justice programs because the foundation of teen court includes the use of youth peers who help determine appropriate sentences for youth offenders (Peterson, 2009). Teen courts help communities offer prevention and early intervention programming including opportunities for positive peer interaction and influence. These programs also offer accountability training, skill development, and community service programs (Godwin, Steinhart, & Fulton, 1996). The concept of positive peer pressure is one reason the use of teens can be effective.

A common focus among teen court programs is to provide high quality, structured, alternative justice programs for youth offenders. Teen court programs will not replace the need for other juvenile courts. The program focuses on creating law-related educational opportunities as well as creating and requiring activities that encourage productive citizenship through community service experiences (Irons & Jones, 2001).

Each teen court program is unique in its origin, leadership, funding, and participants. The location of a program within a community will be determined by the person interested in starting the program, the position of the program coordinator, and the financial resources available (Godwin, et al., 1996). Because this information varies greatly, it was important to ask survey respondents questions related to these factors to ensure that a large body of data related to

county-based Wisconsin teen court programs was collected. Survey results will help potential new program coordinators select components of the program that may be the best fit for them.

Most teen court programs require an advance guilty plea prior to participation in the program. They also allow for dismissal or expunging of charges if the youth offender completes the program requirements successfully (Godwin, et al., 1996). This policy is in place because of youth offenders wavering between a guilty or innocent plea wastes the time of the teen court. This wavering may cause delays in the consequences for the negative action committed. Teen courts pride themselves on prompt reactions to crimes committed by juvenile offenders.

Many programs utilize the practice of restorative justice. This generally includes concentration on harm done by the offender to a victim or the community, followed by reparations for that harm. These programs emphasize open dialogue and an atmosphere of positive reintegration of the youth into the community. Commonly, offenders are required to perform community services in the community where the crime was committed (Office of Juvenile Justice Department Model Program Guide, n.d.).

### **Advantages of a Teen Court Program**

Programs revolve around the concept of rehabilitation versus punishment (Whitebread & Heilman, 1988). Teen court programs offer youth a second chance to correct problem behaviors that caused them to do something illegal.

American youth are influenced by peer culture and the desire to fit in as well as a lack of experience in assessing and responding to risks. Young people tend to focus on short-term rather than long-term consequences of their actions (Kambam & Thompson, 2009). During adolescence, youth need, and most seek out, a way to make the world a better place (Peterson, 2009). Adolescence is a time when young people develop skills, abilities, habits, and attitudes



that will help them transition into adulthood (Godwin, et al., 1996). Through willfully or willingness to volunteer or complete a teen court sanctioned community service requirement, adolescents are exposed to opportunities for teamwork, intergenerational, interracial and inter-socioeconomic status interactions, and the creation of something positive in their community. The skills learned through participation in teen court programs, along with the newly gained knowledge and understanding of the legal and judicial systems, allows youth the opportunity to rethink their opinions and beliefs about delinquent behaviors and hopefully lead them to assume more socially acceptable attitudes and behaviors (Godwin, et al., 1996).

Diversion programs, such as teen court programming, may create less stigmatization than traditional legal action. Diversion programs also offer quicker action through the process of rehabilitation as opposed to the long wait for sentencing through traditional juvenile court systems (Whitebread & Heilman, 1988). Another sentiment that is noted in most youth court programs is “we like you but not your behavior” (Peterson, 2009). This type of programming is based on youth empowerment. A noteworthy component of teen court programming is that it provides youth offenders a chance to learn that there are consequences for their actions (Pearson & Jurich, 2005).

Observational research and data collection show that teen court programs help youth offenders develop positive attitudes towards rules and authority (Peterson, 2009). A recent study released by George Washington University reported that local youth court programs across this country received 129,540 juvenile cases. Of those cases, 97,578 appeared in youth court and completed the required, peer-imposed sentence or consequence. This alternative programming helps to free up probation officers and judges so they can focus on more serious cases (Peterson, 2009).

