

# Multijurisdictional Teen Court Evaluation: A Comparative Evaluation of Three Teen Court Models



Administrative Office of the Courts, Court Operations

Funding from the State Justice Institute Grant Number SJI-09-N-156

June 2013

## Acknowledgments

---

This report was prepared by the University of Maryland School of Social Work (SSW), Ruth H. Young Center for Families and Children, in collaboration with the Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), the Institute for Governmental Service and Research (IGSR), the Baltimore City Teen Court, the Charles County Teen Court, and the Montgomery County Teen Court.

The report was authored by Charlotte Bright and Darnell Morris-Compton of the SSW, Jamie Walter of the AOC, and Benjamin Falls and Doug Young of IGSR. Ellery M. “Rick” Miller, Jr. and Leslie Wright of the Baltimore City Teen Court, Sarah Vaughan of the Charles County Teen Court, and Georgine DeBord of the Montgomery County Teen Court made substantial contributions to all stages of project development, including interpretation of findings. C. David Crumpton, Llewellyn Cornelius, and Ninoosh Hergenroeder from SSW provided substantial input in the early stages of development of the evaluation, and Ursula Hill, Lauren Davis, and Matthew Tanner developed early drafts of some sections.

The evaluation could not have been accomplished without the guidance and assistance of the Maryland Teen Court Association (MDTCA). The many youth, families, and volunteers involved in the three Teen Court jurisdictions contributed not just data but also insight and opinions. We express our sincere appreciation for their efforts. We would also like to acknowledge the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, which provided the data used in the recidivism analyses.

Questions concerning this report should be directed to Diane S. Pawlowicz, Executive Director of Court Operations, Administrative Office of the Courts. She can be reached at 410-260-1725 or via email at [diane.pawlowicz@mdcourts.gov](mailto:diane.pawlowicz@mdcourts.gov).

This project was supported with funds from the State Justice Institute under grant number SJI-09-N-156.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	i
Executive Summary Introduction .....	1
Introduction.....	3
Evaluation Methodology and Organization of the Report.....	3
Evaluation Methods .....	3
Report Organization.....	5
General Overview of Teen Court.....	6
Major Findings from Prior Literature .....	7
Unique Contributions of the Present Evaluation .....	7
Baltimore City Teen Court.....	8
Charles County Teen Court .....	8
Montgomery County Teen Court.....	8
Teen Court Process .....	9
Document Review.....	9
Observations.....	11
Overall Similarities and Differences.....	11
Baltimore City.....	13
Interview Data.....	16
Descriptive Results from the Recidivism Study .....	18
Baltimore City Teen Court Evaluation: Participant Information and DJS Rates of Referral.....	18
Participant Information .....	35
Interview and Survey Results .....	43
Interviews with Youth Respondents .....	43
Recruitment.....	44
Descriptive Statistics of Youth Respondents (Pre-Intervention).....	44

Youth Respondents and Volunteerism .....	45
Youth Respondents at School .....	45
Youth Respondents at Home .....	46
Youth Respondents and Coping.....	48
Youth Respondents and Teen Court Peer Influence.....	51
Youth Respondents and Civic Engagement.....	51
Youth Respondents and Religion .....	53
Youth Respondents’ Perceptions and Opinions .....	53
Results from Interviews with Parents and Guardians.....	56
Descriptive Statistics of Parents and Guardians .....	57
Family Functioning Among Parents and Guardians.....	60
Perceptions from Parents and Guardians .....	61
Results from Interviews with Youth Volunteers .....	63
Youth Volunteers and Civic Engagement .....	70
Results from Interviews with Adult Volunteers .....	71
Recidivism Results.....	74
Baltimore City Teen Court: DJS Referrals .....	75
Charles County Teen Court: DJS Referrals.....	79
Montgomery County Teen Court: DJS Referrals .....	83
Study Limitations .....	87
Summary and Conclusions .....	87
References.....	91

## Executive Summary Introduction

---

Teen Courts, also called Youth Courts and Peer Courts, are increasingly used to divert youth with minor offenses from the juvenile justice system. Ten Teen Courts currently operate in Maryland, and the widespread use of Teen Courts underscores the importance of understanding their process and effectiveness. To facilitate a better understanding of Maryland's Teen Courts, this report presents data on the processes, outcomes, and perspectives of Teen Courts using data gathered in three geographically diverse Teen Courts in Maryland: Baltimore City, Charles County, and Montgomery County Teen Courts. The study also assessed recidivism data collected by matching cases from the three Teen Courts with data from the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. Observations and structured interviews yielded process data while survey and interview data provided rich information from the perspectives of Teen Court volunteers, youth respondents involved in Teen Court, and parents or guardians of these respondents. The evaluation was conducted by the University of Maryland School of Social Work, the Institute for Governmental Service and Research, and the Court Operations Department of the Administrative Office of the Courts, with substantial input from the three Teen Courts and the Maryland Teen Court Association.

Overall, the study found the three Teen Court programs offer an alternative to traditional case processing with lower recidivism rates while garnering support from youth and parents. The study notes that Teen Courts in Charles County, Montgomery County, and Baltimore City have a similar structure and procedure. They emphasize youth decision-making with support from adult volunteers. One structural difference in the three counties is the practice of conducting concurrent versus sequential cases in the same courtroom. Also, the observed jurisdictions handle different types of offenses and, accordingly, recommend different sanctions.

Analysis of data from the Department of Juvenile Services revealed lower rates of recidivism for program completers. Recidivism rates measured at six months and 12 months after Teen Court showed dramatic differences depending on program completion. In all three Teen Court locations, youth who did not complete the Teen Court program were more likely to have a DJS referral and to recidivate more quickly than were youth who completed the program.

- a. In Baltimore City Teen Court, which accepts youth with a prior DJS history and with more serious offenses than the other teen court locations in this study, non-completers were at least 2.5 times more likely to recidivate at both the six- and twelve-month follow-up.
- b. In Charles County, non-completers were about 10 times more likely to be referred to DJS at the six-month follow-up and nearly six times more likely to be referred to DJS at the twelve-month follow-up.

- c. In Montgomery County Teen Court, non-completers were seven times more likely to be referred to DJS at the six-month follow-up and four times more likely to be referred to DJS at the twelve-month follow-up.

Additionally, the percent of youth who did not complete the program and the percent of youth who recidivate was higher for given subgroups (e.g., prior DJS involvement, particular case types), suggesting that program enrichments targeted at particular subgroups may be warranted. These differences varied by court location.

The study further reveals that youth respondents and their parents/guardians scored relatively high on standardized measures of functioning and coping. Their scores indicate that this population of youth offenders possesses substantial strengths. Notably, youth respondents and parents/guardians did not show statistically significant improvement between pre-intervention and post-intervention in standardized measures of coping, family functioning, and civic engagement. Youth respondents and their parents/guardians reported very low rates of problems at home, with friends, in school, and with the law at approximately four months post-intervention. This suggests that Teen Court may be effective at preventing recidivism and also may be helping youth curb problematic behaviors.

Qualitative data indicate substantial support for Teen Court from respondents, parents/guardians, and volunteers. For example, 86.4% (19) of respondents interviewed indicated that Teen Court was beneficial to them. Nearly 95 percent of respondents interviewed considered their sanctions fair, with many of them saying they learned their lesson, they understood what they did wrong, and they deserved the sanctions, and 83.3% of the 17 parents/guardians interviewed found the Teen Court experience positive. When asked whether the Teen Court experience was valuable for their children, 82% (14 of the 17 parents/guardians) said yes. Furthermore, a number of benefits are noted to accrue to youth who volunteer in Teen Court settings, in addition to respondents and their families. These benefits include an opportunity to serve others and their community, education, experience in a legal setting, and the chance to become a positive role model.

After thorough review, the overall findings of this comprehensive two-year evaluation strongly support the continued operation of Teen court programs in Maryland.

## Introduction

---

Teen Courts, also called Youth Courts and Peer Courts, are an increasingly common intervention used to divert youth with minor offenses from the juvenile justice system. Teen Courts receive more than 100,000 referrals a year (Schneider, 2008), and they operate in 49 states and the District of Columbia (National Association of Youth Courts, 2010). Maryland has 10 Teen Courts currently in operation, and more than 3,000 youths have been diverted to Teen Courts in the state of Maryland between 2008 and 2010 (Maryland Teen Court Association, 2012). Teen Court practices vary considerably among jurisdictions, but their common feature is the use of adolescents to hear cases or make decisions (Smith & Chonody, 2010). The widespread use of Teen Courts means that understanding their process and effectiveness is extremely important.

This report serves as a comparative evaluation of three geographically diverse Teen Courts in Maryland. The 24-month project evaluated processes and outcomes of three Maryland Teen Courts: Baltimore City, Charles County, and Montgomery County. Data were collected using face-to-face interviews, observations of teen court hearings, and document review of all three jurisdictions. The purpose of this evaluation is to describe Teen Court operations in three jurisdictions in order to determine whether they are operating as intended as well as to determine the impact of each Teen Court program on target populations. The evaluation research was conducted by the University of Maryland School of Social Work (SSW), Ruth H. Young Center for Families and Children, in collaboration with the Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), The Institute for Governmental Service and Research (IGSR), the Baltimore City Teen Court, the Charles County Teen Court, and the Montgomery County Teen Court.

### **Evaluation Methodology and Organization of the Report**

#### **Evaluation Methods**

The evaluation began with a series of initial meetings with stakeholders from the Teen Courts, the Judiciary, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the School of Social Work. Out of these initial meetings, a working group formed. This group, comprised of representatives from each Teen Court jurisdiction, the Institute for Governmental Service and Research, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the School of Social Work, met on a monthly basis for the entirety of the project. The group determined research activities that would be performed. It also selected and adapted existing measures for use. Trained graduate students from the School of Social Work conducted interviews and observations, under the supervision of Dr. Bright and with input from the working group. Approval from the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board was obtained prior to data collection.

Strategies employed in this project included the following:

1. Context Analysis, involving a review of documents in each jurisdiction to assess the manner in which each program operates, and to identify needs to which the programs were intended to respond.
2. Process Analysis, involving observation and interviews to determine whether each program meets the needs as intended.
3. Pre-Post Program Analysis, using face-to-face interviews to assess the impact of the program on participants.
4. Analysis of Recidivism Data, comparing three years of data from each Teen Court jurisdiction (both youth respondents and youth who were referred, but did not participate in the Teen Court process) with data from Maryland Department of Juvenile Services to determine the degree to which Teen Court participants re-offend.

This study focused on four populations: adult volunteers, youth volunteers, youth respondents, and the parents/guardians of the youth respondents. Adult volunteers participated in one semi-structured interview to generate qualitative information about the value of diversion, value of Teen Court, and their interaction with Teen Court youth. Youth volunteers were interviewed one time, and were asked qualitative questions about their opinions of the legal system and law enforcement, as well as quantitative questions adapted from a measure of civic engagement, school participation, and political attitudes and behaviors (Sherrod, 2003). Youth respondents and their parents or guardians answered qualitative and quantitative questions at two time points, employing a pre-post design. Youth respondents answered questions relating to civic engagement, school participation, and political attitudes and behaviors (Sherrod, 2003). Coping questions posed to youth respondents came from the Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences questionnaire (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987), which was employed at both time points. Both youth respondents and their parents or guardians were asked questions from the Family Functioning Scale (Tavitian, Lubiner, Green, Grebstein, & Velicer, 1987) at two time points. Finally, at the post-test, youth respondents were asked about their perceptions of the value of peer jurors utilizing the Teen Court Peer Influence Scale (Smith & Chonody, 2010).

In addition, researchers obtained documents and observed court hearings in all three jurisdictions. A review of documents using archival methods explored similarities, differences, history, and intended practices of the three Teen Court jurisdictions. Observational data were collected using a specified protocol during actual hearings in each jurisdiction. Observers' written notes recorded behavior, capturing direct quotations whenever possible. Particular emphasis was placed on the physical environment; the activities occurring during hearings; respondent, juror, and volunteer characteristics; and responses of all individuals involved during the hearings.

## *Recidivism Analysis*

Quantitative analyses used information extracted from each of the three teen court (Baltimore City, Charles County and Montgomery County) programs' databases. Program information was combined with data provided by Maryland's Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). Program coordinators, working with researchers on the project, provided data on all youth referred to each of the three Teen Court programs for fiscal years 2009, 2010, and 2011 to DJS. Using names and dates of birth of Teen Court participants, DJS staff matched DJS data to identifying information provided by the Teen Court programs. De-identified data, including program variables and DJS data, were then sent to researchers at the Institute for Governmental Service and Research, at the University of Maryland, College Park, for analysis.

Each Teen Court program's data were analyzed individually as each program had their own way of collecting the information and entering it into their database system. Simple descriptive statistics, including frequencies and crosstabs, were run on the data. Analyses focused on three different participant types: 1) youth who participated in the Teen Court but did not successfully complete the requirements of the program; 2) youth who participated in Teen Court and successfully completed the requirements of the program; and 3) youth who were referred to Teen Court but did not participate in the program.<sup>1</sup>

Information on the number of referrals made to each Teen Court program and the number of hearings held is presented in the report. Demographics such as age at the time of referral to the Teen Court program, ethnicity, and sex, and information regarding case types and the referring agency were also extracted from Teen Court data and are included in the report. Completion status information was taken from program data and was used to classify each youth as a program completer, non-completer, or person who was referred but never attended a Teen Court hearing.

Data reported from DJS on Teen Court participants include whether Teen Court referrals had any prior contacts with DJS or any subsequent referrals to DJS at both six and 12 months after attending (or not attending) a Teen Court hearing. Referral rates at the two time periods are reported, as well as the mean number of days to referral to DJS. Additionally, many of the demographics are compared by completion status and subsequent referral to DJS.

### **Report Organization**

This report is organized to provide an overview of the methodology of the study, a general overview of Teen Courts, and major findings from previous research. The report continues with information on the three jurisdictions included in this project.

---

<sup>1</sup> Those juveniles who were referred but did not participate in a hearing either failed to appear for their hearing, opted to go to court on their own, had parents who chose to forward their case to DJS, failed to respond to the initial letter and follow-up calls from the teen court program, or had their case declined by Teen Court Coordinator acting in consultation with the judge.

The report's subsequent sections present results from the evaluation. These sections include results from the targeted populations, observations, document review, and the recidivism analysis. The final section contains a summary of major findings and recommendations.

### **General Overview of Teen Court**

Teen Courts as a diversion option are generally not part of the juvenile court. They function rather as alternatives to formal court processing (Harrison, Maupin, & Mays, 2001). Successful participation usually means that youth exit Teen Court programs without an official juvenile court record (Butts, Buck, & Coggshall, 2002). Teen Court practices vary considerably among jurisdictions, but their common feature is the use of adolescents to hear cases or make decisions (Smith & Chonody, 2010). Like other so-called "specialty" courts, Teen Courts tend to be local bodies promoted by the Judiciary rather than the legislature and supported by diverse funding streams, with small caseloads, local variability, and an emphasis on individualized sanctions and supportive services (Filler & Smith, 2006).

Most Teen Courts engage youth volunteers in the roles of jurors, judges, attorneys, or some combination thereof, and some involve adults to serve as judges in support of peer jurors (Kendall, 2003-2004).<sup>2</sup>

The theory behind teen courts emphasizes the pivotal role peers play in youth decision-making (White, 1999). Teen court participation allegedly offers pro-social benefits, as defendants often subsequently serve on juries themselves, participate in service activities to benefit their communities, and learn about the functioning of the justice system (Kowalski, 1999).

In the late 1990s, Maryland Judiciary members and representatives of the State's Attorney's offices, Public Defenders offices, and local law enforcement embraced the idea of a Teen Court to fill two major gaps in the juvenile justice system. First, it provided a diversionary program for offenders in a serious setting. Second, through the volunteers in the program, it educated the non-offending youth on various elements of the legal system and encouraged them to take ownership of the problems of teen crime. These results led to design and implementation of Teen Court programs across the state of Maryland, now in operation for more than 15 years. The Maryland State Bar Association recommends expanding the use of teen courts statewide due to their perceived successes (Tambor, 2008). Maryland Teen Courts emphasize personal responsibility, peer influence, and the opportunity to learn more about the justice system through volunteering (Maryland Teen Court Association, 2012).

---

<sup>2</sup> Teen Court practices are often categorized into four models: the Adult Judge model, the Youth Judge model, the Peer Jury model, and the Youth Tribunal model (Harrison, Maupin, & Mays, 2001), although some jurisdictions employ blended practices (Butts & Buck, 2000).

## **Major Findings from Prior Literature**

Many existing empirical studies have documented benefits associated with participation in Teen Courts. Projects sponsored by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention have noted program completion rates greater than 80% and improved efficiency in juvenile courts via reduction of backlogs without an increase in recidivism (Pearson & Jurisch, 2005; Schneider, 2008). Teen Courts may be effective at reducing recidivism for repeat offenders, not just first-time offenders (Forgays & DeMilio, 2005). A study of four jurisdictions found Teen Court participants to have lower rates of re-referral to juvenile court after six months than comparison youth in two jurisdictions, while in the other two jurisdictions differences between groups were non-significant (Butts, Buck & Coggshall, 2002). One evaluation compared Teen Court participants with participants in other diversion programs, finding a lower re-arrest rate within a one year period.<sup>3</sup> Single-group studies have documented relatively low recidivism rates during five- to 12-month follow-up periods.<sup>4</sup> One study noted differences in recidivism between youth respondents who completed Teen Court, versus those who did not; youth who did not complete their sanctions were significantly more likely to recidivate (Norris, Twill, & Kim, 2011).

Some authors have found no differences between Teen Courts and other delinquency prevention and intervention programs, or even an increased risk of recidivism associated with Teen Court participation. One study compared four conditions: Teen Court, an accountability-based diversion program, traditional juvenile justice processing, and a control group, and found no differences in recidivism among a sample whose primary offenses were tobacco-related (Patrick & Marsh, 2005). Another study found that Teen Court participants self-reported more delinquent behavior following the intervention, compared with formally processed youth, but that arrest differences were not significant (Stickle et al, 2008). A subsequent analysis of data collected for this study found that the delinquency differences were limited to male youth, and that no differences existed between females in the experimental and control groups (Wilson, Gottfredson, & Stickle, 2009).

## **Unique Contributions of the Present Evaluation**

The literature on Teen Courts is hardly uniform, as it reflects a multitude of practices and populations (Butts & Buck, 2000). This diversity, along with the differences in research design and measurement employed in existing Teen Court research, discourage broad generalizations about the Teen Court intervention (Kendall, 2003-2004). The present study does not seek to unify the literature on whether Teen Court is or is not effective, as no one evaluation could do so. Rather, the study seeks to ask important but understudied questions: what is the impact of Teen

---

<sup>3</sup> The re-arrest rate was 13% for Teen Court participants, compared with 24% of all diversion participants in the jurisdiction (Weisz, Lott, & Thai, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Recidivism rates ranged from 12.6% to 22% (Garrison, 2001; Logalbo & Callahan, 2001; Rasmussen & Diener, 2005).

Court on multiple populations (volunteers, parents/guardians, respondents)? In addition to recidivism, what other outcomes does Teen Court address? What are some of the procedures and processes common and distinct among multiple Teen Court jurisdictions? This evaluation addresses these questions using qualitative data as well as multiple quantitative measures, in order to assess the perceptions of those involved with Teen Court in addition to investigating outcomes.

### **Baltimore City Teen Court**

Baltimore City Teen Court<sup>5</sup> is a voluntary alternative to the juvenile justice system for offenders between the ages of 11 to 17, charged with a misdemeanor offense, with four or fewer prior misdemeanors in their history. It has been in existence for 13 years and is managed by Citizenship Law Related Education Program, a non-profit organization. It uses constructs from the Adult Judge and Peer Jury Teen Court models (i.e., an adult judge presides over hearings but questioning and decisions are conducted by youth volunteers). Trained student volunteers serve as jurors and court officers, earning service learning hours for high school graduation. Adult volunteers, including attorneys, judges and law school students preside over hearings and coach youth in preparation for hearings. Hearings occur 20 times per year on Thursdays at the Eastside District Courthouse in Baltimore City. BCTC accepts cases such as assault, disorderly conduct, possession of a deadly weapon, theft/attempted theft, possession of marijuana. It provides a variety of leadership skill development activities for both youth volunteers and respondents.

### **Charles County Teen Court**

Charles County Teen Court<sup>6</sup> is operated through the Charles County Sheriff's Office. Originating in March 2001, the program serves first-time offenders between ages 12 and 17. Cases heard in Teen Court are typically the result of offenses including theft, assault, traffic violations, disorderly conduct, common law affray, and criminal mischief. Cases are heard by peer jurors with an adult serving as a judge. Charles County Sheriff's cadets serve as bailiffs for Teen Court, and North Point High School criminal justice students guide youth respondents and their parents to and from their courtroom. Hearings take place in the Charles County Courthouse in La Plata, Maryland.

### **Montgomery County Teen Court**

The Montgomery County Teen Court<sup>7</sup> operates within the Montgomery County Office of the State's Attorney. Montgomery County Teen Court was organized in 1996 and held its first court

---

<sup>5</sup> Baltimore City Teen Court web page: <http://www.clrep.org/BCTeenCourt.html>

<sup>6</sup> Charles County Teen Court web page: [http://www.ccsa.us/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=575](http://www.ccsa.us/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=575)

<sup>7</sup> Montgomery County Teen Court web page:  
<http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/saotmpl.asp?url=/content/SAO/other/TeenCourt.asp>;  
<http://www.facebook.com/MoCoTeenCourt>

hearing in 1997. It was the first Teen Court in Maryland and recently celebrated its 15<sup>th</sup> year of service. Teens are typically first time offenders between the ages of 12 and 17 although MCTC admits youth with prior DJS contacts on a case by case basis. Any youth with prior DJS involvement is only accepted if agreed upon by DJS personnel and the MCTC coordinator. There are an estimated three to four youth per year with prior DJS involvement who are accepted into the MCTC program. Hearings take place twice a month, year-round in the Montgomery County Circuit Court Judicial Center in Rockville, Maryland. Cases frequently involve theft, alcohol violations, property destruction, fourth degree burglary, and possession of marijuana. The judge is an adult volunteer, while jurors are youth volunteers. After Teen Court sessions are complete, adult volunteers (who are often attorneys or judges) will sometimes conduct a question and answer session or talk about a particular topic of interest to the youth volunteers.

## Teen Court Process

---

### Document Review

To address the questions related to context and process, the research team reviewed 81 documents covering more than 245 pages that were provided by the Teen Court coordinators from Baltimore City, Charles County, and Montgomery County. The primary goals of the document review were as follows:

1. To assess the manner in which each program operates;
2. To identify the needs to which the programs were intended to respond; and
3. To identify similarities and differences among jurisdictions' practices and goals.

Each program is explicit about its mission or purpose in various documents, and each indicates which needs it intends to address.

Baltimore City states its mission on a training information booklet: "The mission of the Baltimore City Teen Court is to effectively, efficiently and positively intervene in the lives of Baltimore City juveniles charged with minor offenses and thus prevent juvenile offenders from obtaining a juvenile record while still holding them accountable for their actions." The same document further explains that Baltimore City Teen Court responds to the needs for diversion options and also for accountability, and that it meets these needs through encouraging positive youth development, communicating that law-breaking is self-defeating and destructive, and collaborating with various community organizations, attorneys, and law enforcement. Overall program goals include:

- Improving students' and teachers' knowledge and understanding of the law and our justice system;

- Fostering a more constructive attitude toward the law;
- Mobilizing community resource people to become involved in law-related education; and
- Providing delinquency prevention and early intervention for at-risk students through knowledge, understanding, and opportunity;
- Providing Baltimore City juvenile offenders the opportunity to be diverted from the Department of Juvenile Services and avoid a permanent record for the offense committed;
- Provide Baltimore City Youth the opportunity to develop leadership skills, improved knowledge and understanding of the law and legal system, and foster a positive attitude toward courts while earning service learning hours required for high school graduation.

BCTC specifically aims to provide a holistic/multimodal approach; collaborative effort; integration of family, peers, and community; positive adult and youth interaction; community service; and leadership activities, according to program materials.

Both Charles County and Montgomery County Teen Courts document an intention to interrupt a trajectory or “pattern” of criminal behavior. Similar to Baltimore City, Charles County emphasizes the positive nature of its intervention and the value of diversion in holding youth accountable while avoiding the myriad problems of a juvenile court record.

Charles County and Montgomery County Teen Courts each identify seven similar goals, summarized here:

1. Prevent recidivism and minimize the number of youth offenders in the jurisdiction;
2. Provide hearing outcomes that are reasonable and appropriate;
3. Encourage accountability and connect actions with consequences;
4. Assist youth volunteers in developing their knowledge of the legal system, their confidence, and their ability to contribute to the community;
5. Use the power of peer interaction to make the hearing and sanctioning process meaningful;
6. Give youth volunteers an opportunity for a service activity with real impact; and
7. “To meet and balance the needs of the respondents, the victims, and the community.”

All three jurisdictions offer documentation guiding individuals through the Teen Court process; however, each presentation is slightly different. For example, Baltimore City offers a

folder explaining and describing the roles and responsibilities of the court clerk, judge, bailiff, jury member, jury facilitator, and jury foreperson. These documents include scripts with highlighted sections for each role. Charles County has a two-page document outlining the roles of various participants in Teen Court, and Montgomery County offers a “Teen Court General Information” booklet with an overview, responsibilities, job descriptions, and code of conduct.

All jurisdictions maintain forms that keep track of volunteers, community service hours, and informed consent. Montgomery County also uses an impact statement completed by a victim, who has the option to attend the hearing, request restitution, or write a letter indicating the impact of the offense. Baltimore City’s forms include an entrance interview form for incoming youth respondents.

In regard to general program information, Baltimore City offers an introductory letter with a brochure that outlines inclusion criteria for respondents, staff, location, contact information, a brief overview of the process, and potential sanctions. Montgomery County offers a welcome letter with information on applications, sessions, dates, and contact information. Charles County offers a Teen Court overview document about the process, sanctions, and time to completion.

The three jurisdictions have a repository of information on resources and problem-solving. Baltimore City has an anger management handout and information on community conferencing and on mental health, substance abuse, and family counseling service providers; Charles County utilizes tobacco related fact sheets, information on an EMS ride-along program, and a funeral home project, as well as a document listing community service options. Montgomery County offers pamphlets and brochures related to alcohol and drug education programs, shoplifting prevention programs, and the Sewing Confidence and Determination program. In addition, they have a document listing ideas for completing the community service hours most respondents are required to complete.

### **Observations**

Observations of in-person hearings were conducted in all three jurisdictions with the following aims:

1. To assess the manner in which each program operates; and
2. To identify similarities and differences among jurisdictions’ practices and goals.

### **Overall Similarities and Differences**

Overall, Teen Courts in Baltimore City, Charles County, and Montgomery County have a similar structure and procedure: jurors, respondents, and their parents arrive at the courthouse and are checked-in by the Teen Court coordinator or another staff person. Cases are heard by a volunteer judge (often a retired or practicing judge) or an attorney, and a panel of teen jurors (volunteers or respondents completing sanctions). Other adult volunteers fill a variety of roles during the hearings.

After everyone in the courtroom takes an oath of confidentiality and the jury and respondent are sworn in, questioning begins. Jurors alternately ask the respondent questions about the incident and about the respondent. After the jurors are satisfied that they have enough information, deliberation begins. Jurors deliberate without the respondent, parent, or judge present, but they are sometimes assisted by an adult volunteer. The jurors use guidelines to decide on appropriate sanctions, which are then approved by the judge and presented to the respondent. At the end of the hearing, judges sometimes make remarks, after which the respondent and parent leave the courtroom to check-out with the Teen Court coordinator or another staff person.

