

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What exactly is Teen Court?

Teen Court is a diversion program that strives to help juvenile offenders take responsibility for their actions, increase awareness of the law, and promote community involvement by providing volunteer opportunities to both youth and adults.

2. How long has Teen Court of Tallahassee been around?

Leon County's Teen Court program was established in 1992 but the first hearing was not held until the Spring of 1993. The first Teen Court in Florida was held in Sarasota in 1988.

3. What do the volunteers get from coming to Teen Court?

Volunteers earn community service hours while gaining an understanding and appreciation for how the law works.

4. What do the defendants get from coming to Teen Court?

The defendants in Teen Court are offered a chance to complete sanctions that are determined by their peers. Completing the sanctions successfully allows the state attorney to drop the original charge(s) in their court case.

5. What is the most rewarding outcome of your job in Teen Court?

The most rewarding thing is seeing our defendants complete the program successfully. Statistics show that defendants that complete the Teen Court program are less likely to re-offend than those put through the traditional courts. But it is equally rewarding to see our teen volunteers grow in empathy and improve their analytical thinking and public speaking skills.

6. What happens if a defendant does not complete the sanctions given by the jury?

If a defendant does not to complete the sanctions, then he or she will fail the Teen Court program and the case is returned to the State Attorney's office. Usually, they will have to proceed judicially, through regular juvenile court proceedings.

7. What would you say to someone who is interested in volunteering in Teen Court?

There are many benefits to volunteering with Teen Court! In addition to obtaining service-learning credit, our volunteers are learning about the legal system and gaining experience with public speaking and negotiating. Volunteers are also able to network with members of the community, including volunteer judges, volunteer attorneys, and the bailiffs that preside over the hearings. Teen Court is a wonderful asset to any scholarship, college, or job application!

8. What are the "Officer" positions?

Officers are the volunteers that serve as attorneys, clerks, and bailiffs. These roles are primarily for high school students. Sometimes we will have middle school bailiffs.

9. How long do volunteers have to train to become an officer?

To become a teen attorney, you must be in high school and have served on a jury at least 3 times. Then you will "shadow" the current attorneys until you are comfortable with the job. We will then ease you into the role by giving you one job at a time (opening statements for a few days, then questioning, closing, etc.). The time frame is different for everyone depending on their comfort level, maturity, and speaking skills.

10. How can you help others through Teen Court?

By volunteering your time and efforts in Teen Court, you are impacting other youth's experiences through the judicial process. From helping to determine a defendant's sanctions to arguing in defense of the defendant, your active participation has real and meaningful effects.