One specific benefit of teen court programming is that upon successful completion of the sanction set forth by peers, the criminal record of the youth offender is expunged. Another benefit noted by Irons & Jones is that the teen is allowed to see the judicial system in a positive way (2001). Many youth, whether they volunteer to serve on teen courts or are meeting the obligations of their teen court sentences or sanctions, gain knowledge of the legal system through real life simulations (Office of Juvenile Justice Department Model Program Guide, n.d.).

A community suffers each time a crime is committed as the perception of safety and security is lowered with each crime (Godwin, et al., 1996). A distinct advantage of teen court programming involves interaction from the community. The African proverb “it takes a whole village to raise a child” can be applied to teen court programming because it allows community members to fill in where family members may have fallen short. Community members can step in and volunteer at various steps in the teen court process or be available for assistance at community service sites throughout the community. The level to which community members are involved in teen court programming may vary considerably between each program. Communities with teen courts also have the opportunity to see young people assume leadership roles both within the teen court program process and outside in the community (Godwin, et al., 1996). When youth are given this opportunity they are more likely to feel connected to their communities and will not want to see them negatively affected by crime.

Youth are also given the opportunity to assert responsibility for themselves, as they are responsible for completing sanctions without someone completely arranging it for them. This may include participating in training to become a member of the peer jury, participating in teen court proceedings and completing community service hours within a specific time frame. This

sends a message of trust to the youth, as the program coordinators trust their decisions as members of the teen jury (Godwin, et al., 1996).

### **Disadvantages of a Teen Court Program**

Until youth find their place in the social hierarchy, they tend to experiment with risk-taking behaviors including the commission of crimes. A majority of youth will discontinue these antisocial behaviors in adulthood (Kambam & Thompson, 2009). Because of the likelihood that most adolescents will outgrow potentially criminal behavior, data on the reduction in recidivism rates may be a naturally occurring phenomenon.

In order for a teen court to run smoothly and effectively, the program's coordinator and many volunteers must invest many hours. Many programs utilize the good will of area attorneys, court staff (clerk of courts, deputy clerk of courts, bailiff, etc.), and county judges in order to operate.

Time can also be seen as a limiting factor as many agencies and organizations are being stretched to their limits with existing programs. Beginning a new program may consume a considerable amount of a program coordinator's time. Relationship building is a large component that may be overlooked by funders and the community. According to Nancy [Miller] of Vilas County UW-Extension Teen Court Coordinator, as quoted in the American Bar Association Youth Cases for Youth Courts Desktop Guide, "Don't be discouraged if people don't agree at first...it's the relationship building throughout the entire community, and that takes time" (2006).

Cost may be a prohibitive factor if grants cannot be secured and county funding is not available to adequately meet the needs of the coordinating organization or agency.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to identify common trends within current, county-based teen court programs in Wisconsin in order to offer suggestions to counties that wish to implement a teen court program. This research study was developed as a way to collect data on what things were currently happening in teen court programs throughout the state of Wisconsin. This data could then be presented to local stakeholders in an effort to start a teen court program in a rural county in northwestern Wisconsin.

#### **Selection of Participants**

Participants were not asked to share personal information. They were only asked to share professional opinions regarding the current teen court programming efforts in their county. Because the intent of this research paper was to put forth recommendations for future teen court programs as well as provide data for potential stakeholders in a specific county, the sample only included county-based teen court programs. Nancy Anne Miller, Wisconsin Teen Court Association President, was instrumental in creating a list of participants that met the above noted specifics. Her support staff emailed a list of current county-based teen court programs with each coordinator's name and program mailing address. The investigator transferred this information into a word document that was converted to mailing labels.

In Wisconsin, during May 2011, twenty-eight county-based teen court program coordinators were sent a cover letter (Appendix A) with implied consent information therein, a survey (Appendix B), and a pre-addressed stamped envelope with sender and recipient locations on the envelope. Upon completion of the survey, respondents were instructed to mail the survey in the pre-addressed stamped envelope to the University of Wisconsin Extension office in Washburn County. Upon receipt of the survey, support staff were instructed to remove the

envelope and place the survey in a file folder in a locked drawer. The envelopes were shredded so no identifiable data could be collected. Data from the surveys was counted and analyzed during July of 2011.