One structural difference observed in the three counties is the practice of conducting concurrent versus sequential cases in the same courtroom. Montgomery County uses a concurrent model: each courtroom has two juries which alternate; while the first jury deliberates on the first case, the second jury hears the second case. In some of the observations, Charles County also used a concurrent jury system, while Baltimore City always used a sequential system. Another difference is whether other respondents are in the courtroom during a hearing. In Montgomery County, all respondents and families sit in the courtroom until their cases are called, whereas in Charles County and Baltimore City, only the respondent's family is in the courtroom during his or her hearing, and others wait in the lobby outside the courtroom.

Another difference between counties is offenses. Types of offenses observed in hearings did not overlap between Baltimore City and Montgomery County, but offenses in Charles County overlapped with offenses in both of the other jurisdictions. Despite any differences in offenses, jurors in all jurisdictions ask similar questions to understand what happened from the respondent's perspective, why the respondent did what he or she did, what punishments he or she received at home or in school, as well as background information including grades, extracurricular activities, sports, and goals for the future. Jurors generally ask some questions related to the specific offense (for example, history of drug use in a drug related case).

Sanctions differ across the jurisdictions, possibly due in part to the nature of the offenses. Every Charles County respondent we observed received a letter, essay, or other assignment as part of his or her sanction, while only one Baltimore City respondent observed received an additional sanction beyond community service hours and jury duties. In Charles and Montgomery Counties, judges gave more advice, recommendations, or admonishments to the respondents after describing their sanctions. In Charles County, judges almost always asked parents if they wanted to make a statement at the end of the hearing, whereas this was rare in the other jurisdictions.

Another notable difference is ethnicity. By our observation, Baltimore City Teen Court jurors and respondents are overwhelmingly African American, while Charles County and Montgomery County jurors and respondents are predominantly African American or White, though some are Asian American and Latino/a.

## Baltimore City

---

In Baltimore City, we observed hearings for nine different respondents on two days in spring 2012. All respondents were African American. Five were male; four were female. They ranged in age from 13 to 17 years old. Charges included disorderly conduct (3), possession of a deadly weapon (2), hindering arrest (1), assault (1), loitering (1), and trespassing (1). All respondents received sanctions of community service hours and jury duties. Community service sanctions ranged from eight hours (for trespassing) to 32 hours (for possession of a deadly weapon). Assigned jury duties ranged from two to four required evenings. One of the respondents received an additional sanction to attend anger management classes.

The mothers of eight of the respondents attended their hearings. In three cases, the mother came alone with the respondent, in two cases the respondent's mother was accompanied by at least one other adult, and in two cases the mother was accompanied by a younger child. In one case, the respondent's caseworker, an African American male, appeared as the respondent's guardian. Before questioning, each parent/guardian affirmed that that respondent had come "of his/her own free will."

In Baltimore City, all observed jury members were African American teenagers. They were both male and female, and all appeared to be between ages 12 and 17. The clerk, foreperson, and bailiff were all chosen from the jury in each courtroom before the hearings began. Each of these roles included reading parts, which were difficult for some of the teens. Before each hearing, jury members read the statement of facts silently. They could ask questions of the judge and adult volunteer and think of possible questions for the respondent.

At the beginning of the hearing, the judge gave a brief welcome and administered the oath of confidentiality. The bailiff, clerk, and jury foreperson each filled assigned roles which included swearing in the respondent and reading the statement of facts. The jury asked questions which covered such areas as what happened, previous offenses, rationale for offense, learning from the offense, grades, behavior and attitude at home ("are you a problem child?") and with peers ("are you a leader or a follower?"). In two cases, jury members also asked the ethnicity of the arresting officer. In one case, the jury asked if they could direct questions to the respondent's mother, to which she and the judge agreed.

In each case, after the jury was satisfied with questioning, the respondent, parent/guardian, and judge left the courtroom while the jury deliberated. During deliberation, jury members tried to determine the truth amid conflicting information, the attitude of the respondent, and the fairness of the original charges. Jury members at times lost focus during deliberation, and an adult volunteer guided them.

One judge was a White male, two were African American females, and one was a White female.<sup>8</sup> All worked in the legal field, one as a defense attorney and another as a judge. The judges largely let the members of the jury run the hearing, sometimes interjecting with a question. During two hearings, jury members were restless and sometimes distracting. The judges spoke to them during the hearing as well as between cases. One judge gave a talk about the importance of Teen Court and the justice system in Baltimore City. At the end of each hearing, the judges addressed the respondents, but in general did not spend as long talking to them as in Montgomery or Charles Counties.

Two adults coordinated efforts during hearing nights. The Teen Court coordinator checked in respondents and their families, oversaw jurors with the help of the other staff person, and checked out respondents after their hearings. She also came into one of the courtrooms to correct juror behavior. There was an adult volunteer in each courtroom to take attendance, get the jury started, help them stay focused, and ensure participation.

### *Charles County*

We observed 13 hearings in Charles County on three different dates in spring 2012. Respondents ranged in age from 12 to 18; seven were male and six female. Eleven were African American, one was White, and one was Latino. Respondents were charged with theft (7), disorderly conduct (2), fighting/disruption of school activities (1), possession of a deadly weapon (1), failure to stop at a stop sign (1), and speeding (1). All respondents were sanctioned with a certain number of community service hours, jury duties, and a written or experiential assignment. Community service sanctions ranged from eight hours (for one of the thefts) to 40 required hours, and assigned jury duties ranged from two to four required evenings. Every respondent also received one or more additional sanctions. Ten were to write either a letter of apology or thank you letter, seven were assigned an essay specific to the charges, five received informal probation, five were required to interview a police officer, two received a restriction from stores, and one was required to watch an informational video.

In nine cases, the mother attended the hearing alone or with the respondent's sibling. In one case, only the respondent's father attended. In two cases, the respondent's mother and father both attended the hearing, and in one case, the relationship between the respondent and the adult who attended the hearing was not recorded. At the end of the hearing, judges sometimes asked parents to make a statement to the court if they wanted. Some parents did. Two mothers were observed to cry during the hearings.

---

<sup>8</sup> The demographics of the judges observed are not necessarily representative of the participating judges in Baltimore City. Those participating as judges in the program include the following: Baltimore City Circuit Court judges, including three White male, one White female, and five African American females; Baltimore City District Court Judges, including two White females and one African American male; Administrative Judges, including three White females and one White male; retired judges, including two White males; Juveniles Judges/Masters, including two White male judges, two African American females, and one White male master. Additionally, several attorneys, public defenders, a state's attorney, and law students assist as judges and facilitators at the hearings, including nine White females, one Indian male; three African American males, and four White males.

Jury members were ages 12 to 17 years old, a mix of mostly African American and White teens, some Latino/a and Asian American, and more female than male youth. Jurors asked the respondents questions about academics, athletics, peer pressure, punishment at home, guilt, and future plans. Sometimes they deliberated in the courtroom as in Baltimore City, and other times they deliberated in a separate room while another case was heard as in Montgomery County.

The judges<sup>9</sup> in Charles County commented to the respondent after their hearings. One told a respondent, "Please don't let me down." The judges allowed respondents a chance to make a statement before deliberation. They also asked parents if they wanted to make a statement after deliberation but before the sanctions were read.

Other involved adults included the Teen Court coordinator who checked-in members of the jury, briefed judges and other staff people on the cases, and received respondents and their families before and after the case, making sure they understood the sanctions. Bailiffs wearing special uniforms appeared to be young adult volunteers in a role distinct from that of jury member volunteers.

### *Montgomery County*

In Montgomery County, the research team observed hearings for 13 different respondents on three different days in spring 2012. Nine of the observed respondents were male; four were female. Their ages ranged from 13 to 17 years old. Nine were White, two were Latino/a, and two were African American. Charges included possession of drugs and/or paraphernalia (7), shoplifting or theft (2), alcohol possession and distribution (1), underage drinking (1), vandalism (1), and false identification (1). Sanctions included community service hours, jury duties, and additional activities. Community service requirements ranged from 15 to 44 hours, jury duties ranged from zero to two sessions. Ten respondents' sanctions included completion of a program such as the YES shoplifting program, JETS substance abuse program, or a written assignment such as an apology letter or 250-1000 word essay on a topic specific to the offense.

Five respondents were accompanied by their fathers, four were accompanied by their mothers, and one was accompanied by mother and father; in two cases we did not record who accompanied the respondent. At least one respondent also had other family members present at the hearing. Most parents did not interact with the judge except to be acknowledged at the beginning; however, two parents spoke to the judge privately at the end of questioning.

Jurors appeared to range from 15-18 years of age. There was a mix of male and female jurors, mostly White, but also Asian American, African American, and Latino/a. Jury members were quiet and respectful. Jurors asked respondents questions about what happened, how the respondent felt about the situation, GPA, future plans, current interests (including sports/hobbies), employment, reactions of family members, drug use, punishment at home,

---

<sup>9</sup> Demographics of the judges observed are not necessarily reflective of all Charles County Teen Court judge demographics. Of the Teen Court judges serving in Charles County, three are White males, one is a White female, and one is an African American female.

rationale for the offense, peer pressure/friends, and what the respondent has learned. Because the jury deliberated in a separate jury room, their deliberations were not part of the observations. Juror comments were recorded on the sanction guideline sheet and read by the judge along with the sanctions. For example, one jury wrote, “respondent does not fully comprehend severity of actions.”

All of the judges we observed in Montgomery County were White males.<sup>10</sup> At the beginning of each hearing, the judge administered the oath of confidentiality and read the statement of facts. The judges made an effort to address opening comments to the respondent, jury, and family members. During questioning, some of the judges asked additional questions or sought clarification about something the jury had asked. At the end of each hearing, the judge read the sanctions assigned by the jury and spoke directly to the respondent to give a piece of advice, a recommendation for the future, or an admonishment (“Character is doing what’s right when nobody’s looking,” “Son, you are a medicine cabinet,” “I don’t believe you...you got all the right lines...but it did not impress me”), and in some cases, judges addressed the parents directly. During one hearing, the judge used the time during jury deliberation to share current and historic legal cases with the attendees in the courtroom.

Two staff members, assisted by a few other adults, facilitate Teen Court hearing nights in Montgomery County. The Teen Court coordinator attends to numerous tasks, balancing responsibilities to respondents, parents, jurors, and adult volunteers. Before hearings begin, she checks in jurors and is respectful of the teens while ensuring that they take their role seriously. Another staff person receives respondents and their families and directs them to the correct courtroom. At the end of the evening both women checked-out families, making sure they understand the sanctions and how to complete them.

### **Interview Data**

Interview data were collected to determine whether each program meets needs as intended. Interviews were conducted with adult volunteers in each jurisdiction (methodology is described in more detail in the Interview and Survey Results section). Adult volunteers shared their perceptions of diversion in general and Teen Court in particular. Below are some themes from the interviews, along with quotations intended to illustrate the volunteers’ views on whether Teen Court meets its intended goals.

*Theme: Teen Court values youth respondents.*

---

<sup>10</sup> Courtrooms were randomly selected for observation. The demographics of the judges observed does not reflect the demographics of the judges who participate in the Montgomery County Teen Court Program. Judges participating in the Montgomery County Teen Court Program during fiscal year 2012 included 21 White males, four African-American males, 13 White females, one African-American female, and one Asian American female.

“It makes them feel like they are a part of society at large as opposed to being on the periphery. They learn the system they have come to hate. It’s reinforcement that there are rules in society.”

“[The volunteers and staff] see the potential in these kids that society fails to see.”

“Respondents go on more of a journey...from someone who has been engaging in delinquent activity to someone who includes experiences on a college application.”

*Theme: Teen Court/Diversion is a better alternative than traditional juvenile court.*

“[Formal juvenile court processing] stinks. This system takes kids and it removes them from their families, puts their personal lives out on the table for everybody else to see, and doesn’t take into account all of the factors that exist in the world. Kids every day walk out of their homes into a drug infested neighborhood and are accosted and bothered by the police. And this [Teen Court] program, this diversion in general, talks about ‘how do we heal the community?’”

“I just like the idea that they get a second chance. They’re young, everybody makes a mistake...It doesn’t go on their record, and it gives them a bit of a structure to follow, you know, you have to give this to get this.”

“Anything we can do to get them out of juvenile justice is a good thing.”

“I think that diversion allows society to forgive a mistake.”

*Theme: Teen Court builds respondents’ skills.*

“They experience public speaking, cooperation, and communication with each other. It becomes a positive peer pressure. It can have an impact when a teen asks another teen, ‘What were you thinking bringing a knife to school?’”

“Some need habilitation, not rehabilitation because they may not have the skills.”

*Theme: Youth volunteers benefit.*

“There’s a real interesting dynamic that goes on during the hearings that has an effect on the volunteers.”

“[From] the youth juror’s point of view, they get to see their peers getting caught. And that actually kind of reinforces in their mind, ‘Don’t do stupid things. Don’t make those types of mistakes yourself.’ And a lot of the kids, they’re high achieving, but that also means they’ll get bored easily, and [that boredom can] lead to poor decisions.”

“The students look at justice differently as a result of Teen Court. They are sitting in judgment. They are enforcing the rules. In addition, the students have their finger on the pulse of their peers. They know when they are trying to pull a fast one. Students tend to be insightful, and

fair, even when they distrust the authority figure that brought them to court. They will still provide a fair hearing to the teen in front of them.”

*Theme: Multiple stakeholders contribute.*

“I’ll just say that both the volunteers who come to court, student volunteers, key volunteers as well as board volunteers, which are different, seem to be extremely committed to this program.”

“The volunteers are dedicated to their job...It’s all about the kids.”

“I get an opportunity to get involved with them. They open up to us to some degree... more than [they do with] their parents.”

## Descriptive Results from the Recidivism Study

---

### **Baltimore City Teen Court Evaluation: Participant Information and DJS Rates of Referral**

#### *Participant Information.*

*Referrals and Hearings.* Figure 1 displays the cumulative number of referrals and hearings scheduled at the Baltimore City Teen Court (BCTC) from the first quarter of fiscal year (FY) 2009 (starting on July 1, 2008) through the fourth quarter of FY 2011 (through June 30, 2011). Through the fourth quarter of FY 2011, 802 referrals were made to the program, while 546 hearings were scheduled. Over the three year study period, the BCTC received an average of 66.8 referrals per quarter from various referral agencies. During FY 2010, the BCTC received the most referrals by quarter, averaging 70.8 referrals during each three-month span, with a low of 58 referrals in the first quarter and a high of 81 referrals during the fourth quarter of FY 2010. Figure 2 shows the number of hearings scheduled to occur during each quarter, revealing that on average, between FY 2009 and FY 2011, the BCTC had 45.5 hearings scheduled to occur per quarter. The fewest number of hearings occurred during the first quarter of FY 2009, when 28 hearings were scheduled. The second quarter of FY 2011 had the most hearings scheduled (58) followed by the third quarters of FY 2010 (57) and 2011 (56).

Figure 1. *Baltimore City Teen Court Total Referrals and Hearings FY 2009-2011*

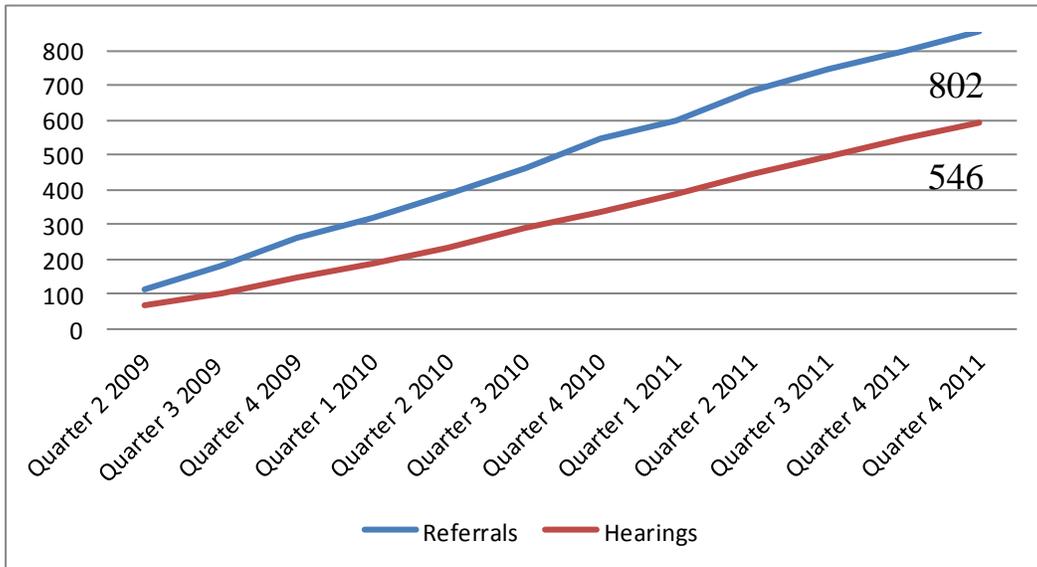
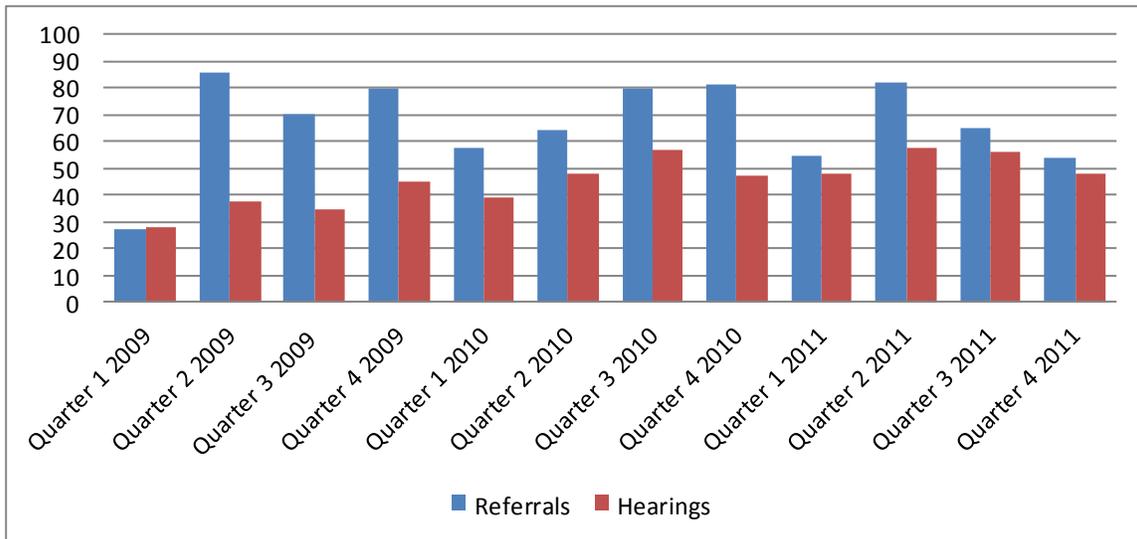


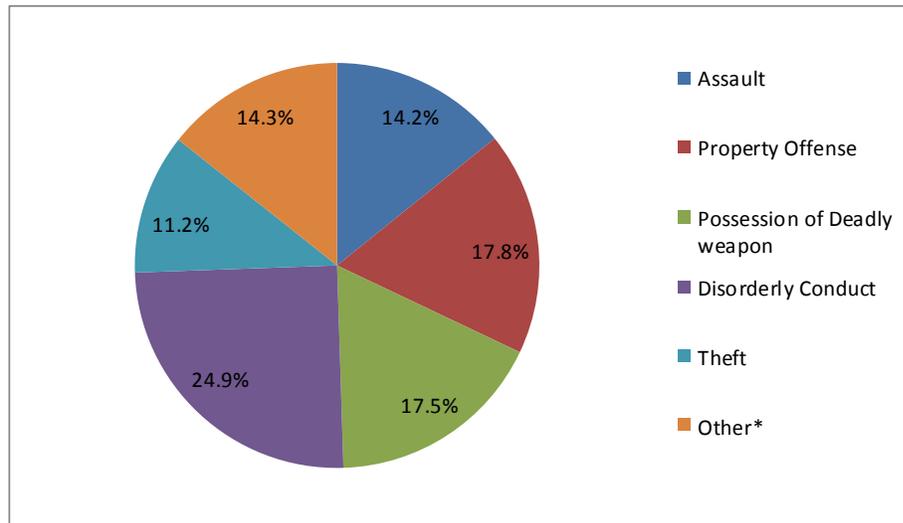
Figure 2. *Baltimore City Teen Court Referrals and Hearings by Quarter*



Case type was reported for all but one referral to the BCTC program. As seen in Figure 3, youth with disorderly conduct charges made up the largest percentage of referrals (24.9%) to the BCTC, followed by those charged with possession of a deadly weapon (17.5%), and property

offenses (17.8%), which included trespassing, loitering, and destruction of property. Assaults (14.2%) and thefts (11.2%) were also common case types for referrals to the BCTC. Offenses that occurred less than 10 percent of the time were grouped to form an “other” category which accounted for 16 percent of the referred case types. These included drug or alcohol related offenses (6.0%), failure to obey (5.1%), and other infrequent case types (see \* below).

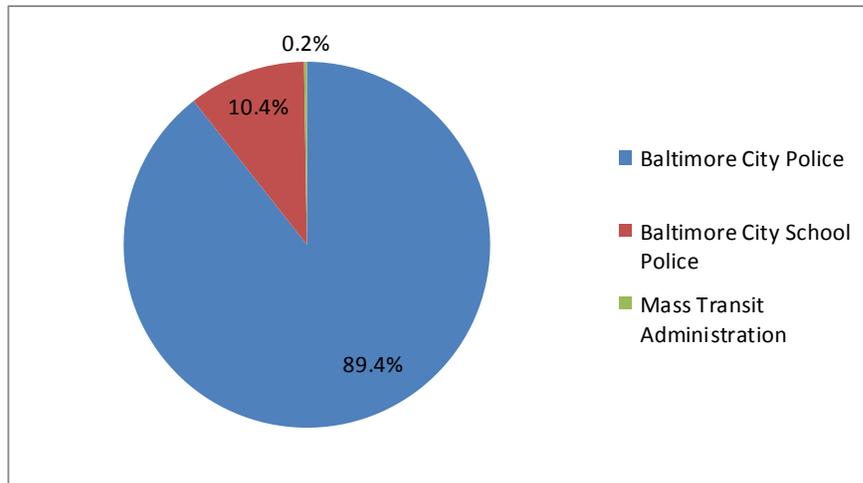
Figure 3. *Baltimore City Teen Court Referrals Case Types*



\* Other includes aggressive panhandling, disrupting school, disturbing peace, false statement, gambling, hindering/resisting arrest, littering, burglary, drug or alcohol related crimes, and failure to obey.

The majority of referrals to the BCTC program came from the Baltimore City Police (89.4%) as is shown in Figure 3. About one in 10 referrals to the program came from the Baltimore City School Police (10.4%), while the Mass Transit Administration made two referrals (less than 1% of the referrals).

Figure 4. *Baltimore City Teen Court Referrals by Agency*



*Demographics.* The average age of youth at the time of referral to Teen Court was 15.4 years. The youngest person was 9.4 years old while the oldest was 18.1 years old. Just more than three of five referrals to the BCTC were male (61.0%); females comprised 39 percent of referrals. Most referred youth were African American (95.6%) followed by Whites (3.4 %) and Latinos/as (1 %). (Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5. *Baltimore City Teen Court Referrals by Gender*

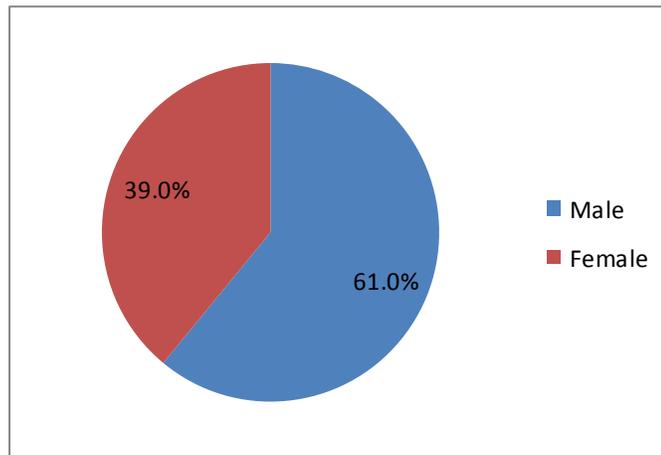
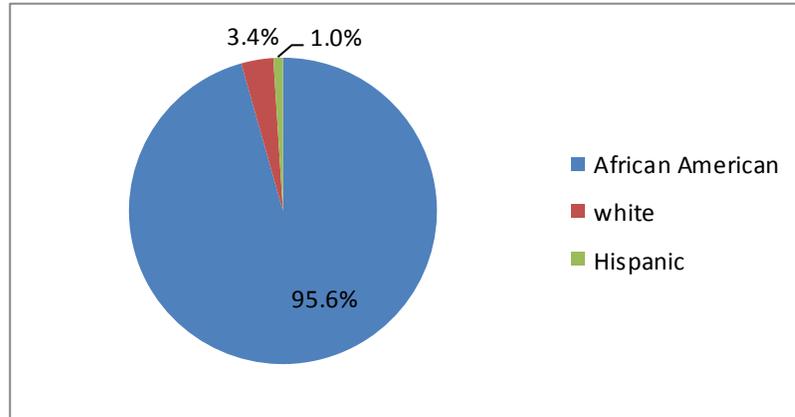
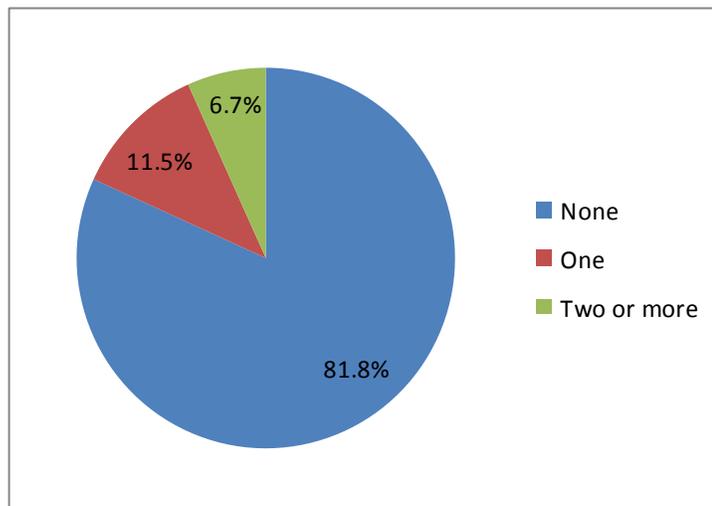


Figure 6. *Baltimore City Teen Court Referrals by Ethnicity*



*Delinquency History.* Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) provided official delinquency history for all BCTC youth. These data showed 146 youth, or about one in five (18.2%) of those referred to teen court, had a previous complaint filed with DJS.<sup>11</sup> Eleven and a half percent had one prior complaint, and 6.7 percent had two or more prior complaints (Figure 7).

