



# KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

IN SERVICE TO ONE. IN SERVICE TO ALL.

January 1, 2014

Charles County (Maryland) Teen Court is a juvenile justice diversion program in which first-time offenders between the ages of 11 and 17 are offered the opportunity to forgo the rigors of the court system, and voluntarily participate in a program where they, and their actions, are judged by a jury of their peers. The juveniles, referred to as respondents, are then given the chance to accept responsibility for their behavior (minor crimes) without incurring a permanent criminal record.

The program was designed to reduce the number of youthful offenders, ease the burden on the taxpayers with an already overcrowded criminal justice system, and educate the youthful offenders in a realistic court environment.

Teen Court was established in March 2001. Since then hundreds, if not thousands, of teens have participated, and in so doing have positively changed their behavior.

The beauty of Teen Court is that there are two sides to every coin. At the opposite end of the Teen Court spectrum, the program also provides teens interested in the criminal justice system with the opportunity to learn about the judicial process, and to assist their peers who have gone astray.

Teen Court cases are actual cases in which arrests have been made or traffic citations issued, and typically include, although are not limited to: theft, assault, driving violations, disorderly conduct, affrays, etc. Participation in the program is voluntary; however, teens are required to plead guilty. The Teen Court is based upon the philosophy that when a respondent's peers decide punishment, the youthful offenders will avoid future violations of the law. Via this informal means of adjudication, first-time offenders are offered the opportunity to restore relationships with and in their communities, have the resources to improve upon their decision-making, and learn valuable lessons regarding responsibility. Respondents then avoid the stigma of formal, permanent juvenile records, and can focus on fulfilling sanctions determined by a jury of their peers.

Once a case is heard, the teen jurors, who number between thirty (30) and sixty (60) per year, determine a suitable sanction which is reviewed with the respondent and his/her parents by the Teen Court Coordinator. The Respondent then signs a contract, and agrees to complete the



imposed sanctions within an allotted time frame. If completed successfully, no further action is taken. Sanctions vary according to the offense though typically involve future participation on a Teen Court jury. Sanctions may also include an apology letter, community service, a research paper, a project regarding prevention/education, informal in-school probation, and ride-alongs with Emergency Medical Services.

Teen Court is but one service which falls under the auspices of the Charles County Sheriff's Office. Since March 2008, Sarah E. Vaughan has been the Teen Court Coordinator. Sarah works in the office from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. However, in order to accommodate respondents who would otherwise be in school, Teen Court convenes from 5:45 to 8:00 p.m. every other Thursday evening.

Sarah reviews all juvenile cases for the Charles County Sheriff's Office. Those cases include traffic, criminal, alcohol, and tobacco-related offenses. If another agency in Charles County (Maryland State Police, Maryland Transit Authority, and the La Plata Police Department) charges a juvenile, Sarah is immediately contacted by the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) so that those case(s) may be reviewed.

Sarah organizes all who participate, the least of who are the adult volunteers that typically act as judges. Sarah ensures the adult volunteers are at least 18 years of age, successfully pass a Charles County Sheriff's Office background investigation, demonstrate maturity and sensitivity, and exhibit an ability to work closely with teenagers.

While the bailiffs' duties may be performed by adult volunteers, bailiffs are usually cadets, culled by Sarah from the training academy.

As coordinator, Sarah is solely responsible for ensuring the respondents and teen jurors arrive in a timely fashion, and that each individual is properly attired (decorum, much like that in the District and Circuit Courts, dictates that individuals wear proper business attire). Sarah also schedules personnel to provide security for the courtrooms to prevent the introduction of prohibited items, as the safety of all is paramount.

Teen Court is conducted in three (3) courtrooms. Sarah must assign respondents, teen jurors, bailiffs to maintain order, and judges to each courtroom. Three (3) to four (4) cases are presented in each courtroom, and each may last up to 45 minutes. Sarah must work between each of the courtrooms ensuring continuity that parents of the respondents wait patiently and don't interfere with the process or speak for their children. Parents who do have concerns must contact the bailiffs who inform the coordinator at which time Sarah answers questions and addresses issues. Aside from the many, many juveniles with whom Sarah interacts, she supervises seven (7) judges, three (3) exit interviewers, and seven (7) adult moderators.

Sarah's duties and responsibilities don't stop there. As previously referenced, sanctions require respondents to serve as jurors in future Teen Courts, and serves as a means by which to reduce or eliminate recidivism. Sarah must schedule their participation to ensure the respondents fulfill the obligations of their sanctions.



Over the past five (5) years, Sarah has managed approximately 900 cases (number of respondents: 182 in 2008; 209 in 2009; 161 in 2010; 177 in 2011; and 178 in 2012). Teen Court expected approximately two hundred (200) respondents for 2013.