### **Instrument Used for Data Collection**

A survey was created to collect data in a timely manner. The first three questions utilized open-ended questions that allowed the respondent to provide as much or as little data as desired. This prevented the investigator from assuming answers to any given response. Results from the literature review presented many different answers to the first question on the survey. The second part of the first question asked why the program was created. This information could prove worthy to a county that is interested in starting a teen court program but does not yet know who to charge with the coordination of the program.

The second question served as a way to assess concerns about a program coordinator's time and energy relative to how many youth would be served.

The third question allowed for multiple responses related to the variety of juvenile offenders accepted by the teen court program. The literature review provided a wide scope of potential offenses viewed as acceptable by different teen court programs. Information from this question could provide worthy information for a new program.

Questions four, five, and six were offered as multiple-choice questions with an option to write in a response if desired. Question four provided more detail related to the agency that provides oversight, including staff funding, for the current teen court program. Question six sought to answer the question of whether or not current county-based programs were utilizing this model of programming.

Questions seven, eight, and nine offered open-ended questions. Question seven sought to answer a funding related question. The eighth and ninth questions attempted to offer suggestions for starting future programs based on successes of other programs in Wisconsin. The survey participants also described some of the challenges these programs were experiencing.

Question eleven utilized the Likert scale to rate the current effectiveness of the program. Questions thirteen and fourteen asked open-ended questions related to community involvement and the benefits of the program to the community. The literature suggested that the community must see benefits and be involved in some way for there to be an effective teen court program.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

A fourteen-question survey was administered to a list of county-based teen court program coordinators provided by Nancy Anne Miller, Wisconsin Teen Court Association President. The program names and addresses were converted into a document and address labels were created.

A copy of the cover letter explaining risks and benefits of completing the survey, including a statement of implied consent, and instructions for completing the survey were included in an envelope with the survey along with a pre-addressed, stamped envelope for which to return the completed survey. The completed surveys in the return envelope were to be sent to the University of Wisconsin-Extension office in Washburn County.

### **Data Analysis**

Both the researcher and staff members from the Planning, Assessment, Research and Quality office at University of Wisconsin-Stout analyzed data. Susan Greene and her graduate student, Andrew, looked at the data and offered suggestions for compiling and analyzing results in this paper. The result of this step is increased validity of data highlighted in the results section of this paper.

**Limitations**

Due to the small number of surveys returned, it was suggested to tabulate the results by hand instead of utilizing a statistical analysis tool on the computer or pay a third party to tabulate the results. This study lacks reliability, as it is only one study conducted in one place during one time period with no piloting or reproduction.

## **Chapter IV: Results**

Teen court programs vary greatly between the different counties in the state of Wisconsin. This study aimed to gather best practices data of current county-based teen court programs in Wisconsin. Paper surveys were mailed to programs identified by Nancy Anne Miller, Wisconsin Teen Court Association President. The paper survey was accompanied by a postage-paid return envelope that was to be sent to the Washburn County University of Wisconsin Extension Office where the envelope and any identifiable information were removed by trained support staff. Twelve completed surveys were collected for a return rate of 43%, which is considered within an acceptable range. The United States Postal Service returned one survey as undeliverable mail.

### **Cornerstone of Programming**

Almost half (45.4%) of all currently operating county-based teen court programs in Wisconsin (whose program coordinator returned the survey by the end of May, 2011) were started by the Youth Development Educator/Agent housed within University of Wisconsin-Extension. A County Judge or District Attorney started 27.3% of the teen court programs surveyed. Professionals or collaborative groups started 27.3% of the programs. One survey did not show a response to the first question.