Figure 7. *Baltimore City Teen Court Referrals with Prior DJS Complaints*



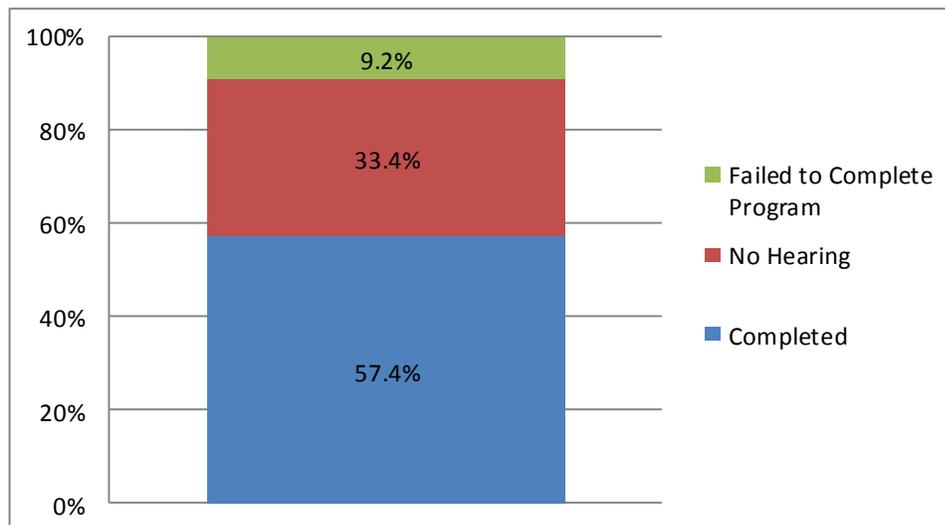
---

<sup>11</sup> The great majority of DJS referrals originate as police complaints; a few youth are referred from school officials and even fewer from private citizens. It should be noted that many of these youth are diverted from the juvenile justice system before they reach the court, and a minority of all DJS referrals are eventually found by the court to have committed a delinquent act.

## Teen Court Participation and DJS Referrals

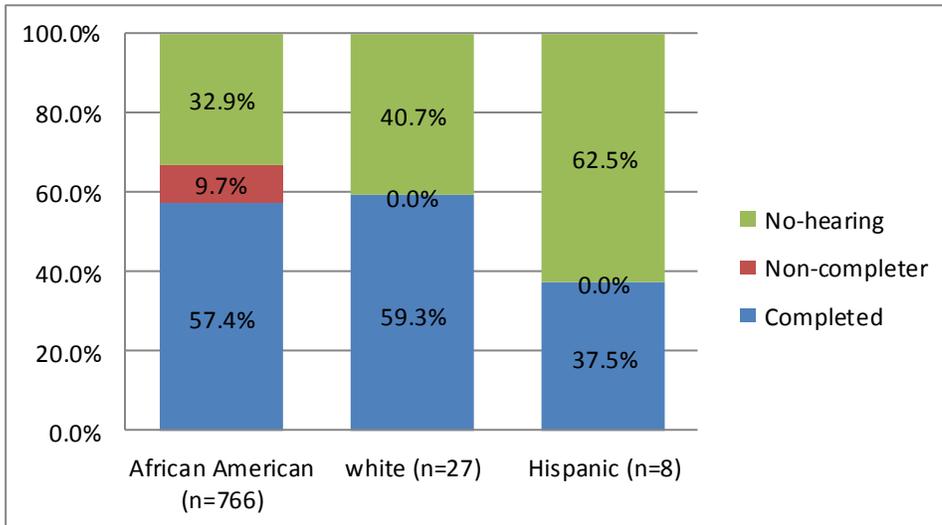
*Hearing and Completion Results.* Of the 802 juveniles referred to the program, 268 (34.1%) did not take part in a Teen Court hearing; nearly all of these youth either failed to respond to the initial letter and follow-up calls about the program, or refused the program's services and never had a hearing scheduled. (Nine had one scheduled but did not appear, and in one case, parents refused to have their child participate after a hearing was scheduled.) See Figure 8. There were 460 participants who attended a hearing and completed the program, accounting for 57.4 percent of all referrals. Another 74 juveniles (9.2%) took part in a hearing but were reported as failing to complete the program because they either failed to complete the sanctions (69) or they refused to admit they committed the offense (5).

Figure 8. *Baltimore City Teen Court Juvenile Referral Status*



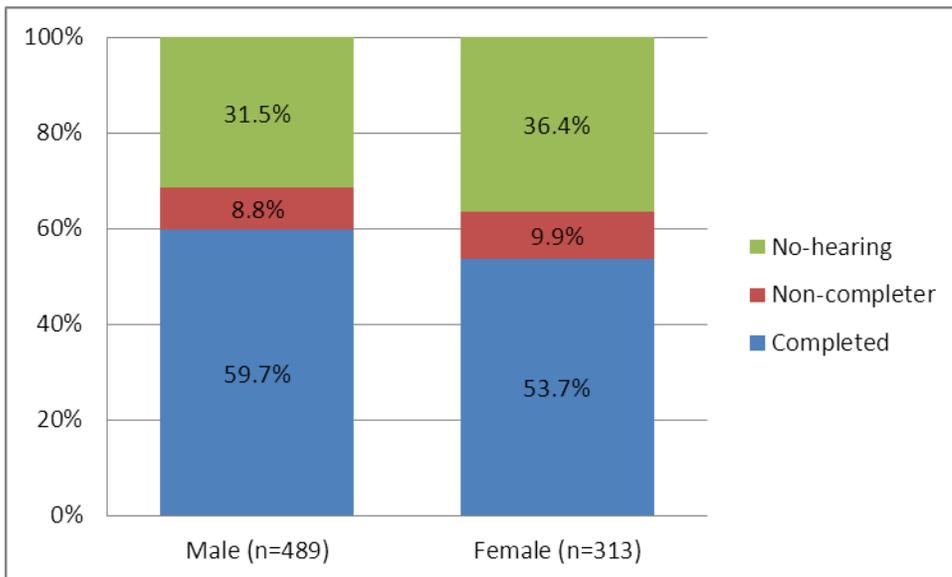
*Completion Results by Demographics.* Similar percentages of African Americans and Whites completed the program (57.4% and 59.3%, respectively). Of African Americans referred to the BCTC program, 74 attended a hearing but did not complete the program. For both Whites and Latinos/as, all clients referred to the program either attended a hearing and completed the program or did not attend a hearing at all. Five of the eight Latinos/as referred to the program did not attend a hearing, a larger proportion than either African Americans or Whites. (Ethnicity information was missing for one teen.) See Figure 9.

Figure 9. *Baltimore City Teen Court Ethnicity by Completion Status*



Males completed the program slightly more often than females (59.7% vs. 53.7%). Females failed to attend a hearing more often than males (36.4% vs. 31.5%). Males and females failed to complete the program after attending a hearing at similar rates (8.8% vs. 9.9%, respectively). See Figure 10.

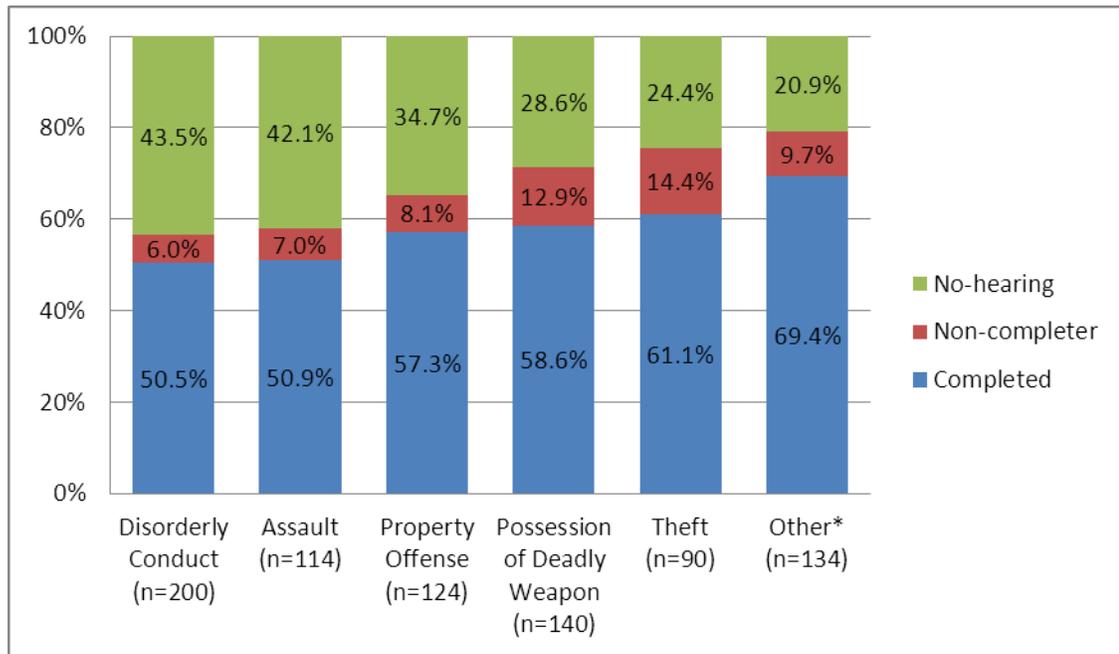
Figure 10. *Baltimore City Teen Court Completion Status by Gender*



Completion rates varied slightly by case type. Teens charged with “other” types of offenses were most likely to complete the program (69.4%), followed by thefts (61.1%), possession of a deadly weapon (58.6%), and property offense (57.3%); see Figure 11. Teens who

committed theft (14.4%) and possession of deadly weapon offenses (12.9%) were slightly more likely not to complete the program than teens charged with other types of offense. Teens with disorderly conduct (43.5%) and assault (42.1%) cases were more likely not to attend a Teen Court hearing than were teens with other case types.

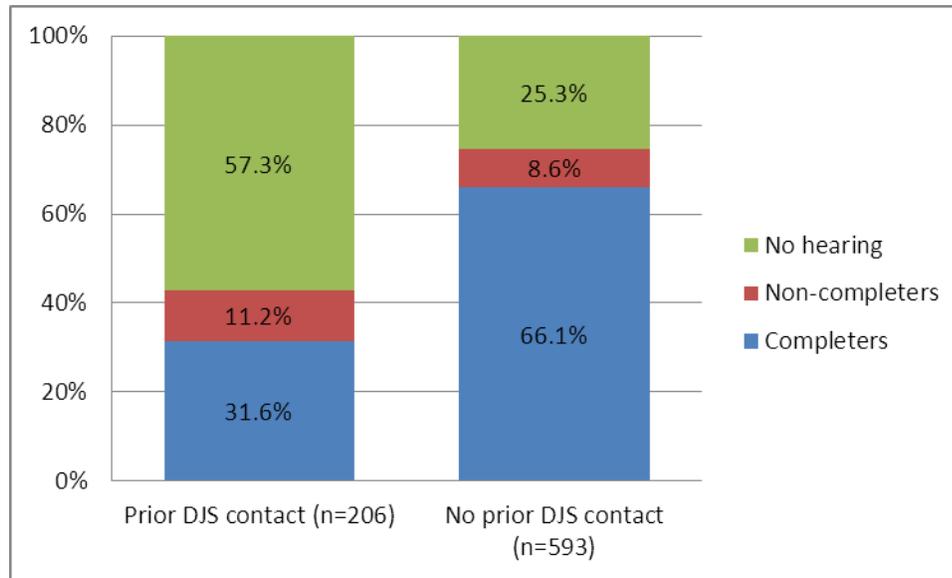
Figure 11. *Baltimore City Teen Court Case Type by Completion Status*



\* Other includes aggressive panhandling, disrupting school, disturbing peace, false statement, gambling, hindering/resisting arrest, littering, burglary, drug or alcohol related crimes, and failure to obey.

As seen in Figure 12, twice as many teens who had no previous contact with DJS (66.1%) before their BCTC referral completed the program than those who had a prior contact with DJS (31.6%). More than half (57.3%) of the teens who had a prior DJS contact failed to attend a Teen Court hearing, while a quarter of the teens who had no prior DJS contact failed to attend a hearing. Similar proportions of teens from both groups failed to complete the program after attending a hearing (11.2% and 8.6%).

Figure 12. *Baltimore City Prior DJS Contacts by Completion Status*



The mean age of teens at time of referral to the BCTC program was compared among the three categories of completion status: completer, non-completer, and no-hearing. The mean age at time of referral was nearly the same across all three groups, ranging from 15.3 years for teens who did not attend a hearing to 15.5 years for teens who completed the BCTC program.

Table 1. *Baltimore City Mean Age at Time of Referral by Completion Status*

	Completers (n=460)	Non-completers (n=74)	No hearing (n=265)
Mean age at time of referral (years)	15.5	15.4	15.3

Charles County Teen Court Evaluation: Participant Information and DJS Rates of Referral

*Participant Information.*

*Referrals and Hearings.* Figure 13 displays the cumulative number of referrals to the Charles County Teen Court (CCTC) from the first quarter of fiscal year (FY) 2009 (starting on July 1, 2008) through the fourth quarter of FY 2011 (through June 30, 2011). Through the fourth

quarter of FY 2011, 550 referrals were made to the CCTC. Only five of the 550 (<1%) referrals did not lead to a Teen Court hearing. Over the past three years, the CCTC received an average of 45.8 referrals per quarter from various referral agencies. During FY 2010, the CCTC received the most referrals by quarter, averaging 48.0 referrals during each three month span. The program had the fewest referrals during the first quarter of FY 2009 (31 referrals) and the largest number of referrals in the fourth quarter of FY 2011 (58). Figure 14 shows the number of referrals and hearings held during each quarter, revealing that on average, between FY 2009 and FY 2011, the CCTC had 45.4 hearings per quarter. The fourth quarter of FY 2011 had the most hearings (56) while the first quarter of FY 2009 had the fewest hearings held (30).

Figure 13. *Charles County Teen Court Total Referrals for FY 2009-2011*

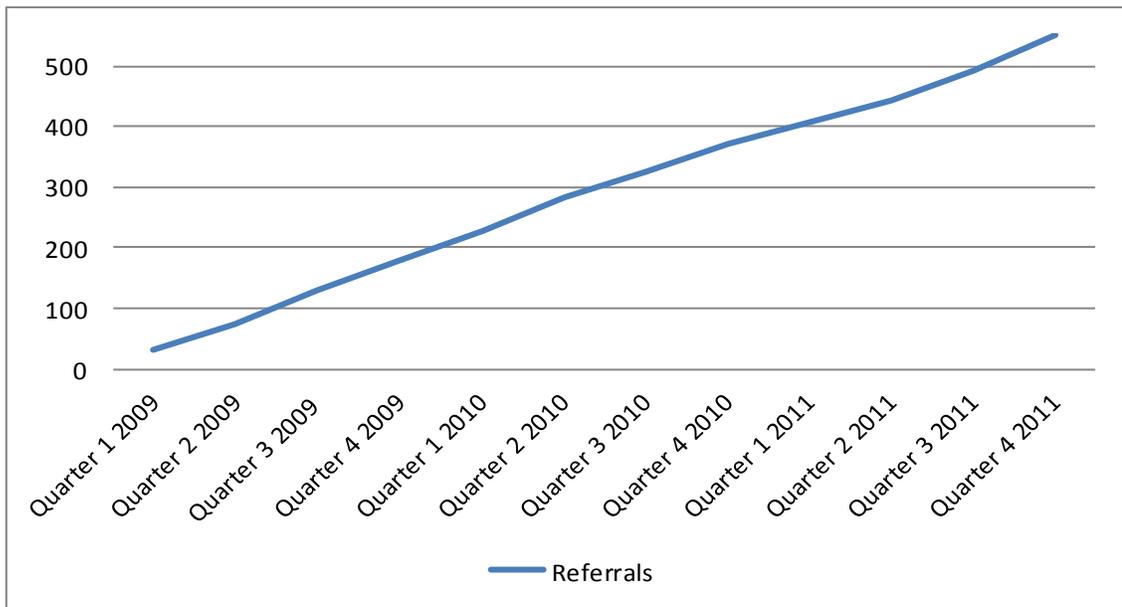
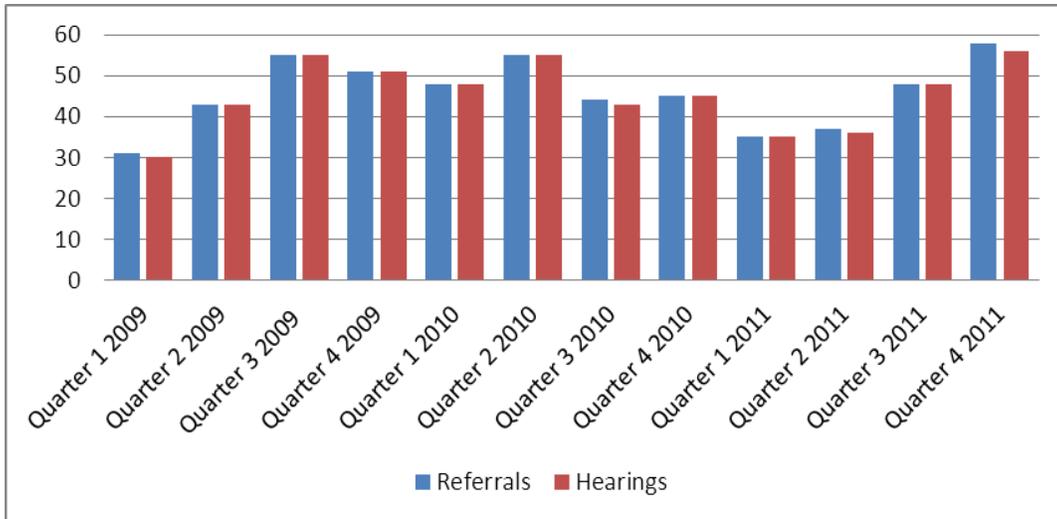
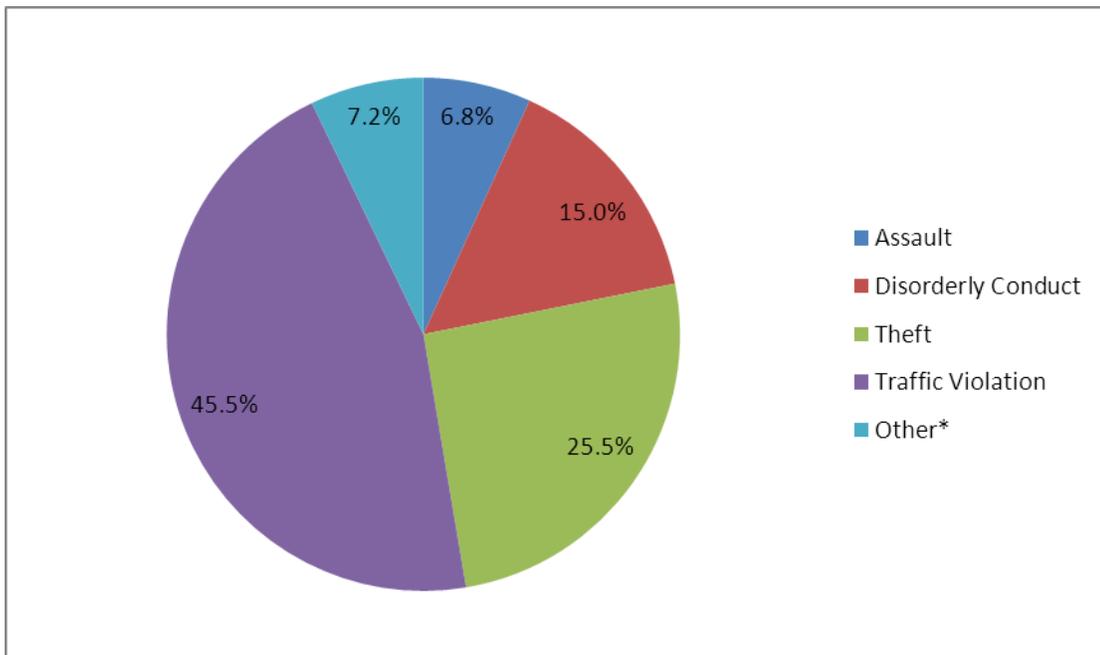


Figure 14. *Charles County Teen Court Referrals and Hearings by Quarter*



Case type was reported for all but one referral to the CCTC program. Youth with traffic violation charges made up the largest percentage of referrals (45.5%) to the CCTC, followed by those charged with theft (25.5%), and disorderly conduct charges (15.0%). Assaults accounted for 6.8 percent of all referrals. Offenses that occurred less than 5 percent of the time were grouped to form an “other” category which accounted for 7.2 percent of the referred case types. These included disrupting school operations and possessing a deadly weapon (both represented 2.6% of the cases), property offenses (1.3%), alcohol or tobacco violations, and disturbing the peace charges, which each represented less than one percent of all referrals. See Figure 15.

Figure 15. *Charles County Referrals by Case Type*



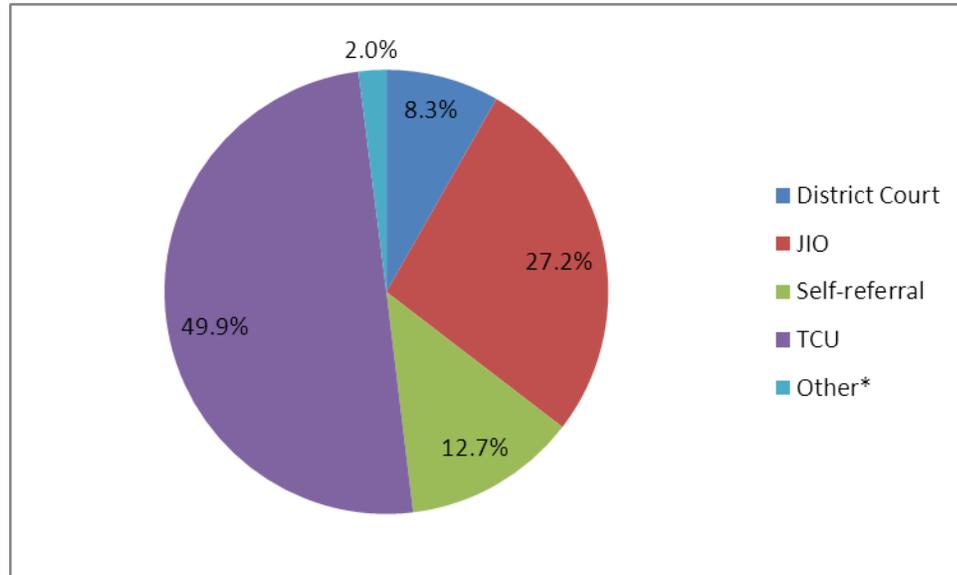
\* Other includes disrupting school operations, disturbing the peace, possession of a deadly weapon, trespassing, alcohol or tobacco violation, and destruction of property.

Half of the referrals to the CCTC program came from the Teen Court Unit (TCU) itself (49.9%) as is shown in Figure 16. About one in four referrals to the program (27.2%) came from Juvenile Intervention Officers, who work for the Charles County Sheriff's Department and are located within the county schools, while roughly one in 10 referrals (12.7%) were family-initiated referrals.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the District Court made 8.3 percent of the referrals to the program. Other referrals (2.0% altogether) came from the Maryland State Police, other Charles County Sheriff's Officers, the Department of Juvenile Services, and private attorneys.

---

<sup>12</sup> Family-initiated referrals are comprised of families of teens who inquire about their eligibility directly to CCTC after hearing about the program at school presentations, word of mouth, or press releases.

Figure 16. Charles County Teen Court Referrals by Source



\*Other includes Maryland State Police, Charles County Sheriff's Officers, Department of Juvenile Services, and private attorneys.

*Demographics.* The average age of juveniles at the time of referral to the Teen Court program was 16.3 years. The youngest person referred was 11.6 years of age, while the oldest was 18.5 years of age (although 17 years old when offense occurred). More than one half of the referrals to the CCTC were male (55.8%), with females accounting for 44.2 percent of referrals. Nearly all juveniles referred to the program were either African American (52.6%) or White (45.8%). Asian Americans, Latinos/as, and American Indians made up the remaining 1.6 percent of referrals (one participant was missing ethnicity information; see Figures 17 and 18).

Figure 17. Charles County Teen Court Referrals by Gender

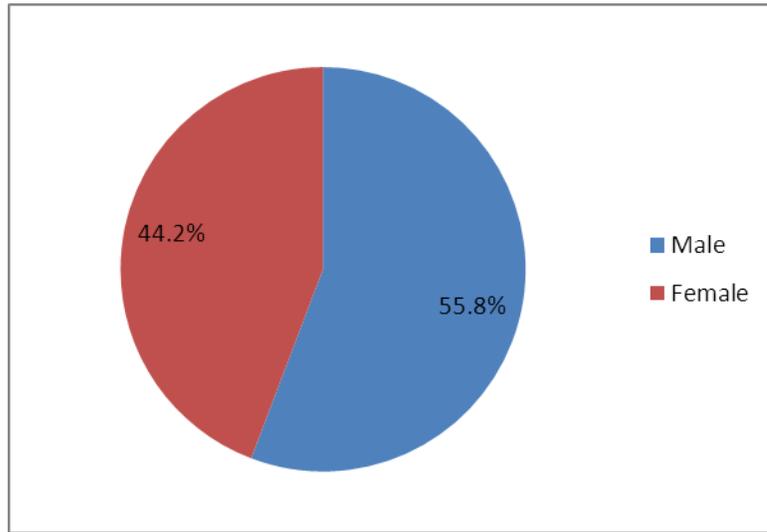
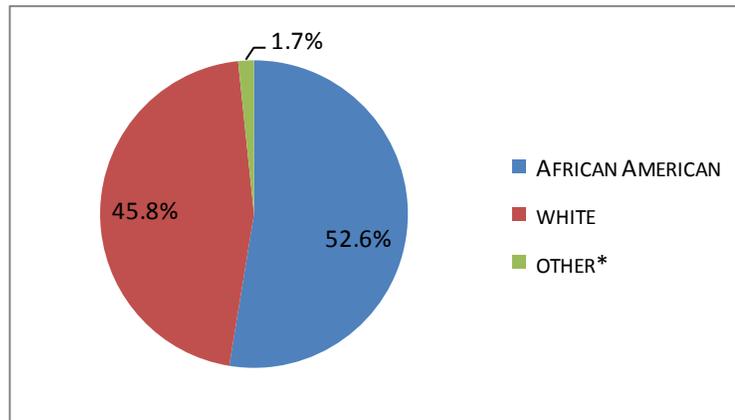


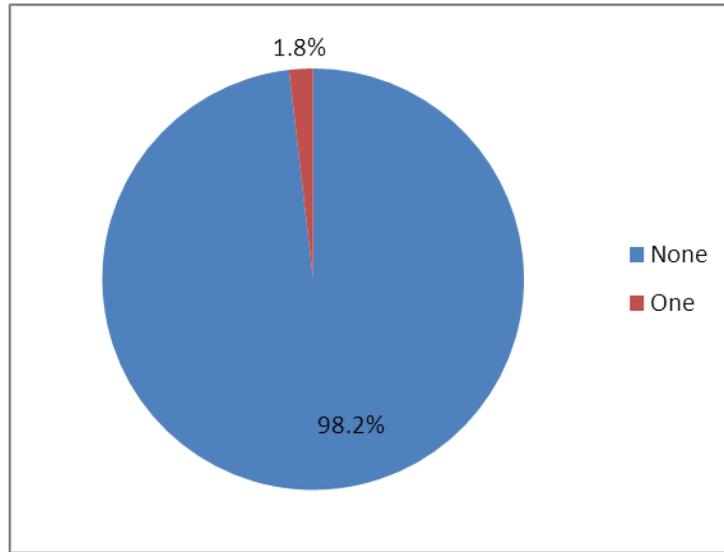
Figure 18. Charles County Teen Court Referrals by Ethnicity



\*Other is made up of Asian Americans, Latinos/as, and American Indians.

