



# COMMUNITY JUSTICE REPORT

Newsletter of the  
Pennsylvania Council  
on Community Youth  
Aid Panels

Community Justice Report:

Spring 2007

## Keys to Youth Aid Panel Success

Lower Merion Township boasts four busy and successful YAPs, serving two separate police districts and youths from 19 different schools. The challenge of tackling a busy caseload while striving for successful outcomes and low recidivism rates can be daunting at times. Equally challenging is working to ensure a unified and well-informed group of community volunteers across four panels. Clearly, each panel maintains a style and personality unique to its members; yet, it is important to ensure that all of the panels remain consistent in representing the goals and protocols of the YAP program. To achieve this unification, Lower Merion Twp. has taken steps towards this goal. The steps are outlined as follows:

**Dissemination of Information/ Distribution of Materials**—All four panels share a common meeting room in which a filing cabinet is maintained. This enables the executive chair to distribute written materials (i.e. articles, forms, pamphlets) and share resources (i.e. books, CD's, DVD's), which may be used by any of the panels to craft unique, individualized resolutions for the youths.

**Communication**—This is the key to succeeding in the sharing of information. All panelists are part of an

email list to facilitate prompt communication of issues related to community service sites, township issues, policies, YAP updates, and to expedite the handling of new cases.

### Interaction Between Panelists

Ideally, the more interaction that occurs between panelists, the more they realize that they are an integral part of a larger team. Encouraging this interaction also helps to share ideas, frustrations, challenges and successes. It also provides a healthy outlet to give each other new insights and ways of dealing with one's own issues.

**Creativity**—Think outside the box! One key to making a resolution effective is to be mindful of the particular person and situation before the panel. Not all agreements need to be the same or similar—on the contrary, they *should* be different. Share your creative ideas with other panels and encourage new types of resolutions.

**Stay Informed**—It is essential that all panel members stay informed about the particular rules, changes, and trends within our communities. It is also helpful to be aware of school and community-wide events (i.e. dances, proms, graduation, vacation schedules). This will certainly aid

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*PCCYAP: Upholding Balanced and Restorative Justice Principles*

- Youth Redemption
- Community Protection
- Victim Restoration

*Editor's Note: "Keys to Youth Aid Panel Success" was submitted by Ryan Kolb, Montgomery County YAP Coordinator, and written by Cary E. Moritz, Executive Chair from Lower Merion Twp.*

## A Note from the Secretary By Laurie Hague

When Berks County Juvenile Probation decided to get into the Community Youth Aid Panel business in 1999, we did not have to look far for help. After a few phone calls, I found myself attending a meeting in Lehigh County with a group of professionals who were working in the field and who had already planned and held two trainings for YAP volunteers and professionals. While the initial purpose of this group was to organize these trainings, the membership and focus had already begun to evolve.

Throughout the conference planning process, the attendees discovered that this was a great forum for discussion about the individual programs. The members of this group quickly took me “under their wing” and started me down the YAP road. They offered guidance, training and support as we developed our Berks County program. In addition to these meetings, I was invited to attend panel meetings and trainings in many Pennsylvania counties. From these visits, Berks County was able to develop a program. While all programs are similar, all have their own unique aspects.

It was this group that has become known as PCCYAP. I am proud to be in my second term as Secretary of this organization and to be able to help newer counties develop and maintain their programs.

As I look back over the minutes of these meetings, starting with my first meeting in January 2000, the group has accomplished many things. In addition to several statewide trainings, members of PCCYAP helped develop the “Best Practice Guidelines for Crime Victim Participation in Community Justice Panels within Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Justice System,” developed policy standards for panel programs, implemented PCCYAP By-Laws, presented at numerous conferences, developed a PCCYAP newsletter, and continue to help new areas establish panel programs.

If you are interested in developing a Youth Aid Panel Program in your jurisdiction or have an established program but have not had the opportunity to join this group, I invite you to begin attending the PCCYAP meetings. Feel free to contact me at the Berks County Juvenile Probation Department at 610-478-3200 for meeting information or questions.