Many different reasons for starting programs were given to answer the second part of the first question. Most responses (38.4%) stated that previous programs were not effectively serving the needs of youth offenders. Prevention of juvenile offenses was mentioned 15.4% of the time as a reason teen court programs were created. Giving youth offenders a second chance and creating an opportunity to educate youth offenders were both mentioned the same amount of



times (15.4% of responses each). High recidivism was cited on 15.4% of the surveys as a reason to create a teen court program.

Programs are facilitated by different agencies. The survey allowed responses from six different options plus the inclusion of an “other” category. Table 1 outlines responses to this question. Three main trends were identified and inclusion of the option to write in a response allowed for greater data to be collected. Responses not significant enough to be considered a trend were combined and included in the other category. They include school district, teen court steering committee, and juvenile justice committee.

*Table 1.*  
*Agencies providing oversight for teen court programming.*

Response	Frequency (N=15)	Percentage
UW-Extension	6	40.0%
Non-profit agency	2	13.3%
County judicial center	3	20.0%
Other	4	26.7%

Crimes described in Table 2 were sorted into four main categories: crimes against others, crimes against self, crimes related to school or community rules, and crimes related to other crimes. Crimes against self include offenses that resulting in the poor decisions made by the offender based on laws created to protect them. Crimes against others were sorted into this category as they might have involved a victim or evidence. Crimes related to other crimes were assigned to this category as they did not fit into any other category, but the frequency of reporting on the surveys was significant. Survey results that lacked the frequency of the above mentioned responses were compiled in the other category. They include non-violent crimes,

traffic violations, obstruction (cited three times), unlawful use of a computer/phone, littering (cited two times), fireworks violations, telephone or computer harassment, false reporting, riding bike/skateboard on sidewalk, criminal negligence, cruelty to animals, threats/intimidation, school policy violations, vandalism (cited two times), bullying, DNR violations (cited two times), and receiving or concealing stolen property.

Table 2  
*Eligible Juvenile Offenses*

Response	Frequency (N=77)	Percentage
Crimes against self: Alcohol/tobacco/illegal drug violations/truancy/curfew violations	26	33.8%
Crimes against others: Trespassing/damage to property/shoplifting/theft	21	27.3%
Crimes related to other crimes: Disorderly conduct	8	10.4%
Other	22	28.5%

The results of this study found that of ten recipients who answered this question, five utilized the youth model and one utilized peer panels. Two of the ten programs surveyed utilized the adult model. Two of the ten recipients wrote that their programs utilized the peer jury model. One recipient used the tribunal model.

Survey results showed that 100% of the programs utilize restorative teen court programming. This was the only instance when 100% of surveys echoed the same message.

On average, according to the surveys, teen court programming consumed 11 hours of time per week. This number was reached by totaling the number of hours each survey reported to spend on teen court programming during an average week divided by the number of respondents who answered this question (N=12). Some counties provided a range of hours worked. When this occurred, the investigator chose to select the higher of the two numbers half the time and the

lower of the two numbers half the time. When surveys differentiated between a coordinator's time and volunteers' time, the investigator totaled the number of hours all program workers worked. The number of hours worked each week should be considered when looking at how many youth are being served by the program.

The average number of youth a county-based teen court program serves per month is 4.925, rounded to five youth per month. This is the average of the results of ten surveys. One survey was excluded from this average, as it did not fit the general pattern. The investigator determined the author of the survey provided the number of youth served per year instead of per month. Another survey did not provide a numeric figure that could be averaged, so it was not included in the data.

The results from the question, "Do you have grant(s) that currently fund teen court programming in your county?" showed that eight of 14 surveys, (57.1%) showed "no" to this question. Of the six remaining surveys that indicated "yes" to this question, four different responses were provided: (1) fundraising (2) local grant/donation from community club (3) Safe & Stable Family grant (4) local foundation.

Table 3 presents responses from survey participants regarding types of support and services county stakeholders provided to their county teen court programs. Data indicates that referral, volunteer, and funded personnel supports were the most common services provided to teen court programs. Some respondents indicated that county stakeholders also provided financial support, training and referrals for jury members. Counties also provided assistance from the departments of Human Services along with office of the District Attorney. When Native American communities were present support was also provided by them. Law firms were also utilized.