*Delinquency History.* Official delinquency history on all CCTC youth was obtained from the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). Virtually all youth referred to the Charles County Teen Court (98.2%) had no previous complaints filed with DJS. The 10 youth with previous DJS involvement had a single prior referral to the Department. See Figure 19.

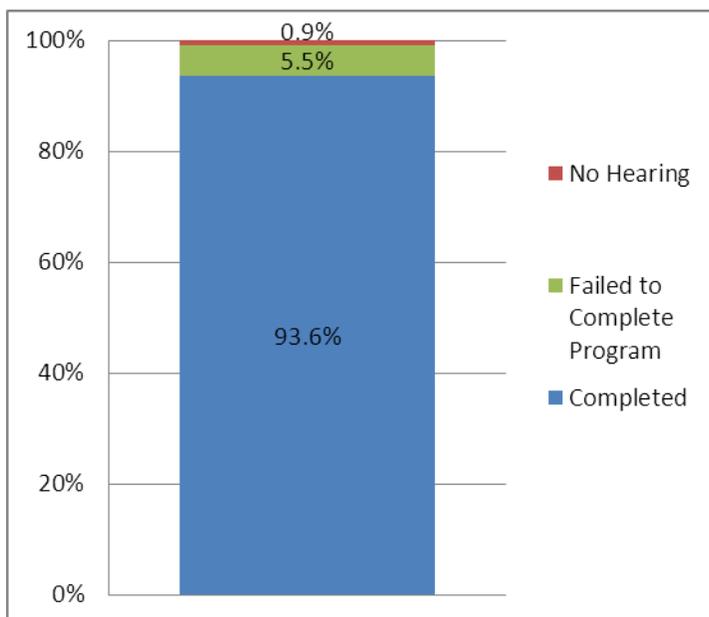
Figure 19. Charles County Teen Court Referrals with Prior DJS Complaints



**Teen Court Participation**

*Hearing and Completion Results.* As noted in Figure 20, only five (0.9%) of the 550 juveniles referred to the program did not take part in a Teen Court hearing; in one case the Teen Court Coordinator in consultation with the judge declined to allow a case to proceed, and the other four juveniles failed to appear (1), opted to go to court on their own (1), or had parents who opted to have their case forwarded to DJS (2). There were 515 participants who attended a hearing and completed the program, accounting for 93.6 percent of all referrals. Another 30 juveniles (5.5%) took part in a hearing but failed to complete the program because they did not complete their sanctions.

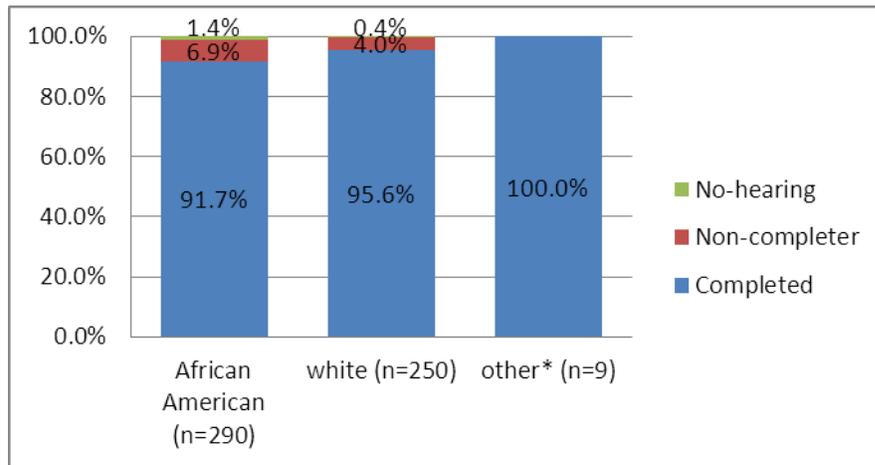
Figure 20. Status of Juveniles Referred to Charles County Teen Court



*Completion Results by Demographics.* There were no notable differences in completion status by ethnicity. All of the CCTC participants grouped in the other ethnicity category (Asian American, Latino/a, and American Indian; n=9) completed the Teen Court program. Among Whites (n=250), 95.6 percent completed the program and 4.0 percent attended a hearing but failed to complete the sanctions imposed. Less than one percent of Whites did not attend a Teen Court hearing although one was

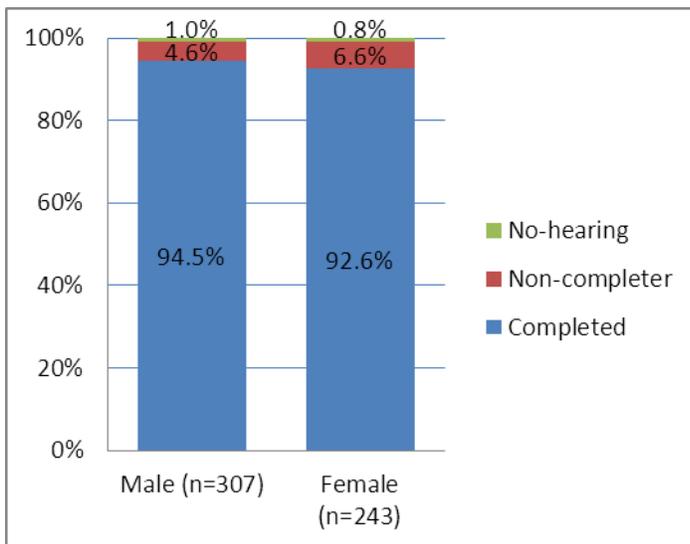
scheduled. Of those clients who reported their ethnicity as African American (n=290), 91.7 percent completed the program and 6.9 percent failed to complete the sanctions imposed at the hearing. There were four African American clients (1.4%) who never attended a hearing even though one was scheduled. See Figure 21.

Figure 21. *Charles County Teen Court Ethnicity by Completion Status*



\* Other includes Asian American, Latino/a, and American Indian.

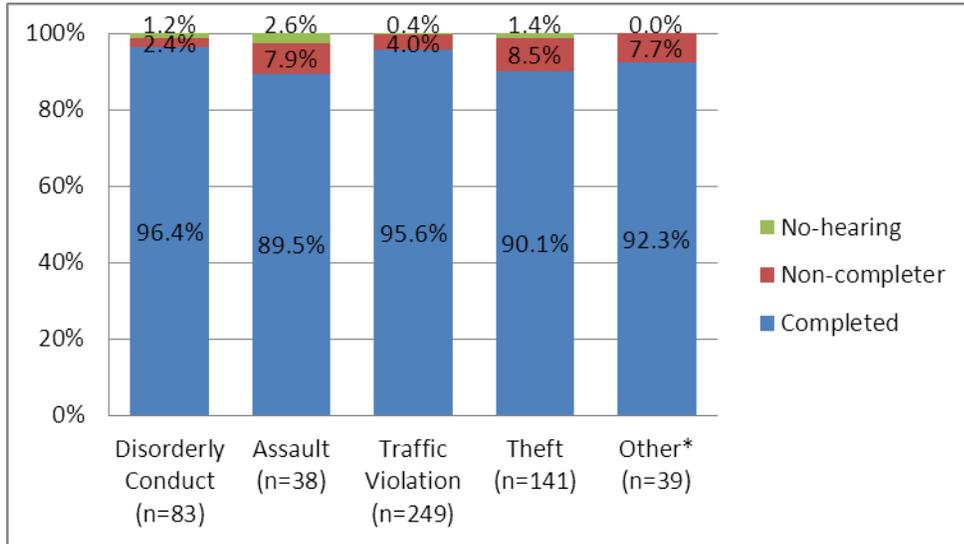
Figure 22. *Charles County Teen Court Gender by Completion Status*



As with ethnicity, there were virtually no differences between males (94.5%) and females (92.6%) in rates of CCTC program completion. See Figure 22. Likewise, similar percentages of males and females failed to complete the sanctions of the program after attending a hearing (4.6% vs. 6.6%, respectively), and did not attend a hearing (1.0% vs. 0.8%, respectively).

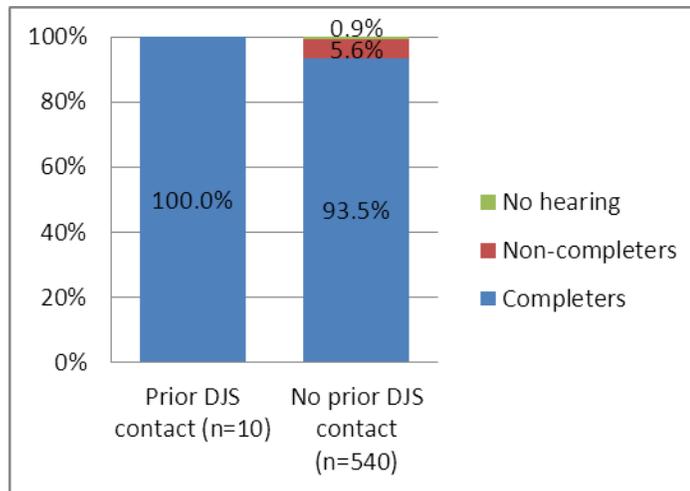
As seen in Figure 23, clients who were charged with theft (90.1%) or assault (89.5%) were slightly less likely to complete the CCTC program than teens charged with disorderly conduct (96.4%) or traffic violations (95.6%). Clients charged with some other offense type completed the program 92.3 percent of the time. There was little difference between case types among those who did not attend a hearing. Of the 10 teens that had a previous referral to DJS, all completed the Teen Court program; see Figure 24.

Figure 23. Charles County Teen Court Case Type by Completion Status



\* Other includes disrupting school operations, disturbing the peace, possession of a deadly weapon, trespassing, alcohol or tobacco violation, and destruction of property.

Figure 24. Charles County Prior DJS Contacts by Completion Status



The mean age of teens at time of referral was compared among the three types of completion status: completer, non-completer, and no-hearing. The mean age at time of referral was oldest for completers at 16.3 years, followed by non-completers at 15.9 years, and teens who did not attend a hearing at 14.8 years (any findings on this latter group should be viewed with caution given the very small number of youth involved). See Table 2.

Table 2. *Charles County Mean Age at Time of Referral by Completion Status*

	Completers (n=515)	Non-completers (n=30)	No hearing (n=5)
Mean age at time of referral	16.3	15.9	14.8

**Montgomery County Teen Court Evaluation: Participant Information and Department of Juvenile Services Rates of Referral**

**Participant Information**

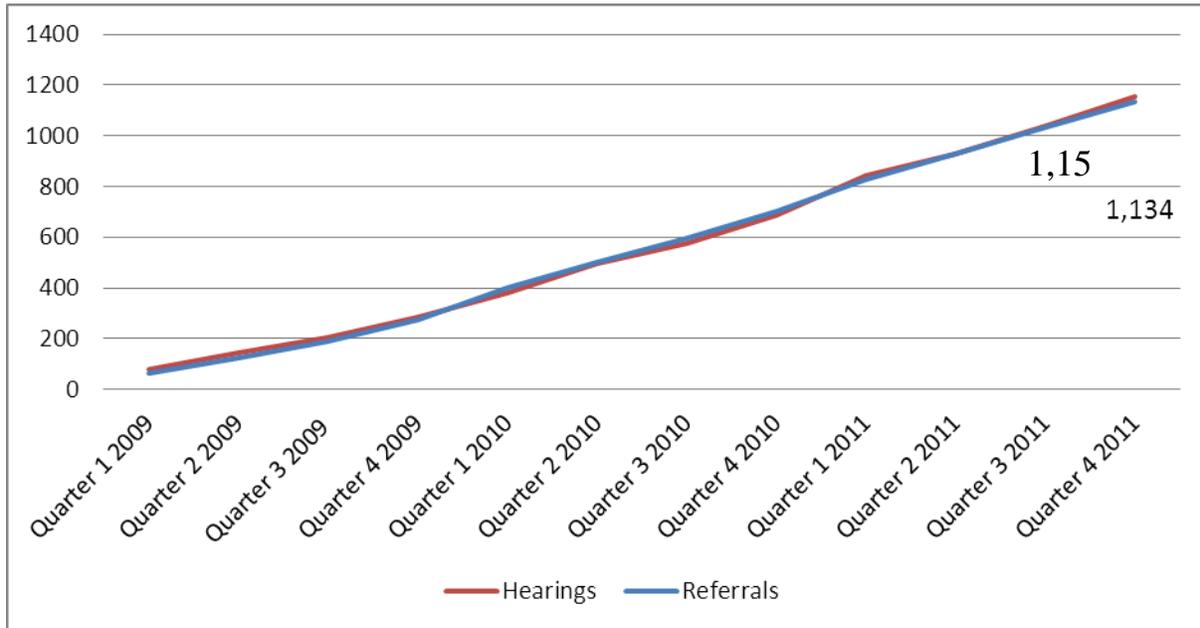
*Referrals and Hearings.*

Figure 25 displays the cumulative number of youth intakes and referrals to the Montgomery County Teen Court (MCTC) and those taking part in Teen Court hearings from the first quarter of fiscal year (FY) 2009 (starting on July 1, 2008) through the fourth quarter of FY 2011 (through June 30, 2011). For this three-year period, there were 1,134 total referrals made to the MCTC and 1,155 hearings.<sup>13</sup>

---

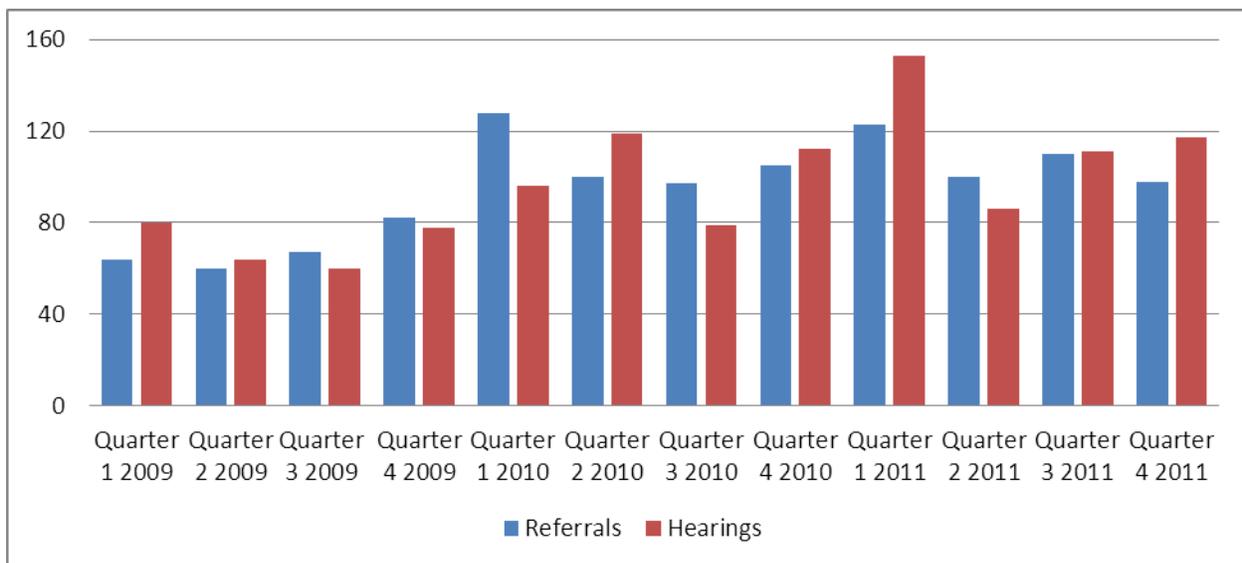
<sup>13</sup>There were another 48 youth referred to the MCTC by outside agencies (e.g., local police) who were not invited to take part in the program and thus are not included in the program findings reported here. The fact that there were more total hearings than referrals during the three-year duration shown was due to a relatively large number of hearings held early in this period, from referrals made in the months prior to July 2008.

Figure 25. Montgomery County Teen Court Total Referrals and Hearings FY 2009-2011



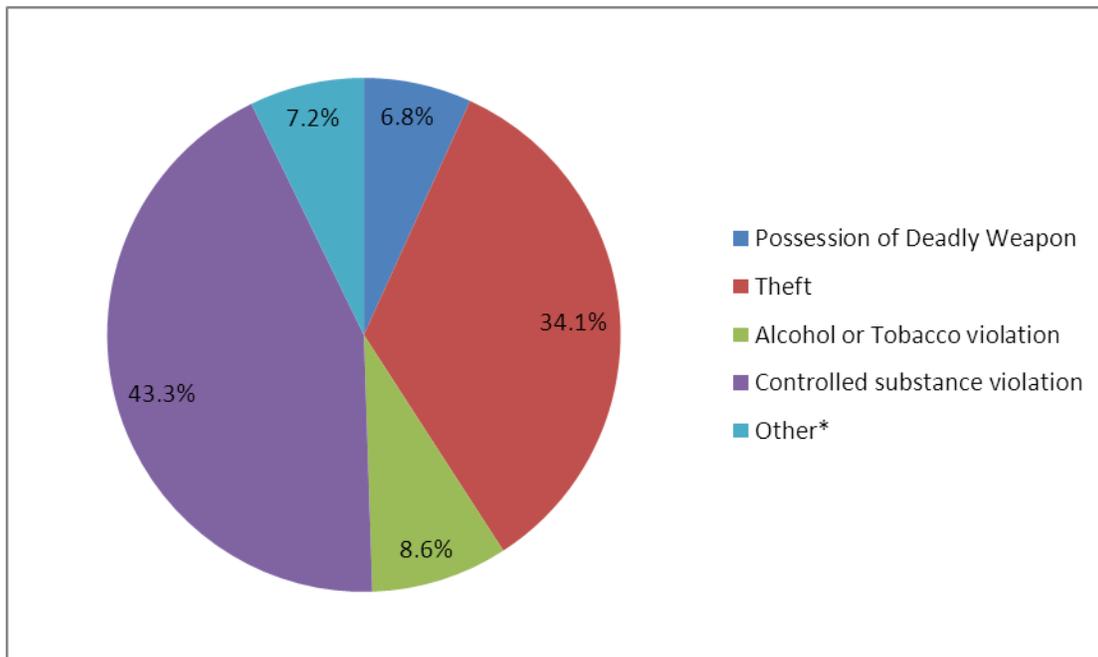
As is evident in Figure 26, the number of referrals and hearings varied considerably by quarter, while generally showing an increase after FY 2009, and stabilizing around 110 hearings per quarter during FY 2010 and FY 2011. Over the three-year tracking period there were an average of 96.3 hearings per quarter, with the most hearings in the first quarter of FY 2011 (153) and the least in the third quarter of FY 2009 (60).

Figure 26. Montgomery County Teen Court Intakes and Hearings by Quarter



Case type was reported for all but eight teens referred to the MCTC program. Youth with controlled substance violation charges made up the largest percentage of teens referred (43.3%) to the MCTC, followed by those charged with theft (34.1%), and alcohol or tobacco violations (8.6%). Possession of a deadly weapon accounted for 6.8 percent of all referrals. Offenses that occurred less than 5 percent of the time were grouped to form an “other” category which accounted for 7.2 percent of the referred case types. These included assault (representing 3.0% of the cases) and property offenses (2.6%). All offenses in the “other” category represented less than one percent of all referrals (a complete list is below Figure 27).

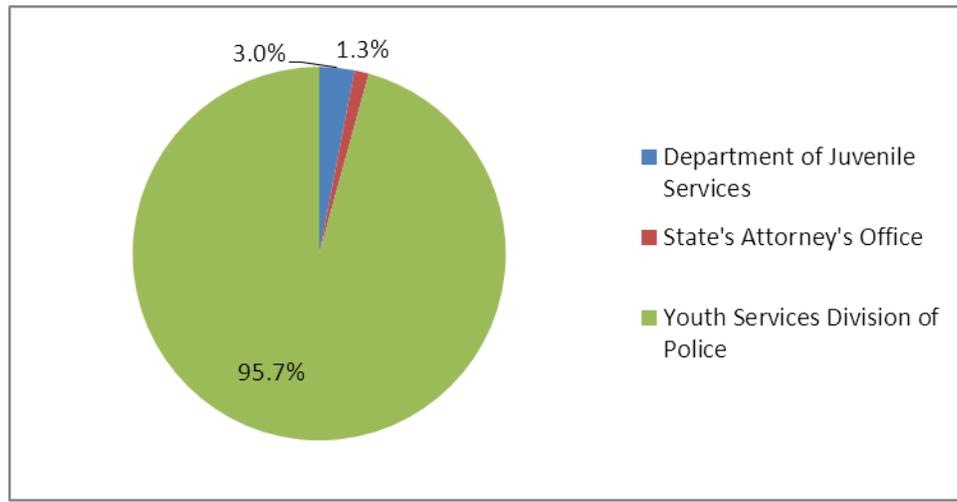
Figure 27. *Montgomery County Teen Court Referrals by Case Type*



\* Other includes assault, destroying property, disorderly conduct, disrupting school operations, failure to obey, false statement, resisting arrest, trespassing, and burglary.

The majority of referrals to the MCTC program came from the Youth Services Division of the Montgomery County Police (95.7%) as is shown in Figure 4. A small portion of referrals came from the Department of Juvenile Services (3.0%) and State’s Attorney’s Office (1.3%).

Figure 28. *Montgomery County Teen Court Referrals by Agency*



*Demographics.* The average age of juveniles at the time of intake with the Teen Court coordinator was 16.4 years. The youngest person referred was 11.9 years of age while the oldest was 18.4 years of age. Two-thirds of the referrals to the MCTC were male (64.4%), with females accounting for 35.6 percent of referrals. A little under half of the juveniles referred to the program were White (45.1%). African Americans made up nearly one-quarter (23.6%) of the teens referred to the MCTC, while Latinos/as accounted for 19.8 percent of the referrals. The remaining 11.4 percent of the teens referred to the MCTC were Asian American.

Figure 29. *Montgomery County Teen Court Referrals by Gender*

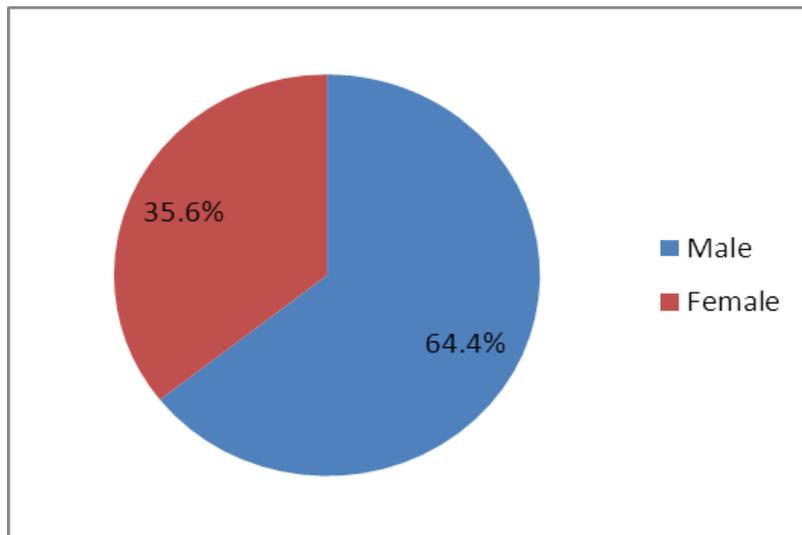
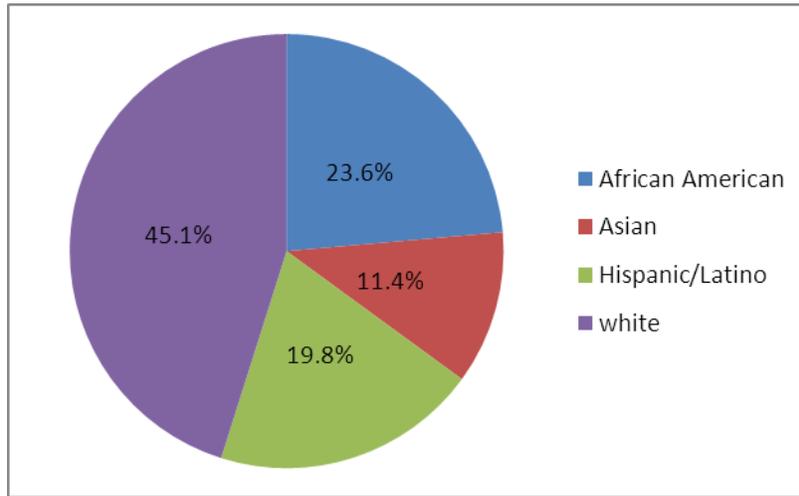
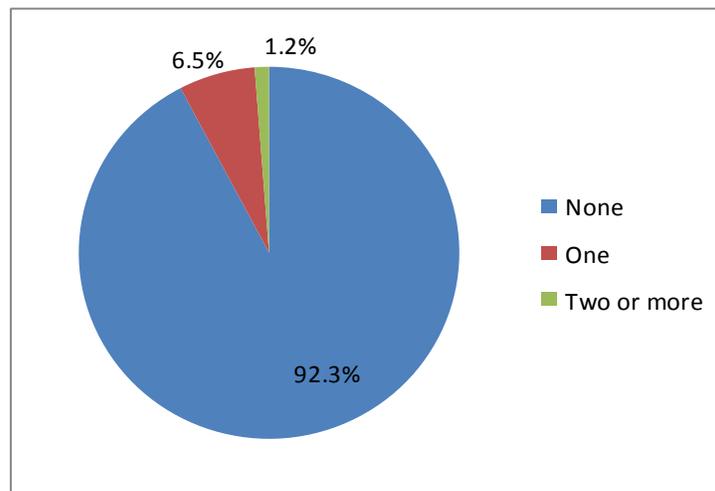


Figure 30. *Montgomery County Teen Court Referrals by Ethnicity*



*Delinquency History.* Official delinquency history on all MCTC youth was obtained from the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). The great majority of youth referred to the Montgomery County Teen Court (92.3%) had no previous complaints filed with DJS; 6.5% had one prior DJS contact and 1.2% had two or more prior DJS contacts.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 31. *Montgomery County Referrals with Prior DJS Complaints*

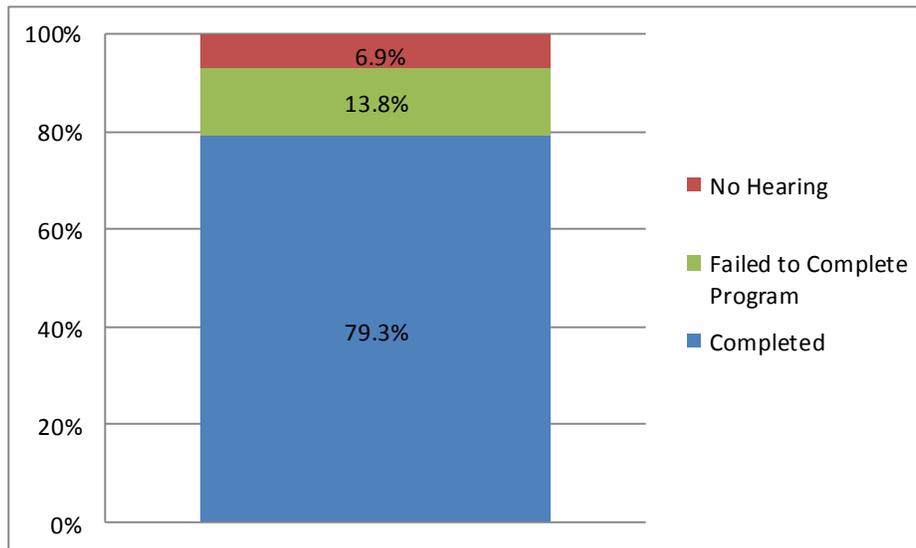


<sup>14</sup> MCTC generally does not accept youth with prior DJS involvement, although an estimated three to four program participants per year (approximately 16 over the time period in this sample) have prior DJS involvement. The higher numbers found here may be due to the timing of the data extraction. MCTC pulled the data when making decisions about whether to accept youth in the program and researchers pulled the data for recidivism a few years later. Researchers also included Child in Need of Supervision contacts, which may not have been included by MCTC.