Additionally, Sarah coordinates field trips for Teen Court participants. Past field trip locations included the National Museum of Crime and Punishment (Washington, D.C.), the National Aquarium (Baltimore, Maryland), and visits to Mount Vernon, Virginia. Each spring, Sarah manages a conference to which ten (10) Teen Court volunteers are chosen to attend the Maryland Law Day Conference in Baltimore, Maryland. During this conference, teens from across Maryland meet and learn about laws. Sarah also coordinates Teen Court lectures in which guest speakers are invited to make presentations, discuss careers in law enforcement, and present topics such as personal well-being and managing stress. Sarah also maintains records associated with community service because Teen Court participants (jurors) are awarded four (4) hours of community service which may be applied to school and/or church confirmation obligations.

No matter the public's involvement in Teen Court, its services are offered free of charge. Sarah occupies the only paid position. All expenses are paid for by grants, donations, and fundraisers. Sarah coordinates these events, and is regularly associated with Pizza Hotline (monthly fundraisers), Chick-Fil-A, The Greene Turtle, and the Greater Waldorf Jaycees which, in 2011, was so impressed by Sarah and the Teen Court program, that the Waldorf Jaycees added the Teen Court to its plan of action for a monetary yearly contribution, and once a year graciously donates its facility and dinner during the annual Teen Court banquet.

Sarah is also responsible for a variety of outreach programs each designed to provide awareness regarding the adverse consequences associated with delinquent and criminal behavior. Sarah visits Just Say No Clubs at local elementary schools, and distributes Teen Court literature during middle and high school lunch periods (Sarah works with 21 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, and 6 high schools). Sarah speaks at summer camps, churches, and homeowner association meetings. Sarah also makes career day presentations, offers free lectures to parents and teens, and hosts mother/daughter activities.

As if Sarah's previously described commitment to our youth hasn't been enough, Sarah recently initiated a program to further the development of our youth, and in particular, young men. Sarah aptly named this program the "Saturday Boys Workout Boot Camp." Sarah, in cooperation with Longevity Studios in La Plata, Maryland, which is a health and wellness organization that provides training and education to assist individuals, developed a program to introduce teenage boys to healthy lifestyles. Longevity Studios' certified trainers work with small groups of young men, and over a five (5) week period, encourages its youthful participants to engage in a beneficial routine which includes proper diet and exercise. Neither Sarah, nor Longevity Studios, charges the individuals for training or participation.

Finally, over the last three (3) years, Sarah has coordinated the Charles County Sheriff's Office Tobacco Compliance Check Program (TCCP). Sarah identifies trustworthy 15 to 17 year old teenagers who are trained to work with the Charles County Sheriff's Office Alcohol Enforcement Unit (AEU), and attempt to purchase tobacco products to ensure local business are in compliance with laws which regulate the sale of tobacco products.



Sarah has enjoyed a host of other accomplishments. In 2008, Sarah sold a large volume of Special Olympics t-shirts, and played an integral part in the Charles County Sheriff's Office which was the top fundraiser in the State of Maryland with \$19,011.50. In 2009, Sarah assisted the March of Dimes, and arranged for Teen Court volunteers to sell cookbooks, stuffed animals, and calendars. Sarah and her teens also sold Christmas ornaments, and decorated the Hospice Tree. They donated \$712.00 to Charles County Hospice which was enough for the Charles County Sheriff's Office to buy back the tree it donated. In 2009, Sarah partnered with the Charles County Community Mediation Center with a mutual goal to find a means by which to incorporate mediation referrals to Teen Court. Also in 2009, Sheriff Rex W. Coffey, Charles County Sheriff's Office, nominated Sarah for Working Woman of the Year because of her work with the agency as a Police Communications Officer, Teen Court Coordinator, and participation in the Federal Bureau of Investigation Citizen Academy, and as a volunteer in the community with the Special Olympics, March of Dimes, and American Cancer Society. Additionally in 2009, Sarah and her Teen Court youth made generous contributions to the Saint Vincent DePaul Food Pantry at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in La Plata, Maryland, and participated in the Stoddert Middle School Community Clean-Up. Finally, between 2010 and 2012, Sarah received any number of Certificates of Appreciation from local schools as a guest speaker during Career Days.

Sarah holds an Associates in Arts Degree in General Studies, an Associates in Arts Degree in Criminal Justice, and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Human Studies. Sarah, and her wonderful parents, Sharon and Gary Vaughan, are parishioners at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in La Plata, Maryland. Sharon is a retired elementary school librarian. Gary is a financial advisor. Both Sharon and Gary regularly attend Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Gary is a Lector, Eucharistic Minister, and Usher, and is a member of the Knights of Columbus, Archbishop Neale Council #2279. Gary was also recently elected to the Parish Council.

Needless to say, Sarah has contributed a significant portion of her life, both during the day, in the evenings, and on weekends, to the betterment of society, particularly with our youth upon whom our future rests. Sarah is a delightful young woman who justly deserves recognition as Citizen of the Year.

Faternally,



Mark S. Shuttters  
Grand Knight  
Archbishop Neale Council #2279  
District #12  
Knights of Columbus