Table 3

*Type of support stakeholders provide local teen court programs. (N=110)*

	Financial support	Funded personnel support	Volunteer personnel support	Referral support	Other (please explain)	Does not apply
County judge(s)	0.0%	1.8%	3.6%	7.3%	0.9%	0.9%
Juvenile Justice Officer(s)	0.0%	0.9%	0.9%	9.1%	0.0%	1.8%
School Liaison	0.0%	0.9%	2.7%	9.1%	0.0%	0.9%
Sherriff's Department	0.0%	0.9%	1.8%	8.2%	0.0%	12.7%
School Districts	1.8%	0.9%	6.3%	7.3%	0.9%	0.0%
City Police Departments	0.0%	0.9%	2.7%	9.1%	0.9%	0.9%
Other (please describe)						
Human Services	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Law Firms	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%
Native American Community	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%
District Attorney/Judge	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%
County	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Civic Organizations	1.8%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Steering Committee	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%
UW-Extension	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Adult Volunteers	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

### **Review of Existing Programs Effectiveness**

Table 4 shows successes celebrated by current county-based teen court programs in Wisconsin. The data collected from this survey question yields very valuable data as many programs must exhibit public value in many different ways. Other responses that were not

significant enough to be considered a trend included an increase in positive alternative youth development programming, youth feeling valued, and the creation of a stable funding source.

Table 4. *Successes in a Teen Court Program*

Response	Frequency (N=24)	Percentage
Reduced recidivism rate	3	12.5%
Increased school/community involvement	5	20.8%
Youth volunteer in community or with teen court	10	41.7%
Other	6	25%

Table 5 outlines challenges current teen court programs face. Funding was the most common challenge faced by teen court programs. Staff time and scheduling were tied for second most common challenge along with offenders not completing sanctions.

Table 5. *Challenges in a Teen Court Program*

Response	Frequency (N=14)	Percentage
Funding/financial support	4	28.6%
Staff time/scheduling	3	21.4%
Offenders not completing sanctions	3	21.4%
Lack of referrals	2	14.3%
Other	2	14.3%

Overall, 10 of 12 (83.3%) surveys showed that their programs were “as effective as possible.” Two of 12 (16.7%) surveys showed their programs were “very effective.” No other options on this Likert-style scale question were selected.

Table 6 identifies seven different ways that county-based teen court programs involve their communities. Multiple responses were allowed.

Table 6. *Ways Communities are Involved in Teen Court Programming*

Response	Frequency (N=21)	Percentage (99.9%)
Serve on advisory board	4	19.0%
Volunteers	7	33.3%
Funding by community groups	2	9.5%
Educational programming offered through community	1	4.8%
Provide community service opportunities for youth	3	14.3%
In-kind donations	2	9.5%
Refer youth to program	2	9.5%

Table 7 outlines different ways communities may benefit from having teen court programs. Responses in the other category included the restoration of relationships and a decrease in juvenile crime and recidivism.

Table 7. *Ways Communities Benefit from Teen Court Programming*

Response	Frequency (N=20)	Percentage
Community service	4	20.0%
Community sees youth as responsible citizens	4	20.0%
Saves money/court time	3	15.0%
Second chance program	5	25.0%
Youth learn about legal system	2	10.0%
Other	2	10.0%

## **Chapter V: Discussion**

The purpose of this research paper was to compile resources related to current county-based teen court programs operating in Wisconsin during May of 2011. Twenty-eight county coordinators were encouraged by Nancy Anne Miller, Wisconsin Association of Teen Court President, to complete the fourteen-question survey and mail the completed survey to the University of Wisconsin Extension office in Washburn County using the pre-addressed stamped envelope. The survey was created after an extensive literature review revealed little data related to county-based teen court programs in the areas addressed on the survey. Twelve of the twenty-eight surveys were returned and analyzed. The results were tabulated by the investigator and again by a graduate student working with the Planning, Assessment, Research and Quality office on the University of Wisconsin-Stout campus.