## Teen Court Participation

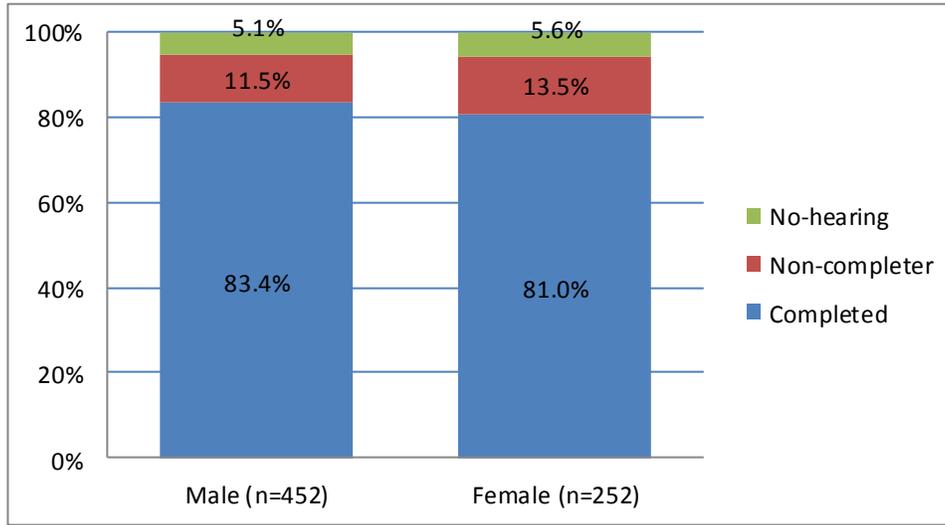
*Hearing and Completion Results.* Four out of five (79.3%) youth referred to MCTC had a hearing and completed the program (n=919). There were 160 teens who attended a hearing but failed to complete the program (13.8%). Eighty teens (6.9%) who were referred to the program never attended a Teen Court hearing.

Figure 32. *Status of Montgomery County Teen Court Referrals*



*Completion Results by Demographics.* Similar percentages of males and females completed MCTC (83.4% vs. 81.0%, respectively). Also, similar percentages of referred males and females failed to complete the program after attending a hearing (11.5% vs. 13.5%) or did not attend a hearing (5.1% vs. 5.6%).

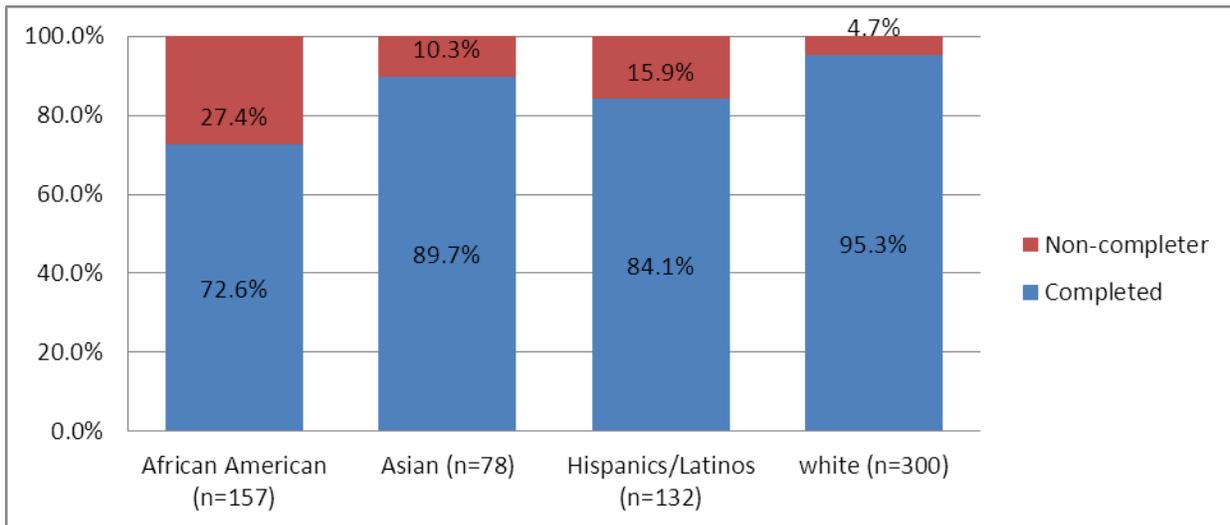
Figure 33. *Montgomery County Teen Court Completion Status by Gender*



The mean age of youth at referral to MCTC was compared among the three types of completion status: completer, non-completer, and no hearing. Completers were the oldest at 16.2 years of age on average; the groups of non-completers and no-hearing teens both averaged 15.9 years of age at the time of their MCTC referral.

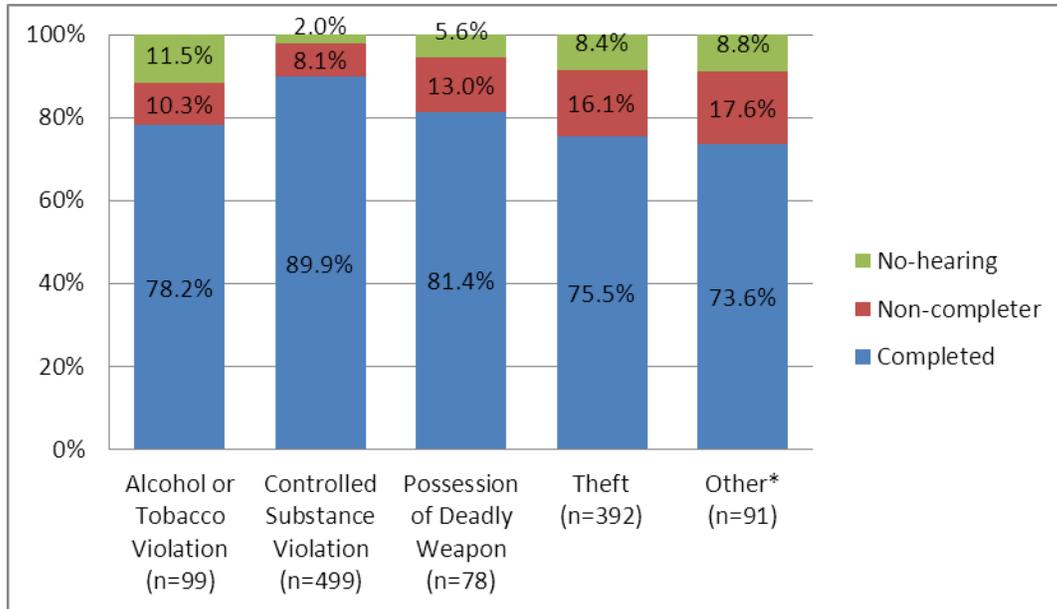
Completion status differed somewhat by ethnicity. White teens who were referred to MCTC tended to complete the program most frequently (95.3%), followed by Asian Americans (89.7%), Latinos/as (84.1%), and African American youth (72.6%). Ethnicity information was not available for those teens who did not attend a hearing so that information is missing from the table below.

Figure 34. *Montgomery County Teen Court Ethnicity by Completion Status*



Completion status also differed somewhat by charge type. Youth who were charged with a controlled substance violation (89.9%) or possession of a deadly weapon (81.4%) were slightly more likely to complete the MCTC program than teens charged with alcohol or tobacco violations (78.2%) or theft (75.5%). There was little difference between case types and clients who were referred but did not attend a hearing. No other differences emerged between charge types and completion status.

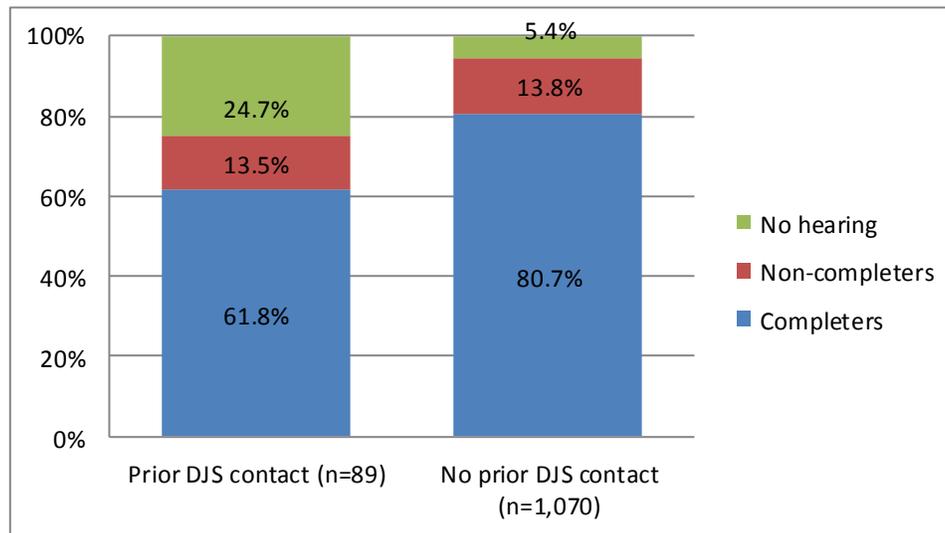
Figure 35. *Montgomery County Teen Court Case Type by Completion Status*



\* Other includes assault, destroying property, disorderly conduct, disrupting school operations, failure to obey, false statement, resisting arrest, trespassing, and burglary.

Teens without prior DJS contact were more likely to complete the MCTC program (80.7%) than teens that had a prior DJS contact (61.8%). Of those teens with prior contact, one quarter of them were referred but did not attend a MCTC hearing, compared to 5.4 percent of youth who had no prior contact with DJS.

Figure 36. *Montgomery County Teen Court Prior DJS Contacts by Completion Status*



## Interview and Survey Results

### Interviews with Youth Respondents

Youth respondents participated in two structured interviews, with similar questions asked at each. The pre-intervention measure administered prior to the Teen Court hearing employed standardized measures on coping, family functioning, civil engagement, and political attitudes.<sup>15</sup> Additional questions asked about demographics (e.g., age, ethnicity, county, religion, education level), and grades, and open-ended questions assessed perceptions on civic engagement, volunteering in the future, the police, and the legal system. The post-intervention measure, administered approximately four to six months following the pre-intervention (in order to ensure a reasonable time period for completing all sanctions), contained similar questions as the pre-intervention interview in addition to questions on Teen Court peer influence.<sup>16</sup> It also posed qualitative questions on volunteering, opinions of the police, law enforcement, citizenship, their Teen Court experience, and whether they have experienced problems at school, with friends or family, in the neighborhood, or with law enforcement.

<sup>15</sup> Specifically, the standardized measures included the Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (A-COPE; Patterson, & McCubbin, 1987), the Family Functioning Scale (FFS; Tavitian, Lubiner, Green, Grebstein, & Velicer, 1987), and political attitudes and civic engagement survey (Sherrod, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> The following standardized measures were used in the post-test: A-COPE, FFS, Sherrod's (2003) political attitudes and civic engagement survey, and the Teen Court Peer Influence Scale (TCPIS; Smith & Chonody, 2010).

## Recruitment

The research team from the School of Social Work, combined with efforts from the Teen Court coordinators from each jurisdiction, recruited 54 youth respondents into the study. Researchers interviewed 36 youth respondents from the three jurisdictions. Researchers were able to conduct 22 follow-up interviews with youth respondents (62.8%).

## Descriptive Statistics of Youth Respondents (Pre-Intervention)

Researchers interviewed 36 youth respondents involved in the three jurisdictions of Teen Court. Just over half (52.8%) were male. Twenty-four were African American. The majority (69.4%) came from Baltimore City, 5 (13.9%) from Charles County, and 6 (16.7%) from Montgomery County). Their ages ranged from 11 to 18, with an average age of 14.66 (SD=1.68). Tables 3 and 4 highlight the breakdown of gender and ethnicity by jurisdiction.

Table 3. *Youth Respondents' Gender by Jurisdiction*

	Jurisdiction		
Gender	Baltimore City	Charles County	Montgomery County
Male	13	3	3
Female	11	2	3
Total	24	5	6

Table 4. *Youth Respondents' Ethnicity by Jurisdiction*

Ethnicity	Jurisdiction		
	Baltimore City	Charles County	Montgomery County
African American	18	4	2
White	0	1	3
American Indian	2	0	0
Latino/a	1	0	0
Hebrew	1	0	0
Other	2	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>

### **Youth Respondents and Volunteerism**

Researchers asked students about their sense of volunteering or performing community service and service learning, a teaching method combining community service with classroom instruction. Seventeen students (47.2%) said they participated in service learning, and 18 indicated they did not. The types of service learning varied, with responses including participating in community clean ups, helping teachers with students, reading to younger students or the elderly, helping the homeless, and manual labor. When asked whether they would volunteer in the future, 86.1% (31) said yes, while 8.3% (3) said no and one said maybe. Among those who said they would volunteer in the future, the majority indicated motivating factors such as enjoying their experience, feeling a passion for helping others, or learning. Only seven said their motivation was simply to complete high school requirements.

### **Youth Respondents at School**

Researchers asked several questions about school, including number of absences weekly and monthly, how respondents described themselves as students, their grades and performance in school relative to others, and participation in school activities. In terms of absences, 24 students (66% of the sample) said they were never absent during a typical school week. Eleven students (30.7%) said they were absent at least one day of the school week, and eight (22.2%) said they were absent about one day each month.

When asked to describe themselves as students, responses among youth respondents fell into two categories: consistently good students, or inconsistently good students. For example, 20 respondents described themselves as good students. Some added that they worked hard, were dedicated, and/or were reliable. One respondent reported receiving high grades without putting forth much effort. Three youth respondents indicated that they were good students when they chose to be, or were better students on some days than on others. A few respondents reported that they did not study, did not pay attention, or did not complete their work. A few respondents, on the other hand, said that they worked hard and tried to do well, but were easily distracted. When asked to compare themselves with other students their age, on a scale of 0 to 4 with 0 being below average and 4 being above average, the majority of students (52.8%) ranked themselves as a 3. The majority of respondents characterized their grades as Bs (19) or Cs (10). Figure 36 shows the range of responses in how students considered themselves as students when compared to their peers.

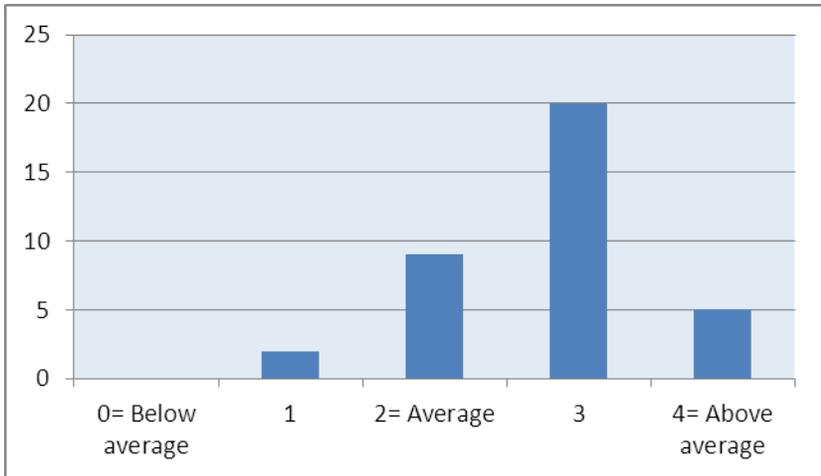


Figure 36. Bar graph of responses to the question: “How good of a student do you think you are, compared to others your age?”

The majority of the youth respondents interviewed did not participate in school-sponsored activities, such as school government, the school newspaper, or athletics. Among those activities, school sports

received the highest level of participation, with 36.1% (13) indicating they played on a sports team almost daily.

### Youth Respondents at Home

Researchers asked respondents about the other members of their households and how often they had dinner with their family members. They also administered a standardized measure of family functioning. Sixty-one percent of the respondents said they ate dinner with their family almost daily, while 13.9% said they had dinner with their family once a week. The most frequent number of family members living in the same house was two (25% or nine respondents), while 22.2% lived with three family members. Nearly 14% had only one other household member. The mother was the most frequent household member (77.8%). Table 5 displays the frequencies and percentages of self-reported number of family members living within a household; Table 6 represents the frequency with which youth respondents ate dinner with their family members

Table 5. *Number of Family Members in the Household*

No. of family members	Frequency	Percentage
One	5	14.71%
Two	9	26.47%
Three	8	23.53%
Four	4	11.76%
Five	4	11.76%
More than five	4	11.76%
Total	34	100%

Table 6. *Frequency of Respondents Having Dinner with Their Parents, Brothers and Sisters*

	Frequency	Percentage
Never	1	2.8%
A few times per year	1	2.8%
Once or twice per month	6	16.7%
Once a week	6	16.7%
Almost daily	22	61.1%
Total	34*	100%

\*Two were missing

The Family Functioning Scale (Tavitian, Lubiner, Green, Grebstein, & Velicer, 1987) is a questionnaire about family life, and each is rated on a scale from 1 = Never to 7 = Always (the higher the score, the more frequent the family participates in that function). There are five subscales within the Family Functioning Scale: *positive family affect*, *family communication*,

*family conflicts, family worries, and family rituals.*<sup>17</sup> Nineteen questions were reverse coded for data analysis.

Table 7 represents a summary of means and standard deviations for the five dimensions of the Family Functioning Scale for both pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews with youth respondents.

Youth respondents reported higher levels of family functioning than the median value for the measure, across all dimensions of this measure. Values ranged from 3.90 to 5.60 on a seven-point scale, indicating fairly high levels of family functioning from the perspective of youth respondents, at both pre- and post-intervention time-points.

Table 7. *Youth Respondents Responding to the Family Functioning Scale*

Dimension	First interview		Second interview	
	M	SD	M	SD
Positive Family Affect	5.46	0.69	5.50	0.71
Family Communication	4.24	1.29	4.07	1.15
Family Conflicts	4.20	1.32	4.31	1.33
Family Worries	3.90	1.26	4.07	1.34
Family Rituals/Supports	5.60	1.07	5.38	0.90

### **Youth Respondents and Coping**

The Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (A-COPE) is a measure that explores how adolescents behave when managing problems or situations that may be difficult for them (Patterson, & McCubbin, 1987). The 54-item measure has 12 subscales (*id.*), including *ventilating feelings, seeking diversion, developing self-reliance, developing social support, solving family problems, avoiding problems, seeking spiritual support, investing in close friends,*

<sup>17</sup> The Cronbach alpha coefficients of the subscales range from .62 to .91 (Tavitian, Lubiner, Green, Grebstein, & Velicer, 1987).

*seeking professional support, engaging in a demanding activity, being humorous, and relaxing.*<sup>18</sup> Each item on the measure is answered on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 = Never, and 5 = Most of the time, meaning the higher the score, the more often the respondent engages in this activity or behavior to cope with a difficult situation.

Table 8 summarizes the means and standard deviations of the dimensions of the A-COPE scale for both pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews.

The results from the A-COPE demonstrate that youth respondents entered Teen Court with substantial coping resources, scoring above the mid-point of the range on nearly all items. Although significance testing with other samples was not conducted, it is notable that the A-COPE scores reported in other literature on vulnerable adolescents are generally lower.<sup>19</sup> During the time between the pre- and post-intervention administration, approximately four months on average, A-COPE scores did not change significantly; however, some differences among jurisdictions were uncovered.

Differences were evaluated among the three jurisdictions on median change on the subscales of the A-COPE scale among youth respondents.<sup>20</sup> There were differences among three subscales (i.e., diversions, family problems, and spirituality). Differences also existed between the jurisdictions.<sup>21</sup> Baltimore City's youth respondents reported a greater change in seeking diversions between the pre- and post-intervention (e.g., sleep, go to a movie, go shopping, reading, watch television, etc.) than Charles County and Montgomery County's youth respondents.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Alpha levels range from .50 to .76.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Gould, Hussong, & Keeley, 2008; Recklitis & Noam, 1999; but see Harris & Franklin, 2003, for a contrasting finding.

<sup>20</sup> Differences were evaluated using the Kruskal-Wallis test of significance.

<sup>21</sup>  $\chi^2 = 9.32$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p = .009$ .

<sup>22</sup> The results of the Mann-Whitney U pairwise comparison found a statistically significant difference between Baltimore City (24) and Charles County (5), ( $U=25.5$ ,  $p = .044$ ), and between Baltimore City (24) and Montgomery County (5) ( $U=15.5$ ,  $p = .007$ ).

Table 8. *Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (A-COPE)*

Dimensions	First interview		Second interview	
	M	SD	M	SD
Ventilating feelings	2.97	0.55	2.95	0.55
Seeking diversions	3.34	0.59	3.27	0.80
Developing self-reliance	3.73	0.67	3.89	0.56
Developing social support	3.26	0.74	3.10	0.73
Solving family problems	3.25	0.79	3.17	0.73
Avoiding problems	4.05	0.48	3.95	0.71
Seeking spiritual support	2.69	1.04	2.38	0.80
Investing in close friends	3.74	0.91	3.64	1.10
Seeking professional support	2.21	0.99	2.45	1.26
Engaging in demanding activities	3.53	1.03	3.42	0.86
Being humorous	3.74	1.10	3.70	1.04
Relaxing	3.38	0.51	3.33	0.45

Within the subscale of solving family problems, the overall comparison of the three jurisdictions was significant.<sup>23</sup> Baltimore City youth respondents on average reported a higher

<sup>23</sup>  $\chi^2 = 8.62, df=2, p = .013$

change score on this subscale (e.g., talking to your family members about what bothers you, doing things with family, compromising with family, and going along with parental rules and requests) than respondents in Charles and Montgomery Counties.<sup>24</sup>

Within the spirituality subscale (e.g., going to church, praying, or talking to a spiritual leader), the overall comparison of the three jurisdictions was significant.<sup>25</sup> Baltimore City youth reported, on average, a greater degree of change in using spirituality to help cope with their problems compared with youth in Montgomery County.<sup>26</sup>

### **Youth Respondents and Teen Court Peer Influence**

Youth respondents who participated in the second (post-intervention) interview completed a 15-item questionnaire that assessed peer influence within Teen Court (Smith, & Chonody, 2010). The measure, called the Teen Court Peer Influence Scale (TCPIS, Smith 2007), is scaled from 1 to 7, with 1= Strongly Disagree and 7= Strongly Agree. The questions reflect how peer volunteers affect youth respondents' attitudes and decisions.<sup>27</sup> In a sample of 22 youth respondents, the mean was 3.75 (SD=1.72) for positive cognitions, the mean was 4.49 (SD=1.47) for positive identity. For modeling, the mean was 4.52 (SD=1.62). These averages indicate that Teen Court respondents perceived their experiences with the youth volunteers as neutral (Smith, 2007).

### **Youth Respondents and Civic Engagement**

At both the pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews, youth respondents answered 117 questions related to civic engagement. The standardized measure includes dimensions of civic rights, civic duties, attitudes and behaviors, and elements of society that are deemed important by the respondent (Sherrod, 2003). Measure subscales are scored on somewhat different metrics (i.e, the ranges of scores are from 0 to 4, or 1 to 5) with higher scores indicating greater importance or higher frequency of the construct or behavior. The measure contains eight subscales: *participation in an event, future orientation, civic rights, civic duties, attitudes toward citizenship, current events, location where topics were discussed, and the importance of certain issues.*

---

<sup>24</sup> The results of the Mann-Whitney U pairwise comparison found a statistically significant difference between Baltimore City (24) and Charles County (5), (U=22.0, p = .027), and between Baltimore City (24) and Montgomery County (5) (U=20.5, p = .019).

<sup>25</sup>  $\chi^2 = 6.12$ , df=2, p = .047

<sup>26</sup> The results of the Mann-Whitney U pairwise comparison found a statistically significant difference between Baltimore City (24) and Montgomery County (5), (U=22.0, p = .027).

<sup>27</sup> The reliability of the measure has a Cronbach's alpha of .90, and it has three subscales: positive cognitions, positive identity, and modeling.

See Table 9 for a breakdown of means and standard deviations within the subscales of Sherrod’s measure on civic engagement.

Table 9. *Sherrod’s Civic Engagement Measure – Youth Respondents*

Dimensions	First interview		Second interview	
	M	SD	M	SD
Participation in activities	1.40	0.63	1.40	0.82
Things to do in the future	4.05	0.56	3.77	0.61
Rights as a citizen	3.29	0.54	3.21	0.50
Duties as a citizen	3.18	0.39	3.04	0.33
Citizenship attitudes & behaviors	2.20	0.58	2.20	0.58
Current events	2.85	0.68	2.81	0.66
Location where topics are discussed	1.72	1.00	1.39	0.70
Importance of social issues	4.20	0.43	3.89	0.41

Differences were evaluated among respondents from the three jurisdictions on median change on the rights subscale of the civic engagement measure (researchers asked youth whether items such as freedom of speech, privacy, to join any group, to vote, demonstrate, etc., are never a right, sometimes a right, or always a right).<sup>28</sup> The overall comparison of the three jurisdictions was significant.<sup>29</sup> Baltimore City youth respondents changed more than Montgomery County respondents in indicating that these activities were always a right.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> A Kruskal-Wallis test of significance was used to evaluate differences.

<sup>29</sup>  $\chi^2 = 8.193$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p = .017$

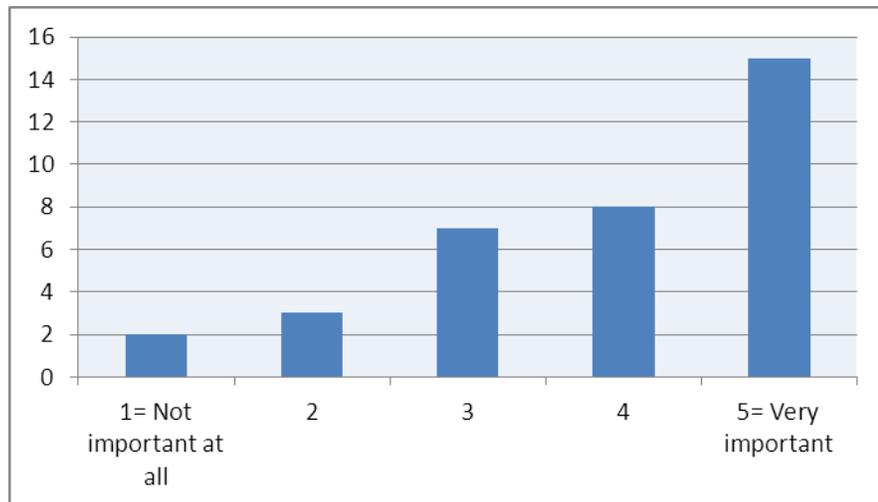
<sup>30</sup> The results of the Mann-Whitney U pairwise comparison found a statistically significant difference between Baltimore City (24) and Montgomery County (6), ( $U=18.5$ ,  $p = .003$ ).