*About Ms. Hague—She has worked for Berks JPO for 17 1/2 years, and in 1999 was promoted to Assistant Chief Juvenile Probation Officer. She supervises 9 probation officers and oversees the YAP Program, Community Service Department, Probation Officer training and the Detention Risk Assessment project. She also is the department’s liaison for several community committees. Laurie has a bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice and a Master’s degree in Public Administration.*



“To save one life is to save the world.” —  
from the Jewish Talmud

“He drew a circle to shut me out.  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win.  
We drew a circle that took him in.”—  
Edwin Markham

## Panel Member Testimonials

*submitted by Michael Lukac, Fayette County Juvenile Probation Officer*



**Tina Wolford:** I am a senior at Penn State graduating with a degree in Administration of Justice in May 2007. The experience and knowledge that I have gained has been very beneficial to me in both my school work and as a resident of Fayette County. Being a Youth Commission member has also given me first hand experience in dealing with the offender and their family, as well as teaching me what goes on behind the scenes.

**Larry Fetsko:** Ever since I met up with Mike at Penn State Eberly Campus my life has changed. I was already interested in working with kids so the Commission really interested me. I was a little nervous when I first joined, but . . . the other volunteers were the nicest group of people you could ask for. The Youth Commission educated me a lot on troubled youth and how to properly teach them to make better decisions. I got a lot of education from Penn State but I got all the hands on education from the Youth Commission. . .

**Jamie Pinkney:** It's been a rewarding experience; one I would recommend to anyone who would like to give back to the community while having their lives enriched by making a difference in the lives of young people.

**Michelle Matthews & Donna Moore:** We have been with the Youth Commission since its inception. The idea of volunteering your time is not one that all people can afford to do, but Donna and I both agree that the experiences we have encountered are very much worth the

time we have spent being members of the youth commission. It always amazes us that the children in our area can come from such diverse backgrounds and still have the same problems. There have been many children and young adults come up to us once they've completed the program and say that they appreciate the fact that we took the time to help them. We had to learn early on that "you can't save them all." Even with this unfortunate fact, the ones we are able to help enable us to keep in mind that we can help some.

**Matthew Thomas:** I have been a member of the commission for eight or nine years. Success and failure are part of the process, but you can't allow yourself to be detoured by the failures. The first person I was to supervise lasted five days after his hearing. He had stolen a car and was caught driving the car while possessing a firearm and drinking beer. I guess if you're going to screw up, screw up BIG. On the positive side, the last person I supervised completed successfully and was the first youth to go through the program to attend college. [They] had the same opportunity; one took advantage of [it] and the other sunk deeper into the juvenile justice system. As a whole we have many more successes than failures. Mike has assembled a group of volunteers who have many talents and professions, but the one thing that connects the entire group is the desire to help someone, in this case a young person who has made a mistake and hopefully wants to make a change in their life.

**Lyn Andalar:** I enjoy volunteering for the Youth Commission! The Juvenile Probation Office continues to educate and inform us of the many concerns of the young people. This training has helped me with the young people we are involved with through the Y.C. and has benefited me in raising my own children. Someone that cares and is willing to listen is often what the youths are looking for. Being aware of what to listen for and equipped with the tools to help is what the volunteer needs. Having the youth not re-offend and being productive with their life is our goal. Having it all come together . . . .  
sweet music!!!

*Editor's Note: Certain testimonials have been abbreviated to provide room for input from several panelists. Mr. Lukac is the Community Service and Youth Commission Coordinator for Fayette County Juvenile Probation.*

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## The Keys to Success

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the panel with designing a reasonable resolution that can be completed by the juvenile.

**Consistency**—Stay on the same page. Despite differences between panels, the basic information conveyed to families must remain consistent across the panels. Each panel represents one overall county YAP program, so the message we send and the results we strive for should be a common one.

**Community Awareness**—This element is two-sided—the panels should be informed about any issues in our community, and, yet, it is also important to let the community know about the YAP program and the important work we do. As often as is feasible, we must educate the local authorities, the media and community leaders about the existence of the program and the outcomes that our panels are able to accomplish.

**Appreciation**—With the many hours each panelist puts into the YAP commitment, it is important to recognize the dedication of our volunteers and to remember to continue to say, “THANK YOU!” We should not forget that it is the collective time and commitment of our community volunteers that enables our program to succeed.

Community Justice Report edited by Dwight Lichtenwalner, Lehigh County CJP Coordinator. For more information on PCCYAP, to become a volunteer, or to contribute a story, please contact Dwight at 610-966-6999, via email at [IMPACTDL@ptd.net](mailto:IMPACTDL@ptd.net), or contact your local PCCYAP member.

If you would like to be added to the newsletter mailing list, please email Dwight Lichtenwalner ([IMPACTDL@ptd.net](mailto:IMPACTDL@ptd.net)) with your preference of delivery (email or U.S. Postal Service). Be sure to include your name, organization, and address.