### **Limitations**

Limitations for this study include the limited geographical area selected. The study was also limited to county-based teen court programs as a way to provide recommendations to other county-based teen court programs. County-based programs are different from school-based or municipality-based teen court programs in a variety of ways.

### **Conclusions**

This research paper provides some answers to important questions for someone interested in starting a teen court program in his/her county. The Office of Juvenile Justice Department Model Program Guide revealed four different styles of teen court programming with the most common method listed first, as defined in the introduction of this paper: adult judge model, peer jury model, youth judge model, and tribunal (n.d.). This information will allow a potential teen court program coordinator to select a model common in Wisconsin as a way to gain resources

(tips and suggestions) from other programs. The effectiveness of similar programs should be viewed as a way of evaluating one's own program or potential program. Viewing another program's successes and challenges can yield perspective and new ideas.

Survey data revealed that program coordinators worked an average of 11 hours per week. Survey data also revealed that an average of five youth served per month. Given these numbers, it took an average of 8.8 hours per month per youth to reduce recidivism rates. Starting a program requires a significant amount of time, energy, and volunteers, but the availability of funding is also critical.

According to the U.S. Justice Policy Institute website, the average cost to hold a youth in a post-adjudicative, residential facility is \$240 per day (n.d.). Comparing programs at that rate, teen court programming only costs \$88.00 per youth versus \$240, for a cost savings of \$152 per youth per day. In addition to providing positive experiences for teen offenders and reducing recidivism, teen court programs could provide great cost savings. The literature review suggested that overall programs were cost-effective, but funding was not always delegated to sustain these programs.

Grant funding can offer some security when county budgets are being scaled back. Obtaining funding is often a time-consuming and uncertain element of teen court programming. Sustainability is important, yet many of the programs surveyed do not utilize grant money to sustain their programs. The researcher found that few programs rely on grants for funding, so their partners must find great value in the programs in order to back them financially. One reason for the lack of grant funding is the fact that grant writing is time consuming. Grant money also releases some ownership of the program to the grant funder. Receiving grant funding may



require the program coordinator to collect data and track specific outcomes, both time-consuming activities.

A key component to consider before starting a teen court program is the time commitment required to sustain a program and how many offenders can be served. Stakeholders, supporters and other professionals are needed to ensure a successful program.

Community involvement is an important component to the sustainability of any non-mandated program. A community that gets involved in programming also benefits in a variety of ways.

As the review of literature revealed, teen court programs offer youth a second chance to develop positive skills and pro-social behaviors. Surveys showed that successes in their programs included the number of opportunities youth offenders had for a second chance. A program's effectiveness ebbed and flowed based on the number of current offenders being accepted and how many of them completed their sanctions on time.

One important item to note was a comment received on one of the surveys identifying a preference for the term "youthful offenders" to be used instead of "juvenile delinquent." A review of literature revealed the use of both terms to describe the population served by teen court programs. Up-to-date information was utilized when possible, and the language on the survey attempted to reflect a standardized language throughout. Therefore, the term "juvenile delinquents" was used. This was not intended to offend anyone but to keep language consistent in the survey in order to facilitate quick completion with the least amount of uncertainty.

## **Recommendations**

Future research related to teen court programming could be done for all teen court programs in Wisconsin by expanding research to municipality- or school-based programs. More

detailed questions could be asked to better understand the economic impact of teen court programs in Wisconsin. Youthful offender recidivism rates could be collected by program coordinators and compared to other states' programming efforts. A study could be conducted regarding the type, purpose, and amount of paperwork that is completed by each program in an effort to standardize forms for referral agencies that work between multiple counties. A study could be conducted related to how families are affected by youthful offenders. These actions could be analyzed in an effort to create educational opportunities to strengthen families.

Many factors must be considered before starting a teen court program including a clear list of offenses that make youthful offenders eligible for inclusion in a teen court program.