Researchers asked youth respondents about their duties as citizens. More specifically, they asked whether certain activities (e.g., voting, protesting bad laws, staying informed, working, helping the needy, etc.) are important duties as a citizen. Differences were assessed among the three jurisdictions on median change on the duties subscale of the civic engagement measure.<sup>31</sup> The overall comparison of the three jurisdictions was significant.<sup>32</sup> Charles County reported on average, a greater change in the importance of these activities as civic duties.<sup>33</sup>

### Youth Respondents and Religion

Youth respondents responded to questions about their religion, their frequency of attending religious services and how important spirituality was in their lives. The majority of the youth respondents identified their religion as Christian/Protestant (19, or 52.8%) with Catholic (5, 13.9%), Baptist (2, 5.6%) and none (5, 13.9%) as additional categories endorsed by the youth. The most frequent response to the question about frequency of attendance of religious services was “Sometimes” (30.6%), with the average being 3.23 (SD=1.37) on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= Never, and 5 =Every week. When asked about spirituality, 41.7% (15) said it was very important, with the average score being 3.89 (SD=1.23) on a 1-to-5 scale. Figure 37 is a bar graph displaying how important religion was in the lives of youth respondents.

Figure 37. *Youth Respondents Answer the Question: “How important is religion or spirituality in your life?”*



### Youth Respondents’ Perceptions and Opinions

Youth respondents were asked several open-ended questions to assess their perceptions of law enforcement, the legal system, and citizenship. At the post-intervention interview, respondents were also asked their opinions on the Teen Court process and whether they had

<sup>31</sup> A Kruskal-Wallis test of significance was conducted to evaluate differences.

<sup>32</sup>  $\chi^2 = 6.32$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p = .042$

<sup>33</sup> The results of the Mann-Whitney U pairwise comparison found a statistically significant difference between Baltimore City (9) and Charles County (14), ( $U=22.00$ ,  $p = .009$ ).

encountered any problems at school, with police, with friends, family, or in their neighborhood since Teen Court. The findings from these qualitative questions are summarized below.

### *Opinions of Law Enforcement*

Out of the 36 youth respondents, 47.2% (17) provided positive comments regarding law enforcement. One respondent stated, “They help people, keep people out of trouble.” Another respondent said police are “just there to protect people who can’t protect themselves.” Twenty-five percent of the group had a negative perception of law enforcement, reflected in comments such as: “They bring us no peace,” or “I don’t like them. I have no respect for them. I don’t trust them.” Seven youth respondents (19.4%) had mixed opinions of law enforcement, including, “They’re good, they protect us people, but sometimes I feel like they overuse their power,” or “some may enjoy their power more than others and abuse it at times.” Among the 22 respondents who also participated in the post-intervention interviews, 40.9% (nine) still had a favorable opinion of law enforcement, 27.3% (six) had mixed opinions, 22.7% (five) had negative opinions, and the remainder indicated no opinion.

### *Opinions of the Legal System*

Out of the 36 youth respondents, 63.9% (23) gave positive remarks regarding the legal system. Many of the students considered Teen Court to be part of the legal system. “That’s their job. They [Teen Court] are cool, too,” said one youth respondent. Six students (16.7%) had negative opinions of the legal system and three had no opinions. “I don’t like them...I wouldn’t want to associate myself with them,” said one respondent. Among the 22 respondents who participated in the post-intervention interview, 50% (11) had a positive opinion of the legal system, while four respondents each (18.2%) had either a mixed or no opinion. Three (13.6%) had a negative opinion.

### *Opinions on Citizenship*

Of the 36 youth respondents, 50% (18) equated being a good citizen with helping others and/or helping the environment. Seven youth respondents (19.4%) said obeying laws was being a good citizen. Other responses included being responsible (11.1%) and being patriotic (2.8%). Three youth respondents indicated both obeying laws and being helpful (8.3%). Among the 22 respondents re-interviewed, 54.5% (12) said being helpful defines good citizenship; 22.7% (five) said obeying laws, while others had a combination of obeying laws and being helpful (9.1%) and those two plus patriotism (4.5%). Two people said “respect.”

### *Perceived Benefits of Teen Court*

Among the 22 respondents who completed the post-intervention interview, 86.4% (19) indicated that Teen Court was beneficial to them. One respondent stated, “It was helpful because I could have been charged with a lot of stuff...had I not had the opportunity to go to Teen Court. It was beneficial because I have seen other people in worse situations and Teen Court gives you another chance.” Another youth respondent said, “I don’t want to be in jail no more,” while a third said, “They cared for me. They made me feel better. They love me.” Other comments

included: “Made me realize what I did was wrong, and brought it to light. Hit me in the back of the head like a brick,” “[Teen Court was a] slap in the face,” and “[Teen Court gave me] a wake-up call.”

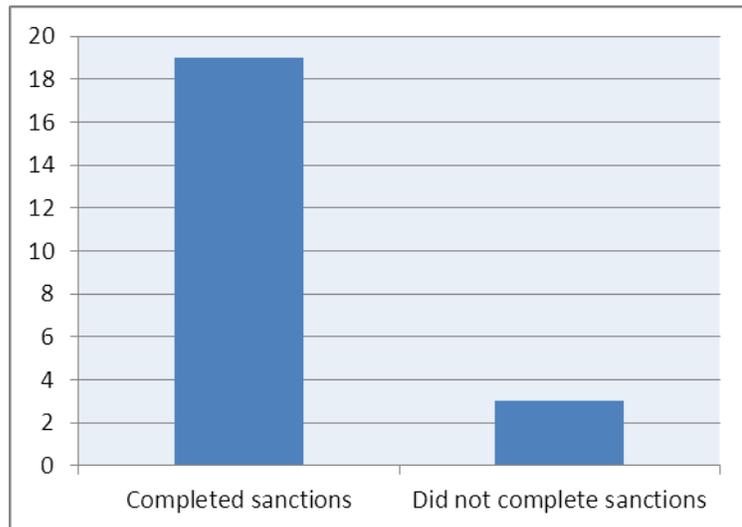
Three students (13.6%) said it was not beneficial, although one qualified the response as follows: “I don’t see it as beneficial or helpful. It was something I had to do. It has just made me more cautious, to see situations I’m put in, and if it’s sketchy then I should go [leave].”

All but one of the respondents (94.5%) considered their sanctions fair, with many of them saying they learned their lesson, they understood what they did wrong, and they deserved the sanctions. Many indicated the sanctions could have been worse. The one youth respondent who said it was not fair described disagreement with the charge in the first place, but said participation in Teen Court was a route to avoid juvenile court.

Seventeen respondents (77.3%) said the jury was professional. Many said their appearance was acceptable, they listened, asked questions and followed orders. Five respondents indicated that the jury was not professional and mentioned that jurors were laughing, joking, or playing around during the hearing.

Figure 38. *Youth Respondents Who Completed Vs. Did Not Complete Sanctions*

The majority of respondents did not have any suggestions for improving Teen Court. Among the few suggestions included fewer sanctions, decreasing the childishness of the jury, having older jurors, providing waiting rooms, giving more time to complete sanctions, and creating more guidelines for jury questioning depending upon the case.



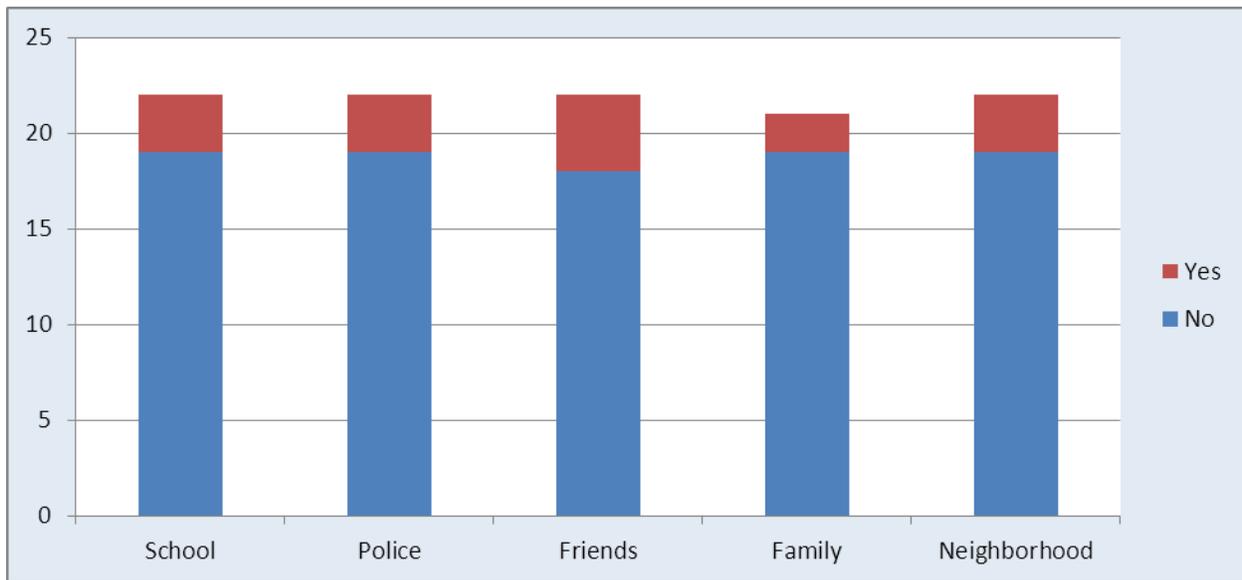
Among the respondents who were re-interviewed, 86.4% (19) completed their sanctions, and 13.6% (three) did not. Figure 38 reports the number of respondents who completed sanctions and who did not complete sanctions, among those interviewed.

### *Problems Since Teen Court*

The 22 youth respondents interviewed twice were asked whether they had experienced problems in various areas since their Teen Court hearings. The majority of the youth stated that they had experienced no subsequent difficulties in school (86.4%), with police (86.4%), friends (81.8%), family (86.4%), or in the neighborhood (86.4%). Some respondents said they had come

close to getting in trouble, or they had spoken to a police officer about something, or had difficulty with a friend (e.g., immaturity), but they walked away from it or were able to resolve it; however, one respondent reported getting into a physical fight with a friend. Another respondent described family conflict around health issues. Some respondents described existing drug or violence problems in their schools or neighborhoods but indicated they are not involved in these problems. Figure 39 represents problems that occurred since respondents' Teen Court hearings.

Figure 39. *Youth Respondents Indicating Whether They Have Experienced Problems Since Teen Court*



### Results from Interviews with Parents and Guardians

Parents or guardians of youth respondents responded to two structured interview protocols, with most of the same questions asked at pre- and post-intervention administration. On the pre-intervention measure, for administration prior to the youth's Teen Court hearing, parents/guardians completed the Family Functioning Scale (FFS; Tavitian, Lubiner, Green, Grebstein, & Velicer, 1987), as well as questions about political attitudes and civic engagement (Sherrod, 2003). Additional questions queried demographics (e.g., age, ethnicity, religion), and open-ended questions assessed perceptions of the community, the police, the legal system, volunteering, and Teen Court. The post-intervention measure, administered approximately four months following the pre-intervention interview (in order to ensure a reasonable time period for the youth to complete all sanctions), contained the FFS, questions about the youth's and the parent/guardian's Teen Court experience, and inquiries about any recent problems the youth respondent had experienced at school, with friends or family, in the neighborhood, or with law enforcement.

## Descriptive Statistics of Parents and Guardians

Researchers conducted pre-intervention interviews with 34 parents or guardians in three jurisdictions of Teen Court. The majority (70.6%) were female. Twenty-four were African American, and 25 (69.4%) came from Baltimore City (with 13.9% from Charles County, and 16.7% from Montgomery County); see Tables 10 and 11. The average age of the parent or guardian was 42.61 years (SD= 8.91). Seven parents or guardians reported their religion as Baptist (20.6%) with six reporting their religion as Christian/Protestant (17.6%). Fifteen parents/guardians were employed full time (44.1%), and eight (23.5%) reported being unemployed (23.5%). Table 12 describes employment status, and Table 13 shows reported religions. Table 14 provides the range of ages of parents/guardians.

Table 10. *Gender of Parents/Guardians of Respondents by Jurisdiction*

	Jurisdiction		
Sex	Baltimore City	Charles County	Montgomery County
Male	4	1	1
Female	18	5	5
Total	22	6	6

Table 11. *Ethnicity by Jurisdiction Among Parents/Guardians of Respondents*

	Jurisdiction		
Race/ethnicity	Baltimore City	Charles County	Montgomery County
Black/African American	18	4	2
White/Caucasian	0	2	3
Hebrew	1	0	0
Other	1	0	0
Missing	2	0	1
Total	22	6	6

Table 12. *Employment Status of Parents/Guardians by Jurisdiction*

<b>Jurisdiction</b>			
Employment	Baltimore City	Charles County	Montgomery County
Full time	5	5	5
Part time	4	0	0
Student	1	0	0
Homemaker	1	0	0
Retired	1	1	0
Unemployed	8	0	0
Missing	2	0	1
Total	22	6	6

Table 13. *Religion of Parents/Guardians by Jurisdiction*

Religion	Jurisdiction		
	Baltimore City	Charles County	Montgomery County
Baptist	7	1	0
Catholic	3	1	1
Christian/Protestant	3	2	2
Jehovah's Witness	1	0	0
Muslim	0	0	2
Other-Yoruba	1	0	0
Other - Jewish/Christian	1	0	0
Other-Pentecostal	0	1	0
None	4	1	0
Missing	2	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>

Table 14. *Ages of Parents/Guardians*

Age range	Frequency
29 to 39	14
40 to 47	9
47 to 62	8
Missing	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>

## Family Functioning Among Parents and Guardians

The Family Functioning Scale (Tavitian, Lubiner, Green, Grebstein, & Velicer, 1987) is a questionnaire about family life, and it is rated on a scale from 1 = Never to 7 = Always (the higher the score, the more frequently the family participates in that function). The five subscales within the Family Functioning Scale are *positive family affect*, *family communication*, *family conflicts*, *family worries*, and *family rituals*. The Cronbach alpha coefficients range within the subscales from .62 to .91. Nineteen questions were reverse coded. There were no statistically significant differences between the pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews on the five FFS subscales, as completed by parents/guardians. Table 15 displays the means and standard deviations on the dimensions of the Family Function Scale reported by parents/guardians of youth respondents.

Table 15. *Responses of Parents/Guardians to the Family Functioning Scale*

Dimension	First interview		Second interview	
	M	SD	M	SD
Positive Family Affect	5.26	0.99	4.75	1.43
Family Communication	4.81	1.01	4.35	1.35
Family Conflicts	3.81	1.18	3.90	0.84
Family Worries	3.94	1.17	3.92	0.87
Family Rituals/Supports	5.95	0.80	5.40	1.67

The following statistics describe the means and standard deviations for the subscales of the Family Functioning Scale for the first (pre-intervention) interview of parents/guardians. For positive family affect, the mean was 5.26 (SD=.99). For family communication, the mean was 4.81 (SD=1.00). For the family conflicts subscale, the mean was 3.81 (SD= 1.81). For the family worries subscale, the mean was 3.94 (SD=1.67). For the family rituals subscale, the mean was 5.95 (SD=.80).

The following statistics describe the means and standard deviations for the subscales of the Family Functioning Scale for the second (post-intervention) interview of parents/guardians. For positive family affect, the mean was 4.75 (SD=1.43). For family communication, the mean was 4.35 (SD=1.35). For the family conflicts subscale, the mean was 3.90 (SD= .84). For the

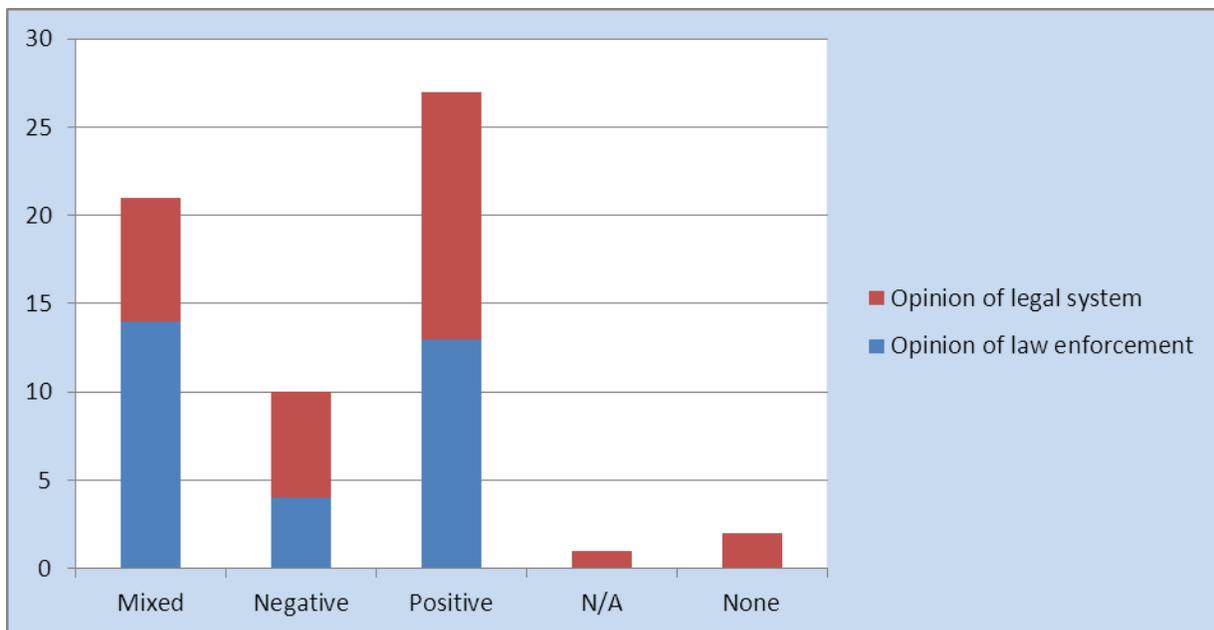
family worries subscale, the mean was 3.92 (SD=.87). For the family rituals subscale, the mean was 5.40 (SD=1.67).

Like youth respondents, parents/guardians reported a mean above the mid-point on a seven-point scale for all domains, at both time points. In other words, parents and guardians reported a relatively high level of family functioning.

### Perceptions from Parents and Guardians

Fourteen parents/guardians had mixed reviews of law enforcement (41.2%). Thirteen (38.2%) spoke of law enforcement favorably, and four (11.8%) expressed negative perceptions. One said, “Eighty percent do what they are supposed to, and do a pretty nice job in the community. The other 20 percent may be corrupt.” Another said, “They are the good guys. I commend them for doing their job every day.” Another commented, “I have great respect for them, but I am not naïve to the power they control.” Figure 39 reports parents/guardians’ opinions of law enforcement and the legal system.

Figure 39. *Parents/Guardians’ Opinions of Law Enforcement and the Legal System*



Fourteen (41.2%) parents/guardians expressed a positive regard for the legal system. Among the comments were: “Overall, it’s just something needed in place in a society.” Another said: “It’s a worthwhile system. It does what it stands for.” Seven (20.6%) offered mixed reviews, with comments such as, “For some it works and for some it doesn’t work.” Six gave negative assessments (17.6%), indicating that the system is, for example, “Two faced and biased.”

When researchers asked parents/guardians about safety in their community, 52.9% said that they felt safe in their community, 20.6% said they did not feel safe in their community,

14.7% said they sometimes felt safe in their community, and one individual said, “It depends.” For those who expressed that they did not feel safe in the community, drugs and violence were the most frequently cited reasons. Researchers also asked parents/guardians what they would do if they witnessed a crime; 52.9% (18) said they would report it. Six people (17.6%) said it would depend on the situation. Two people said they would not only report it, but they would intervene themselves. When asked whether their community had any kind of safety measure in place, 52.9% said yes (18), while just under 30% (10) said no. Parents and guardians described cameras and community policing as safety measures in their neighborhoods. Finally, 79.4% (27) of parents and guardians interviewed said they volunteered, with 11.8% (four) saying they did not.

Parents and guardians were asked why they chose to allow their child to participate in Teen Court. The most frequent answer was the experience of participating in a court process (10, or 29.4%). One said, “[It is a] nice way to show him at a young age what the experience will be like as an adult.” Another said, “[I] thought it would be a good opportunity to see court experience instead of going through it in ‘real life,’ and see what it was like on the other side—see what she did was serious business – so it is not taken lightly. [It] really hit home when she had to tell her peers what she did and to get peers to tell her how to make it right.” The second most frequent reason for parents/guardians allowing their child to participate in Teen Court was related to consequences. One parent said, “Because he stole \$20 from me and I pressed charges. Because [he] did it before and I told him that if he did it again, I would press charges, so I did. I hope this process shows he’s not as bad off as he feels he is.” Other reasons included wanting to avoid a record and exposing the youth to positive peer influences (three responses, or 8.8%).

Parents and guardians were asked what both they and their child might gain from the Teen Court experience. The majority (61.8%) hoped that their child would learn a lesson to avoid offending or to think before acting. One parent said: “To know that there are other ways to handle situations and that consequences come with your reaction. There are other ways to deal with it.” Another parent said: “He can learn you can’t break the law. There are consequences...I hope it frightens him just enough to make him think the next time.” Parents indicated that they wanted this experience to hit home for their children (7, 20.6%). In other words, they wanted their sons or daughters to learn from this experience and not make the same mistake again. One parent said, “Somebody can possibly change his thought pattern. I’m desperate here. I’m trying to keep my son alive [crying].” Another parent said. “I am hoping that my son gains something – to think before you act.” Parents/guardians also wanted to gain experience about the court system (5, 14.7%). One said: “Just to see what the system will do with these young kids before they get to the adult system. This is just a slap on the hand compared to the adult system.” Other answers included that the child might become a better person or gain court experience.

Researchers asked 17 parents and guardians in a follow-up interview about their opinions of the Teen Court process. Fifteen of the 17 (83.3%) found the experience positive, with one neutral response and one negative response. Positive responses included the following: “[Teen Court] teaches kids to take responsibility for oneself and keeps them from having a record,” “I think it exposes teens to how the judicial system works,” “They asked questions that grown-ups ask, but coming from their peers,” and finally, “When I came in, I thought it was BS. Now going through it, I think it’s an excellent process.” The neutral parent/guardian indicated, “I guess it’s

mediation. I didn't like nor did I hate it." The one who did not like it said, "They have to learn to do things well."

When asked whether the Teen Court experience was valuable for their children, 14 of the 17 parents/guardians said yes and three were unsure. Among the comments: "She thinks before she reacts now." "She didn't want to go back." "He hasn't done anything to put himself in a position to land himself in the program again. He used to like go outside all the time, but he doesn't now. He does not hang out with certain people." "Now she's more focused in school...She understands consequences."

When asked whether the consequences assigned were fair, 15 of the 17 parents/guardians said yes (88.2%), and the remaining two said no. Interestingly, one of the two believed the sanctions were not severe enough: "I think she might have deserved more consequences because of her history." Similarly, 15 out of 17 parents said that Teen Court met their expectations, with two saying it did not. "No, because there were no real consequences...Another slap on the wrist." Among the parents whose expectations were met, reactions included: "It was a real court atmosphere," "Being a juror made them feel like a contributor," and "It was convenient, which was the biggest thing...Everything that the coordinator explained was as she explained it would be, so there were no surprises."

Fifteen of the 17 parents/guardians felt included in the process. Some of their reactions were, "I was included. I was there to support her," "At the first meeting, they talked with all three of us, so I felt included," and "I feel that [the coordinator] had my interest along with my son's interest." One described appropriately limited involvement: "We were left to be observers, which was appropriate for parents. We all subject ourselves to this as citizens. So the fact that they left us out of this is OK." The two who did not feel included commented, "It already seemed like they had the consequences set aside. They didn't ask me anything. It seemed like the only consequences were to be a juror on future cases and do community service. Also it was community service of the respondent's choice," and "My child was questioned without my knowledge, and that conversation was included in the legal statement, which was not fair."

Parents or guardians were asked post-intervention questions about whether their child had encountered any problems in school, with police, with friends, family, or in the neighborhood since participating in Teen Court. The majority (over 75% for each question) said they had not experienced these problems. Four said their children had problems in school, four said they had problems with the law, two said they had problems with friends, and three parents said they had problems in their family. No one reported their child having problems in the neighborhood. Parents or guardians did report some neighborhood problems in general, but noted that their children were not involved in those problems.

### **Results from Interviews with Youth Volunteers**

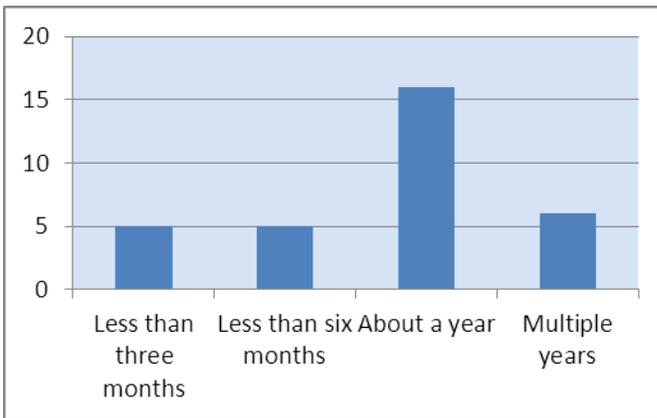
Youth volunteers were interviewed using a structured protocol, administered at one time point. The protocol included a standardized measure of political attitudes and civic engagement (Sherrod, 2003). Additional questions asked about demographics (e.g., age, ethnicity, county,

religion, education level), and grades, and open-ended questions assessed perceptions on civic engagement, volunteering in the future, the police, and the legal system.

Table 16. *Youth Volunteer Gender by Jurisdiction*

Jurisdiction			
Gender	Baltimore City	Charles County	Montgomery County
Male	6	1	2
Female	3	11	9
Total	9	12	11

Figure 40. *Youth Volunteers' Length of Experience with Teen Court*



Thirty-two youth volunteers were interviewed. Youth volunteers were student-age youth, who could be in middle school, high school, or college. Nine were from Baltimore City, 11 were from Montgomery County, and 12 were from Charles County. The youth volunteers ranged in age from 12 years to 24 years with an average age of 15.44 years (standard deviation=2.78). The majority were between 13 and 16 years of age. Twenty-three youth volunteers were

females and nine were males. Twenty-one of the 32 youth volunteers interviewed had been volunteering with Teen Court for less than a year, and at the other end of the spectrum, one youth reported “over 10 years” of volunteering with Teen Court. Table 16 gives the number of male and female youth volunteers by jurisdiction. Table 17 presents the number of family members in each volunteer’s household. Table 18 is a frequency table of youth volunteers’ age. Figure 40 highlights the number of years youth had volunteered with Teen Court.

Table 17. *Number of Family Members in Youth Volunteer Households*

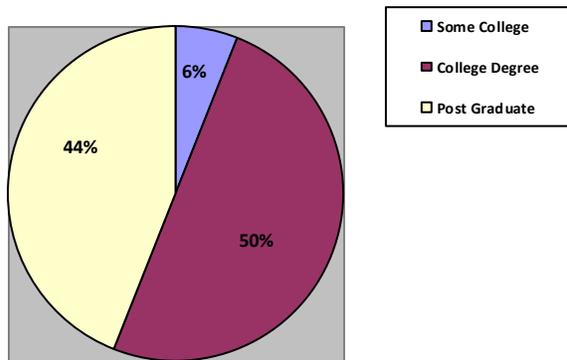
No. of family members	Frequency	Percentage
One	6	18.8%
Two	5	15.6%
Three	13	40.6%
Four	6	18.8%
Five	1	3.1%
More than five	1	3.1%
Total	32	100.0%

Table 18. *Ages of Youth Volunteers*

Age	Frequency	Percent
12	4	12.5%
13	5	15.6%
14	2	6.2%
15	5	15.6%
16	6	18.8%
17	2	6.2%
18	4	12.5%
19	1	3.1%
21	1	3.1%
24	1	3.1%
Total	32	100.0%

Three of the youth volunteers reported that their involvement with Teen Court started as a youth respondent. One of the three said, “I liked it. It’s a second chance. People make mistakes.” Another said, “[Volunteering] was what I was supposed to be doing, giving back to the community.”

Figure 41. *Educational Expectation Among Youth Volunteers*



Eight youth volunteers were in middle school, 18 were in high school, one was in an alternative or GED program, three were in college, and two did not respond to the question about educational level or gave other answers, such as expecting to begin college in the near future. Two youth volunteers said they expected to complete “some college,” 16 said they expected to obtain a college degree, and 14 said they expected to obtain a post graduate degree. All of the youth volunteers said they

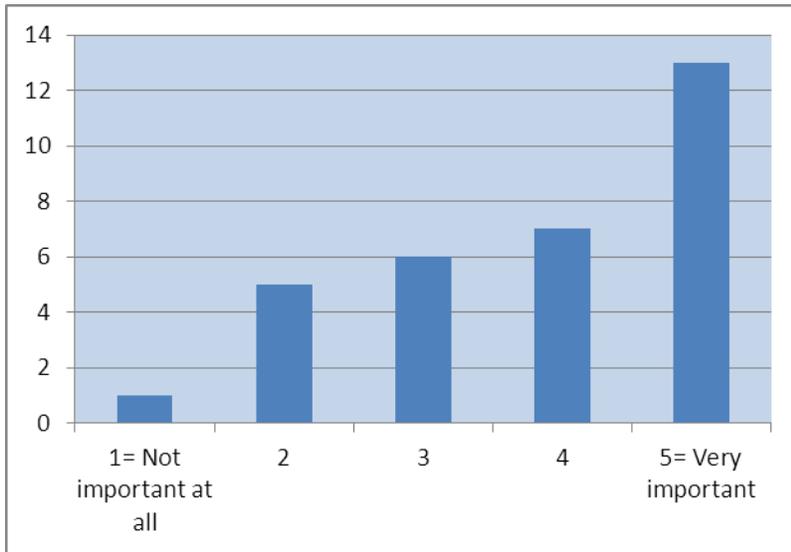
considered themselves at least “average” students, and 10 considered themselves to be “above average” compared to others their age. Nineteen reported average grades of A, A-, or B+. Figure 41 is a pie chart of educational expectation among youth volunteers.

The majority of youth volunteers (23) responded that they ate dinner with family members almost daily. Five said they had dinner with their families once a week, one reported having dinner with family members a few times per year, and three said they never ate dinner with their immediate family members during the year. A breakdown of how often youth volunteers had dinner with family members can be seen in Table 19.

Table 19. *How Often Youth Volunteers Have Dinner with Their Parents, Brothers, and Sisters*

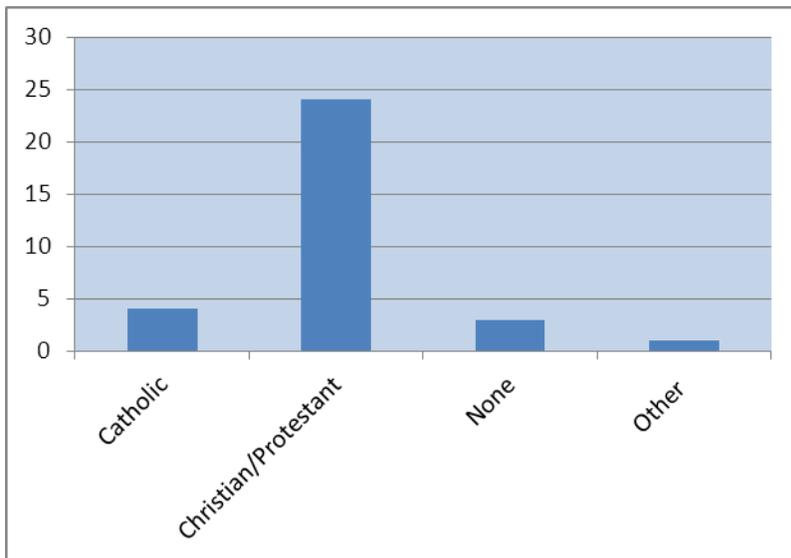
	Frequency	Percentage
Never	1	2.8%
A few times per year	1	2.8%
Once or twice per month	6	16.7%
Once a week	6	16.7%
Almost daily	22	61.1%
Total	36	100%

Figure 42. Youth Volunteers Answer the Question: “How important is religion or spirituality in your life?”



The majority of the youth volunteers sampled described themselves as Christian/Protestant (24). There were four reported Catholics. Two reported no religion, one was Other, and one was Buddhist/Hindu. Forty percent of the youth volunteers said that religion or spirituality was “very important” in their lives. Figure 42 shows the importance of spirituality in the lives of youth volunteers; Figure 43 shows a breakdown of religion among youth volunteers.

Figure 43. Religion Among Youth Volunteers



### Perceptions of Jury Membership and Professionalism

Youth volunteers expressed a sense of responsibility for the outcome of each case and its effect on the respondent. One described it as a “duty to assess their case in a fair manner.” Another said, “We have responsibility on us to give punishments that are right for whatever the offense is,” and a third said, “It’s my duty to listen and understand but not judge.”

They described feeling empowered to make decisions and “play an important role” or “give people justice.” They shared that they believed they were “making a difference” or “helping” the respondents by hearing their stories, relating to them, and “giving them a second chance” to learn from their mistakes. Many of the youth volunteers also said that they gained something tangible from the experience of being jurors. Their comments included: “It makes me more educated,” “It’s like being in real court,” and Teen Court provides an “opportunity to make friends.”

Fifteen of the 32 youth volunteers interviewed responded that the juries they served on handled cases professionally. Evidence of professionalism included taking time to listen and “think through punishments,” asking good questions, and acting respectfully (not “loud,” “try to be serious,” and “no laughing”). Many youth volunteers responded that the jury mostly or usually handled the cases professionally, but also said there were sometimes jurors who were “immature,” laughing, “silly,” or “think it’s a joke.” Some volunteers described fellow jurors as impatient, and one said that some jurors “may have been too sympathetic [and] would want to let [the respondent] go without punishment.” Seven youth volunteers said that the jury members acted somewhat professionally. Some suggested that it varied from person to person, and two mentioned that individuals’ reasons for being a juror may have influenced their behavior. Youth volunteers perceived jury members as disrespectful when they “use their phones,” “talk to each other,” “don’t get involved,” or “don’t take it seriously.” Two youth volunteers said that the jury did not handle cases professionally. One said, “there’s commentary on the people about their grades...on their looks...it does affect the outcome.” The other described “people laughing and making jokes.”

### **Previous Volunteer or Teen Court Experiences**

Seven of the 32 youth volunteers interviewed said they did not have any prior volunteer experience. One could not remember during the interview, and the other 24 described volunteer activities ranging from one-day experiences to regular ongoing activities. Thirteen said they were involved in volunteer experiences through school or church. Common volunteer activities included work with issues related to food and hunger (warehouse/pantry, making food for homeless, collecting food for distribution); service to ill, wounded, or elderly people; animal care (e.g. Humane Society); caring for the environment (cleaning parks, planting trees); and work with youth. Only three of the youth volunteers interviewed indicated that their initial involvement with Teen Court was as a youth respondent. One commented, “I liked it. It’s a second chance. People make mistakes.”

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

Twelve of the 32 youth volunteers interviewed said they had no suggestions for improving Teen Court. One youth volunteer specifically commented that “the full night that is dedicated to being a juror is useful.”

Four youth volunteers suggested that there should be more volunteers; one suggested more adult volunteers, saying “I see the same people, the same judges, the same facilitators every week.” The other three said that “having a bigger jury” would make the process more effective. Seven youth volunteers made comments about the professionalism of the jury, saying “a lot don’t take it seriously,” and two additional youth volunteers suggested that having more guidance in questioning or by “keeping someone in deliberation that has more experience” might help the respondent “receive fair justice.” One commented that if respondents are not respectful of the Teen Court process, they should be sent back to Juvenile Court.

Four youth volunteers commented on the structure of Teen Court including suggestions about fewer respondents and more “different types of case[s]” in one evening. Another described having a “youth advisory council” as a possible improvement.

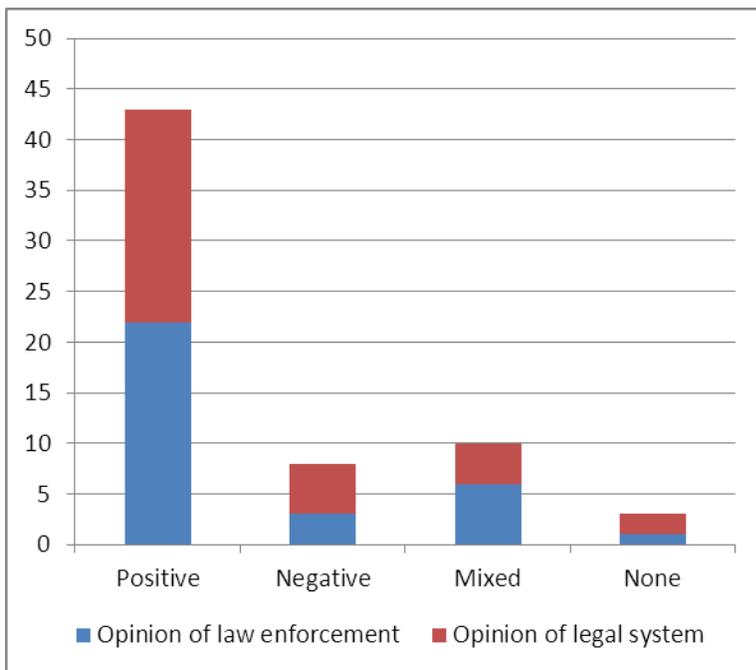
***Perceptions of Law Enforcement***

Twenty youth volunteers described law enforcement or police officers as generally favorable and doing an important job. One said, “They are providing the city with a service to prevent any harm in the city.” Two characterized police or law enforcement as positive overall, but also suggested that they could do a better job, in comments such as, “I think they can be extreme, but overall they’re OK.” Five youth volunteers described police or law enforcement as strict or heavy enforcers, indicating that police “seem to be a little too hard.” Three described negative impressions of police, including statements such as, “A lot are crooked. It could be a lot better. Some are bullies.”

***Perceptions of the Legal System***

Three youth volunteers described the importance of the legal/judicial system for maintaining community safety and stability. With little elaboration, these youth volunteers stated that the “system is working” “fine” or “pretty good,” while four others more explicitly articulated why: the process is “reasonable,” evidence is adequately considered, and “decisions that they make will help people.” In addition to expressing similar impressions, 13 youth volunteers also described with more nuance the complexity of the legal system by mentioning discrepancies, biases, and injustices they saw in the system. One volunteer said, “There are people who do crimes and are not found guilty, and those who did not do crimes and are found guilty.” Another stated, “There is a level of corruption,” and a third described, “It can be [culturally or racially] biased.”

Figure 44. Youth Volunteer Opinions of Law Enforcement and the Legal System



Five youth volunteers mentioned specific changes they would like to see in the legal system to better “help those who need help.” Suggestions included getting “more advice from teens,” using “more facts” to “try harder to help those who need help,” and having “rules against discrimination.” Two youth volunteers also suggested creating “stricter laws.” Finally, two youth volunteers expressed that they were interested in becoming lawyers in the future in order to “help the

community” and “defend people’s rights.” Figure 44 displays youth volunteer opinions of law enforcement and the legal system.

### Youth Volunteers and Civic Engagement

Youth respondents were asked 117 questions related to civic engagement. The standardized measure includes dimensions of civic rights, civic duties, attitudes and behaviors, and elements of society that are deemed important (Sherrod, 2003). Measure subscales are scored on somewhat different metrics depending on the question (i.e., the range of scores are from 0 to 4, or 1 to 5) with higher scores indicating greater importance or higher frequency of the construct or behavior. The measure contains eight subscales: *participation in an event, future orientation, civic rights, civic duties, attitudes toward citizenship, current events, location where topics were discussed*, and the *importance of certain issues*. A breakdown of the responses to the civic engagement measure can be found in Table 20.

Table 20. *Civic Engagement Among Youth Volunteers*

Dimensions	M	SD
Participation in activities	1.71	0.55
Things to do in the future	4.08	0.48
Rights as a citizen	3.50	0.43
Duties as a citizen	3.44	0.29
Citizenship attitudes & behaviors	3.01	0.50
Current events	1.76	0.71
Location where topics are discussed	4.08	0.48
Importance of social issues	2.27	0.66

An independent samples t-test was used to compare respondents and volunteers on civic engagement. Within the subscale participation, there was a statistically significant difference, such that youth volunteers reported higher levels of participation (1.73, SD=.55) than youth respondents (1.40, SD=.63;  $t=2.33$ ,  $df =65$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Within the subscale of duties, there was a statistically significant difference, such that youth volunteers (3.43, SD=.29) reported higher

sense of duty than respondents (3.18, SD=.39;  $t=3.0$ ,  $df=65$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In other words, volunteers participated in activities more substantially, and reported a higher sense of duty than respondents.

### **Results from Interviews with Adult Volunteers**

Adult volunteers serve multiple roles in the Teen Court jurisdictions covered by this evaluation. Some act as judges or jury facilitators, while others assist with the logistics of hearings, for example, by checking in youth respondents and parents, or organizing juries prior to commencing hearings. For this study, adult volunteers completed a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions about their interest in Teen Court, their opinions of diversion in general, and their perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of this particular approach, based on their experiences. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to identify salient themes.

Three members of the Maryland Judiciary were interviewed. One judge described Teen Court as being “apples to oranges” compared to other volunteer experiences. Another judge described it as a “remarkable concept” whereby teens address wrongdoing without formal training in the law. “This gives those teens a wonderful experience.” Another judge said the primary decision making is placed upon the teen-agers. “As a result, they become more interested.”

When asked why these judges work with this population, their answers varied. One said these students are the future, and so it is important to “prevent criminal behavior later on,” while another appreciated the opportunity to serve vulnerable urban populations, and a third emphasized the value of Teen Court in these terms: “Teen Court gives them an empowering experience.”

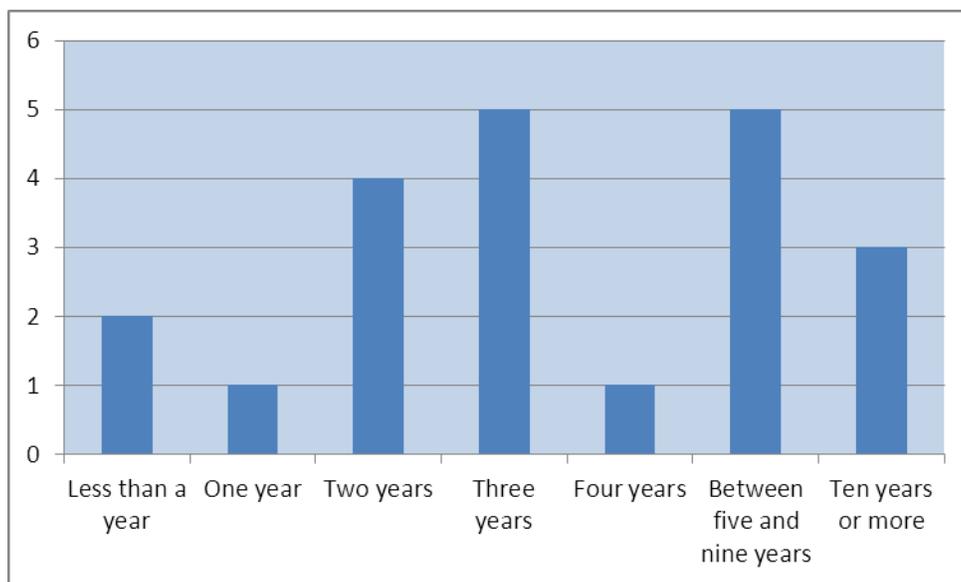
When asked about the value of diversion, judges focused on the lack of a formal record following the youth. One judge discussed the role transitions that take place from becoming a respondent to a juror. Another judge indicated that the program saves money in the juvenile justice system. When probed further, judges responded by talking about influence and citizenship. Two judges talked about the power of positive peer pressure when the jury decides on the sanctions for a respondent; another judge mentioned that for some parents, this is the first time they have seen their son or daughter stand before authority figures. Another judge indicated that “this helps them develop a sense of citizenship in the long term....Instead of distrusting the system, this gives them the other side of the coin.”

Interviewers asked the judges what they try to do behaviorally to make an impact on youth. One judge said she will ask the questions that may have been missed. Another judge emphasized the professional demeanor. “If they don’t measure up, I’ll talk to them,” the judge said. “I encourage them to take advantage of this opportunity.” One of the judges will interact casually with volunteer jurors or answer a question about the legal system before and between cases. The same judge also will ask jurors to reflect upon their sanctioning decisions.

All three judges agreed upon how much and how hard the staff and volunteers work to make Teen Court operate. “Volunteers who come to court, teens, and the board, seem to be committed to the program,” one judge said. Another judge recognized all of the logistics, the time, and the effort that has to go into planning each teen court session, indicating the judge’s appreciation of the work done by Teen Court staff. “It was a good experience for me,” said the judge. “It’s rewarding to go and spend time with teens. It clicks with some of them.” From another judge’s observations, it was clear that the staff and volunteers were dedicated to this work. “It’s all about the kids,” the judge said. “They see potential in these kids that society fails to see.”

Including the judges, 21 adult volunteers were interviewed. Eight were from Baltimore City, eight from Charles County, and five from Montgomery County. Below are themes that emerged during the interviews, with direct quotations illustrating each theme. The number of years of experience with Teen Court varied. Volunteers most frequently had three years of experience with Teen Court, and five volunteers reported between five and nine years of experience. One person had one year of experience, while another person had four years of experience. Figure 45 contains years of experience among adult volunteers.

Figure 45. *Adult Volunteers’ Years of Experience with Teen Court*



When asked how adult volunteers connected to Teen Court, respondents most frequently (four or 19%) answered having a child who became a part of the Teen Court process either as a respondent or as a juror. Other responses included through a colleague or coworker, they sought out the program, or in response to an advertisement.

Researchers asked adult volunteers what makes Teen Court unique or different compared to other programs. The most frequent response of the volunteers (eight) was that this program is different because of its focus on real life situations and cases, and it is teens that are deciding the sanctions of these cases. “It’s actual cases,” one adult volunteer said. Four adult volunteers said it

was the interaction that takes place between adults and teens. Two adult volunteers said it was the rehabilitative orientation that makes it different from other programs. “[This program] keeps them from making more mistakes,” said one adult volunteer. “It’s rehabilitative. [It is] trying to stop bad behavior.”

The reasons adult volunteers wanted to interact with this population varied. For some, it was about empowerment, which speaks to the idea that youth can become a stakeholder in the process. “This group doesn’t feel empowered,” said one adult volunteer. Another volunteer said, “It’s helping to decide how a teen will live their life, possibly change their path.” Another theme related to the future and the youth becoming leaders of tomorrow. Two adult volunteers focused on the Teen Court program itself, and their desire to volunteer specifically for this program. “It’s a program I believe in,” said one volunteer. One volunteer said they benefit from this program, indicating it keeps them apprised of teen issues and topics. The theme of service focused on being able to give back and make a difference.

When researchers asked about the value of diversion in general, answers varied. Five adult volunteers reported the idea of a clean record, referencing the proposition that there are consequences to having an offense on youths’ record. One further said it reduces stigma. “Juvenile records can be damaging.” Another theme that emerged among five adult volunteers was the idea of a second chance. “[You get] one and only one second chance,” said one adult volunteer. The theme of the juvenile justice system’s burden and diversion’s potential to reduce the load also emerged.

Regarding the value of Teen Court specifically, major themes that emerged included peer influence, empowerment, judgment, cognition, second chance, and authority. With respect to peer influence, one adult volunteer said, “Jurors see peers getting caught.” The theme of empowerment focused on taking responsibility. “Kids look at justice differently...,” said one volunteer. “Citizenship is developed instead of distrusting the system.” One volunteer simply said: “[It is] teens judging teens.” This gives teens a chance to understand and learn about the legal system, another volunteer said. One volunteer recognized the cognitive aspect of this program, in the opportunity to reflect upon the crimes committed: “[It is] evaluating bad behavior in self and others.” Another volunteer said: “As a juror, they hear it a second time around, or from a different judge. They pick up on it again.”

When asked about the value of Teen Court for youth volunteers, the adults described skill acquisition, exposure, a positive activity, and the opportunity to interact with and learn from peers. When asked how respondents and youth volunteers were different, five said there was no difference. Four adult volunteers alluded to the difference being that one was caught offending and another did not get caught. Others said there was a difference in level of involvement in Teen Court, where respondents who become jurors tended to participate less than those who came in as volunteers. Some adults (two) saw growth in the respondents. Similarly, one person said time, where the differences diminished the more a respondent attended hearings as a juror. Other perceived differences included socioeconomic status, level of engagement, and attitude.

When asked how respondents and youth volunteers were similar, the responses varied. Some said age, experiences, the types of questions asked as jurors, level of curiosity, community values, their environment, intelligence, peer influences, ability to relate to other teens, and the fact that they came from the same communities.

When adult volunteers were asked what they try to do behaviorally, their most frequent answer was to interact with youth in some way. Whether it was talking with them, listening to them, playing hangman, answering questions, or discussing law, many adult volunteers attempted to spend time with jurors and respondents. Some adult volunteers (four) emphasized the importance of a professional demeanor and the trappings of the courtroom. Some encouraged hugs. Others used “tough love” tactics, with parent or guardian permission. Examples of this included taking away a driver’s license or handcuffing the respondent.

Adult volunteers shared their perspectives of the importance of the program, the need to strengthen it, and the value of the staff. Some described Teen Court as a great learning opportunity. Others mentioned people should donate money or time to the program, saying, “It’s about having a connection with kids. There’s a disconnect [in the community].” Some interviewees focused on the fact that it deals with real cases, not fake or mock cases. “It’s a wonderful program. It’s an act of love in giving the kids a second chance, and helping their parents.” Another adult volunteer said: “If I were a teen, I would want to do it. It’s a lot of fun.” “[The] staff is dedicated,” said one volunteer. Another noted, “Our coordinator is young and enthusiastic and committed to kids. Adult volunteers are a good group of people.” A few people said because of the coordinators, improvements were made. For example, one adult volunteer noted a history of sanctioning bias based on socioeconomic status and ethnicity, but reported that the coordinator had improved the situation. One volunteer asked why there are not more Teen Courts. Some volunteers said they wanted more of a role in Teen Court, and one critical comment was that judges took priority over attorneys in their volunteering role. “[We] need more opportunities for adult volunteers,” said one adult volunteer. “It’s a great mentoring opportunity. I went to law school because of Teen Court.”

## Recidivism Results

---

Department of Juvenile Services data were used to assess juvenile justice system involvement for all youth who participated in the three Teen Court programs. The subsequent DJS referral follow-up period for each youth was from the date of her or his Teen Court hearing through April 30, 2012, which was the cut-off date of the data obtained from DJS. Follow-up periods thus varied widely, from three years or more for youth who were the first participants and had their hearings in early 2009, to as brief as a month for youth who took part in a hearing just before the DJS query was done. Obviously, youth tracked for long follow-up periods have much greater time at risk to recidivate compared to those with very short tracking periods.

To control for these variable follow-up durations, the initial recidivism assessment focused on two groups of Teen Court participants, those who had at least six months of time at risk to recidivate and those who had at least 12 months of time at risk. Teen Court participants must have had their Teen Court hearing on or before October 30, 2011, to be included in the six-month group and prior to April 30, 2011 to be included in the 12-month group.

Initial analyses focused on any referral to DJS during this tracking period. While this is the most common measure of recidivism, it is also the least “official” or formal measure because most referrals to DJS do *not* eventually result in a formal finding of delinquency by the juvenile court. Although final court findings and placements are more definitive measures of recidivism, due to long case processing times, it is potentially misleading to use these measures for youth tracked for periods of a year or less.

### **Baltimore City Teen Court: DJS Referrals**

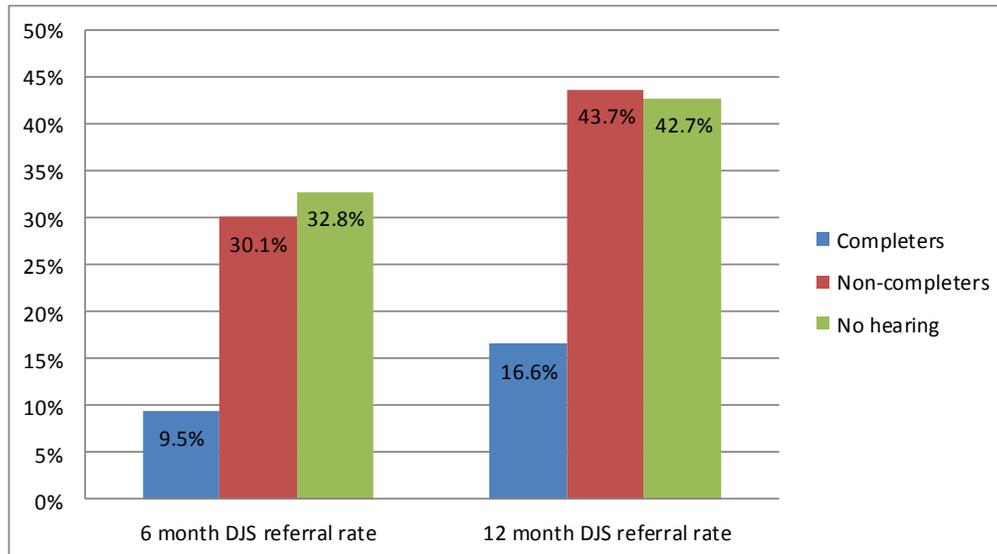
For Baltimore City youth, there were a total of 526 youth who had at least six months of follow-up time, and 485 youth who had at least 12 months of follow-up time after their Teen Court hearing. Among all youth who had a BCTC hearing, 67 of the 526 participants in the six-month group, or 12.7 percent, were referred to DJS and had a complaint entered within six months after their hearing date. As seen in Figure 46, among those with at least 12 months of time at risk, 100 of 485 youth had a DJS complaint, yielding a 12-month recidivism rate of 20.6 percent.

Figure 46. *Baltimore City DJS Referral Rates at Six and 12 Months Post Hearing*



The BCTC completers, non-completers, and referred teens who never had a hearing were assessed separately using the two tracking periods. For the teens who did not have a BCTC hearing, we used six and 12 months after their BCTC intake date as the basis for subsequent DJS referrals.