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**Appendix A: *Survey Consent Form***  
**UW-Stout Implied Consent Statement**  
**for Research Involving Human Subjects**

**Consent to Participate In UW-Stout Approved Research**

**Title:** Current, County Based, Teen Court Programming in Wisconsin: Recommendations for Future Programs

**Investigator:**

Beth Johnson  
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**Research Sponsor:**

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**Description:**

This research study aims to collect data from current Teen Court Programs throughout Wisconsin in order to fill the gap in information related to starting up a Teen Court Program in a county in northwestern Wisconsin. This survey will require historical and demographic information about the current programming efforts of county-based Teen Court Programs. The information requested, through this survey, is public knowledge that does not include identifiable information.

**Risks and Benefits:**

Every situation comes with risks; however, very little risk is involved with the completion of this survey. The benefits to the subject include the collective contribution to improving the state of Teen Court Programming in Wisconsin through the sharing of ideas and good practices.

**Time Commitment:**

This survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete depending of the degree of knowledge the subject has to reference from paperwork or other colleagues.

**Confidentiality:**

This survey does not require or include any space to provide identifiable information. One's name will not be included on any documents. We do not believe that any subject can be identified from any of this information. No identifiable information can be traced back to the subject as return envelopes will be discarded as they are received.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participants may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences. Participants have the right to stop the survey at any time. However, should a participant choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify one's anonymous document after it has been turned into the investigator.

**IRB Approval:**

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

**Investigator:**

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**Statement of Consent:**

By completing the following survey you agree to participate in the project entitled, Current, County Based, Teen Court Programming in Wisconsin: Recommendations for Future Programs.

### Appendix B: Survey

## Current, County Based, Teen Court Programming in Wisconsin: Recommendations for Future Programs

This project has been reviewed by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46

Thank you for agreeing to complete this confidential survey; by completing this survey you are implying consent to use your answers when compiled with other surveys to make recommendations for future Teen Court Programs.

Please answer the following short answer questions to the best of your ability. If you do not know the answer to a question please ask someone who might know the answer.

1. What was the title/position of the individual who started the current teen court program you work with? What were the reasons the program was created?
2. How many juvenile delinquents utilize your program in an average month?
3. What juvenile offenses are eligible for your teen court program?

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability by checking the box(es) that best match your type of programming.

4. What agency(ies) currently provides oversight for your teen court programming? Check all that apply:
 

<input type="checkbox"/> UW-Extension	<input type="checkbox"/> school district	<input type="checkbox"/> private for-profit agency
<input type="checkbox"/> non-profit agency	<input type="checkbox"/> County Health & Human Services	<input type="checkbox"/> county judicial center
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		
5. What model of programming does your program utilize? Choose one.
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Tribunal	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth model	<input type="checkbox"/> Adult model	<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please describe
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6. Does your program utilize restorative teen court programming? Choose one.
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Unsure
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Please answer the following short answer questions to the best of your ability. If you do not know the answer to a question please ask someone who might know the answer.

7. Do you have grant(s) that currently fund teen court programming in your county? If so please list.
8. What successes (what has been working) in your current teen court program?



9. What challenges (has not been working) in your current teen court program?

10. On an average/typical week, how much time does the staff spend on teen court programming?

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability by checking the box(es) that best match your type of programming.

11. Overall, how effectively would you rate your current teen court program?

Very effective	As effective as possible	Somewhat effective	Not as effective as possible	Not at all effective

12. What type(s) of support does your program currently have? Please check all that apply.

	Financial support	Funded personnel support	Volunteer personnel support	Referral support	Other (please explain)	Does not apply
County judge(s)						
Juvenile Justice Officer(s)						
School Liaison						
Sherriff's Department						
School Districts						
City Police Departments						
Other (please describe)						

Please answer the following short answer questions to the best of your ability. If you do not know the answer to a question please ask someone who might know the answer.

13. How is the community currently involved in your teen court program?

14. How has the community benefited from having a teen court program?