Figure 47. Baltimore City Six and 12 Month DJS Referral Rates by Completion Status



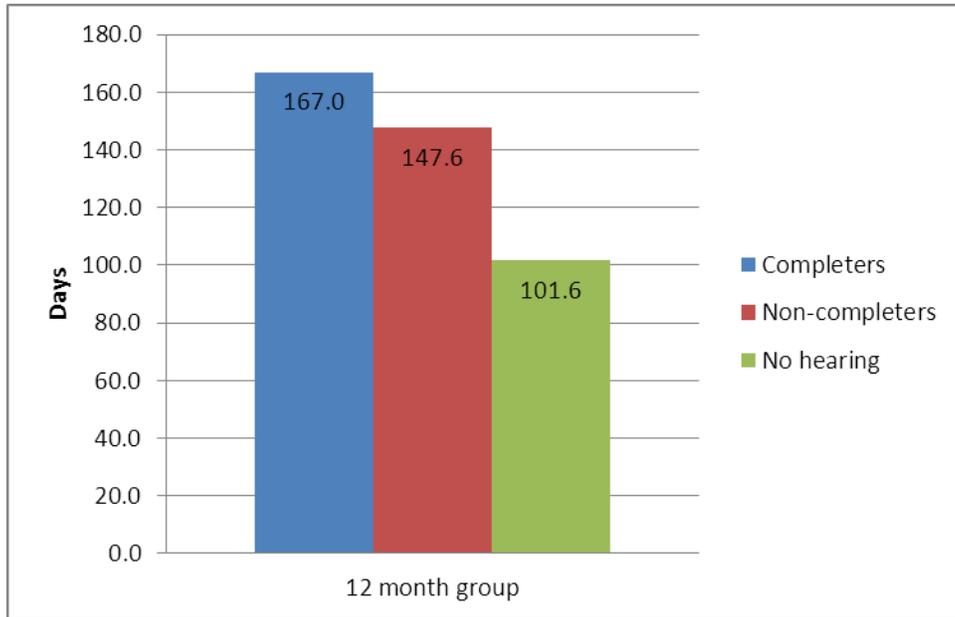
As shown in Figure 47, of the 454 completers tracked for at least six months, 9.5 percent (n=43) had been referred to DJS during this period. In contrast, among 73 non-completers, 30.1 percent (n=22) had been referred to DJS within six months of their hearing. At 12 months, the recidivism rate for completers was 16.6 percent (69 of 415), and the rate for non-completers was 43.7 percent (31 of 71). As expected then, rates of referral to the juvenile justice system were much lower for BCTC completers than non-completers; non-completers were at least 2.5 times more likely to recidivate at both the six- and 12-month follow-up periods. Teens referred to the program but who never attended a hearing were even more likely to be referred to DJS than teens in the completer and non-completer groups. Of the 259 teens in the six-month group who did not have a hearing, 85 (32.8%) were referred to DJS for a subsequent offense following their BCTC referral, while 105 of the 246 teens (42.7%) in the 12-month group were referred to DJS for a subsequent event. At six months, teens with no hearing were three times more likely to be referred to DJS than teens who attended a hearing and completed the program, but teens with no hearing were just as likely to be referred to DJS as teens who attended a hearing but failed to complete the program. Similar comparisons existed at the 12-month time period.

The remaining analyses focus on those youth who had at least 12 months of time at risk from the Teen Court hearing. Regardless of completion status, youth who had a DJS referral within 12 months after the hearing or projected hearing were referred to DJS in as few as two days and as many as 347 days.

Upon further review, teens who had a hearing, completed the program, and had a DJS referral in the 12 months after their hearing (n=69) had their first DJS referral nearly 5.5 months after their hearing (167.0 days). Those teens who attended a hearing but did not complete the program and were referred to DJS within the first year after their hearing (n=31) were referred to DJS in 147.6 days on average, a half-month earlier than completers. Those teens who did not

attend a hearing and were referred to DJS within 12 months after their referral date (n=246) were referred to DJS in 128.7 days on average, earlier than both completers and non-completers, by 38.3 days and 18.9 days, respectively. See Figure 48.

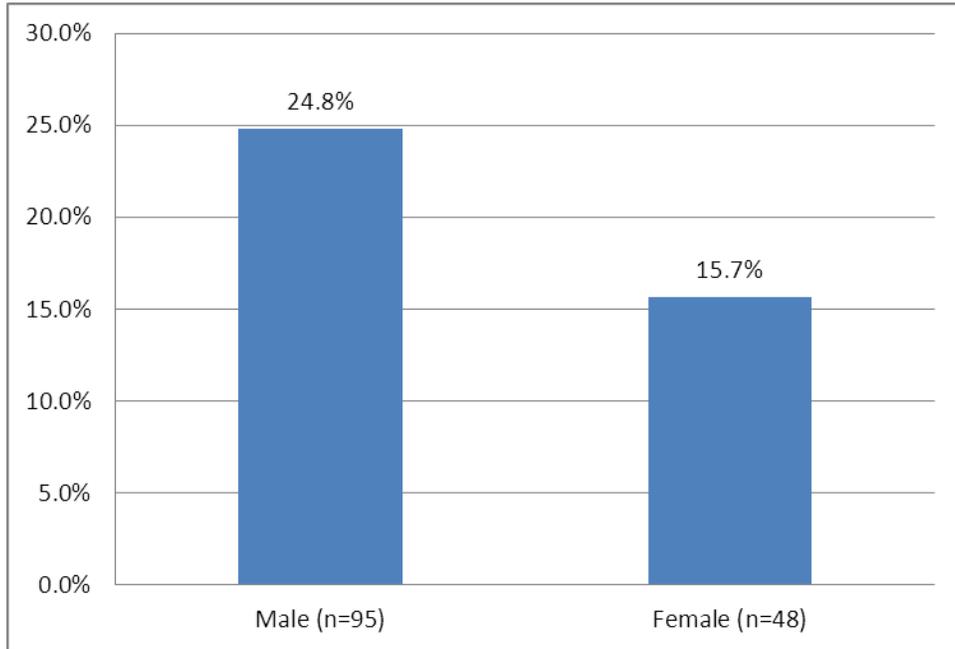
Figure 48. *Baltimore City: Mean Number of Days to First DJS Referral*



The number of DJS referrals was also examined for completers, non-completers, and teens who did not attend a hearing for those teens who had at least one post-hearing DJS referral. Participants who completed the program and had a referral had on average 2.3 referrals to DJS following their hearing. Those with at least one referral, who had a hearing but did not complete the program, had on average 2.5 referrals to DJS, while teens with at least one DJS referral who did not attend a hearing had on average 1.7 referrals to DJS during follow-up.

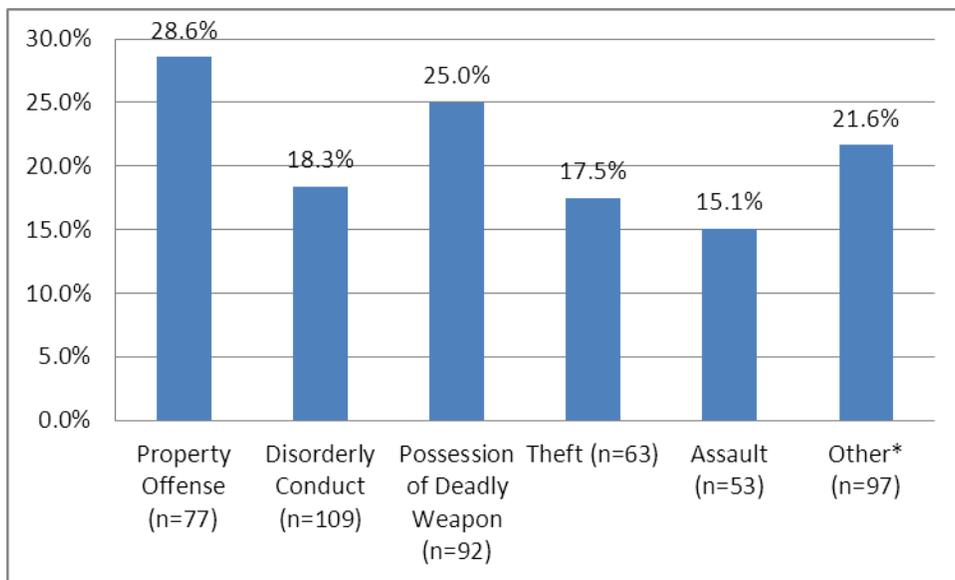
Of those youth at risk for 12 months or more, males' rate of referral to DJS was 24.8 percent, compared to 15.7 percent for females. See Figure 49. Youth who were referred to DJS did not differ in age with those youth who had not been referred to DJS; each group's average age at time of referral was 15.6 years. With regard to ethnicity, the numbers of youth in White and Latino/a categories were too few to compare.

Figure 49. Baltimore City Rates of DJS Referral at 12 Months by Gender



Case types were also compared with regard to DJS referrals at 12 months after the Teen Court hearing. See Figure 50. The most common type of offense charge among youth with a DJS referral was a property offense charge (28.6%) followed by possession of a deadly weapon (25.0%), and “other” (21.6%) offense types.

Figure 50. Baltimore City Rates of DJS Referral at 12 Months by Case Type



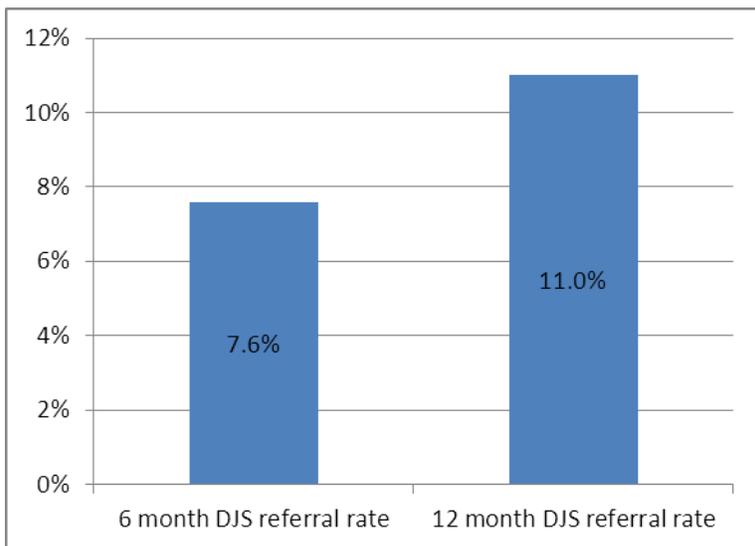
\* Other includes aggressive panhandling, disrupting school, disturbing peace, false statement, gambling, hindering/resisting arrest, littering, burglary, drug or alcohol related crimes, and failure to obey.

Finally, referrals to DJS at 12 months were analyzed with regard to teens' previous history with DJS. At 12 months, 39 of 86 youth (45.3%) who had a prior DJS contact were referred to DJS, compared to 66 of the 408 teens (16.3%) who had no prior DJS contacts.

### Charles County Teen Court: DJS Referrals

In Charles County, there were a total of 421 youth who had at least six months of follow-up time and 346 youth who had at least 12 months of follow-up time after their Teen Court hearings. As seen in Figure 51, among all youth who had a CCTC hearing, 32 of the 421 participants in the six-month group, or 7.6 percent, were referred to DJS and had a complaint entered within six months after their Teen Court hearing date. Among those with at least 12 months of time at risk, 38 of 346 youth had a DJS complaint filed, yielding a 12-month DJS referral rate of 11.0 percent.

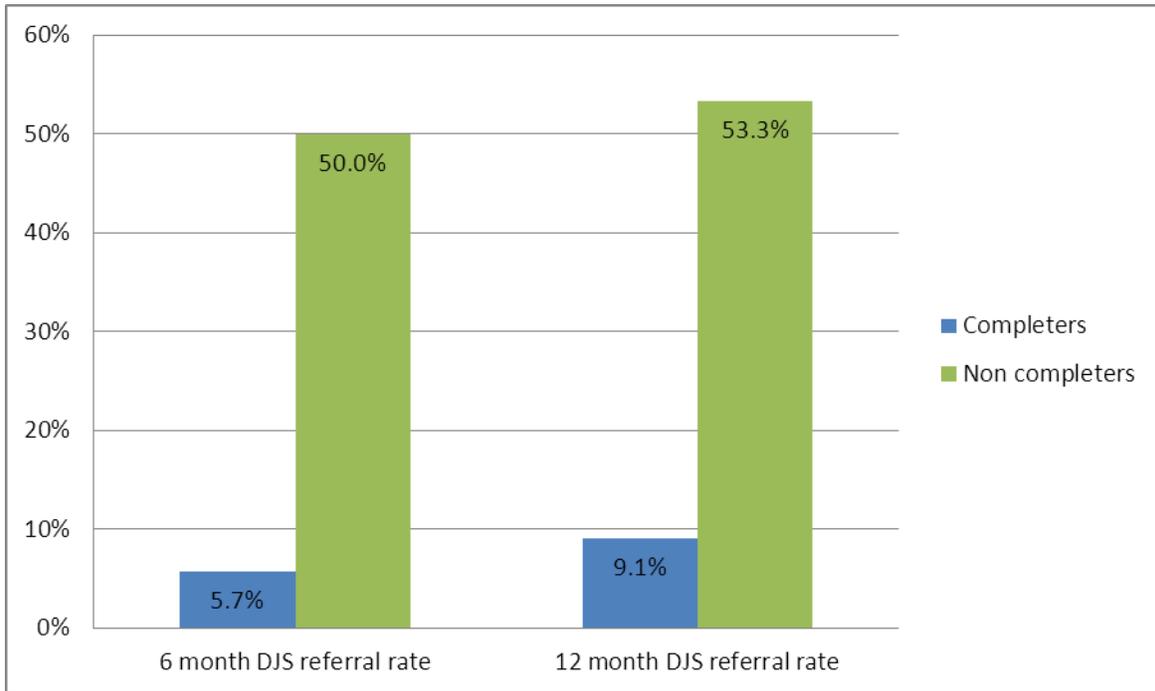
Figure 51. Charles County DJS Referral Rates at Six and 12 Months Post-Hearing



For comparative purposes, the CCTC completers and non-completers were assessed separately using the two tracking periods. As shown in Figure 52, of the 403 completers tracked for at least six months, 5.7 percent (n=23) had been referred to DJS during this period. In contrast, among 18 non-completers, 50.0 percent (n=9) had been referred to DJS within six months of their hearing. At 12 months, the DJS referral rate for completers was 9.1% (30 of 331), and the rate

for non-completers was 53.3 percent (8 of 15). As expected then, rates of referral to the juvenile justice system were much lower for CCTC completers than non-completers. Given the relatively small number of youth who were non-completers, results for this group should be viewed with caution; nonetheless the magnitude of the differences here—non-completers were about 10 times more likely to be referred to DJS at the six-month follow-up and nearly six times more likely to be referred to DJS at the 12-month follow-up period than completers—makes these findings worthy of consideration.

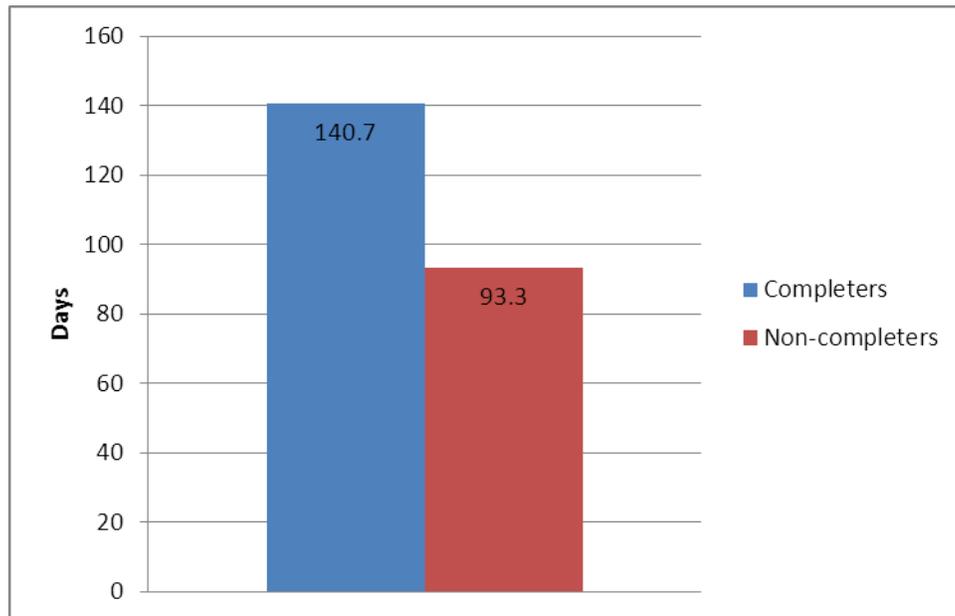
Figure 52. Charles County Six and 12 Month DJS Referral Rates by Completion Status



The remaining analyses focus on those youth who had at least 12 months of time at risk from their Teen Court hearing. For youth in this group who had a DJS referral within 12 months after their Teen Court hearing the referral occurred within as few as four days and in as many as 348 days after the hearing. On average these youth recidivated 124.8 days after their Teen Court hearing.

In addition to being more likely to recidivate, non-completers recidivated more quickly than completers. See Figure 53. Non-completers with a DJS referral (n=8) were referred, on average, about a month and a half earlier (47.4 days) than completers with a referral (n=30) (93.3 days vs. 140.7 days, respectively).

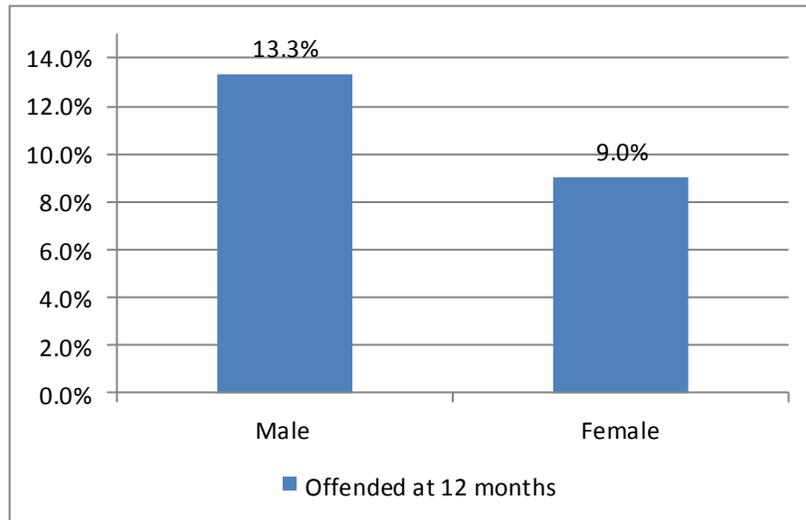
Figure 53. *Charles County Teen Court Mean Number of Days to First DJS Referral*



The number of DJS referrals was also examined for completers and non-completers in the 12-month follow-up group. Teens that completed the program and had a post-hearing referral had on average 1.4 referrals to DJS after their Teen Court hearing. Teens that did not complete the program had a mean number of 2.6 DJS referrals after their Teen Court hearing.

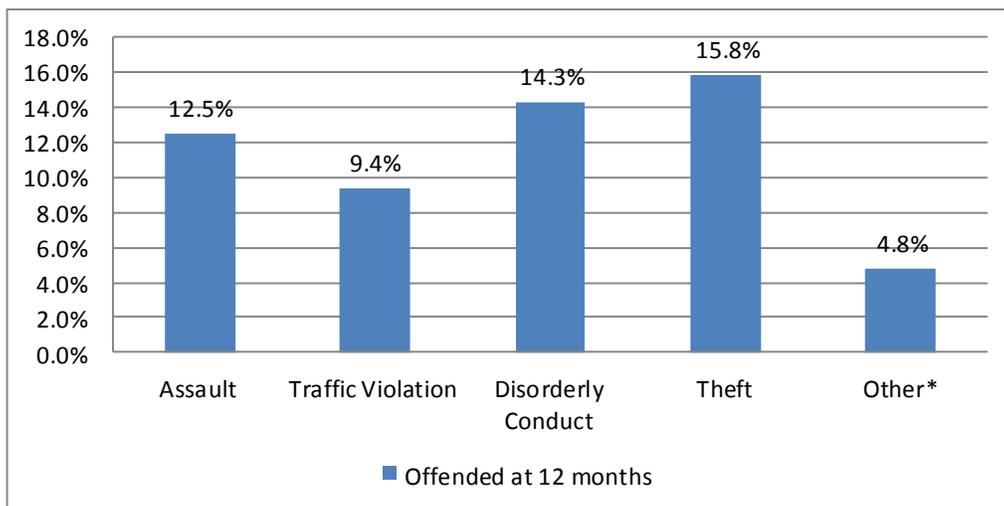
Of those youth at risk for 12 months or more, males' rate of referral to DJS was 13.3 percent, compared with 9 percent for females; see Figure 54. Youth who were referred to DJS after their hearing were slightly younger than those who had no DJS referral. On average, teens who were referred to DJS were 15.9 years of age at the time of their CCTC referral, compared to 16.4 years of age for those teens who were not referred to DJS. With regard to ethnicity, the rates of referral to DJS were virtually the same for the two largest groups (11.1%, n=171 for Whites; 11.4%, n=167 for African Americans) during the 12-month tracking period. The numbers of youth grouped into the "other" category were too few in number to include in these analyses.

Figure 54. Charles County Rates of DJS Referral at 12 Months by Gender



Case types were also compared with regard to DJS referrals at 12 months after the Teen Court hearing. The most common type of offense charge among youth with a post-hearing DJS referral at 12 months was theft (15.8%). As shown in Figure 55, disorderly conduct was the next most common charge. Traffic violation and assault charges accounted for most of the other charge types among those who were referred within a year of their Teen Court hearing.

Figure 55. Charles County Rates of DJS Referrals at 12 Months by Case Type



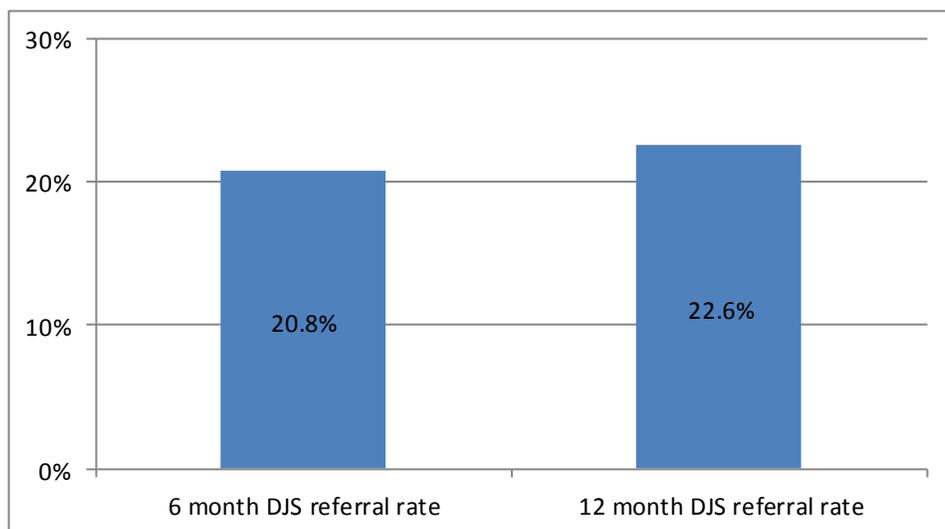
\* Other includes disrupting school operations, disturbing the peace, possession of a deadly weapon, trespassing, alcohol or tobacco violation, and destruction of property.

Finally, referrals to DJS at 12 months were analyzed with regard to teens' previous history with DJS. At 12 months, four of the seven youth (57.1%) who had a prior DJS contact were re-referred to DJS, compared to 36 of the 341 teens (10.6%) who had no prior DJS contacts. Once again, because of the small number of youth with prior DJS contact, results for this group should be viewed with caution; nonetheless the magnitude of the difference between youth with and without prior DJS contact makes these findings worthy of consideration.

### Montgomery County Teen Court: DJS Referrals

In Montgomery County, there were a total of 904 youth who had at least six months of follow-up time and 657 youth who at least 12 months of follow-up time after their Teen Court hearings. Among all youth who had a MCTC hearing, 171 of the 824 participants in the six-month group, or 20.8 percent, were referred to DJS and had a complaint entered within six months after their hearing date. Among those with at least 12 months of time at risk, 136 of 601 youth had a DJS complaint, yielding a 12-month recidivism rate of 22.6 percent. See Figure 56.

Figure 56. *Montgomery County Teen Court Six and 12 Month DJS Referral Rates*

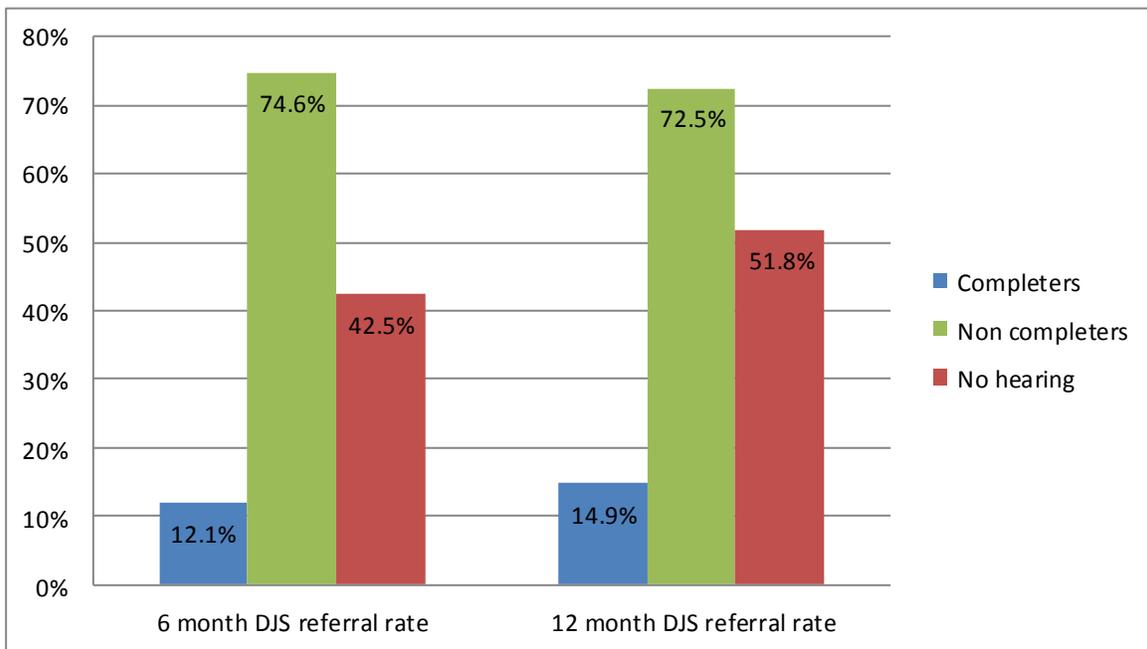


For comparative purposes, the MCTC completers, non-completers, and those teens referred but not attending a hearing were assessed separately using the two tracking periods. For the teens who did not have a MCTC hearing, six and 12 months after their MCTC intake date was used as the basis for whether the teen had been referred to DJS.

As shown in Figure 57, of the 710 completers tracked for at least six months, 12.1 percent (n=86) had been referred to DJS during this period. In contrast, among 114 non-completers, 74.6 percent (n=85) had been referred to DJS within six months of their hearing. At 12 months, the recidivism rate for completers was 14.9 percent (78 of 521), and the comparable rate for non-completers was 72.5 percent (58 of 80). As expected, rates of referral to the juvenile

justice system were much lower for MCTC completers than non-completers; non-completers were seven times more likely to be referred to DJS at the six-month follow-up and four times more likely to be referred to DJS at the 12-month follow-up. Teens that were referred to the program but never attended a hearing were more likely to be referred to DJS than MCTC completers, but less likely to be referred to DJS than non-completers. Of the 80 youth in the six-month group that did not have hearings, 34 (42.5%) were referred to DJS following their MCTC referral for a subsequent offense, while 29 of the 56 (51.8%) in the 12-month group were referred to DJS during this follow-up period. At six and 12 months, teens who were referred to the program but who had no hearings were 3.5 times more likely to be referred to DJS than teens who completed the program. Teens who completed the program were also less likely to have a subsequent DJS referral compared with those who attended a MCTC hearing but failed to complete the program.

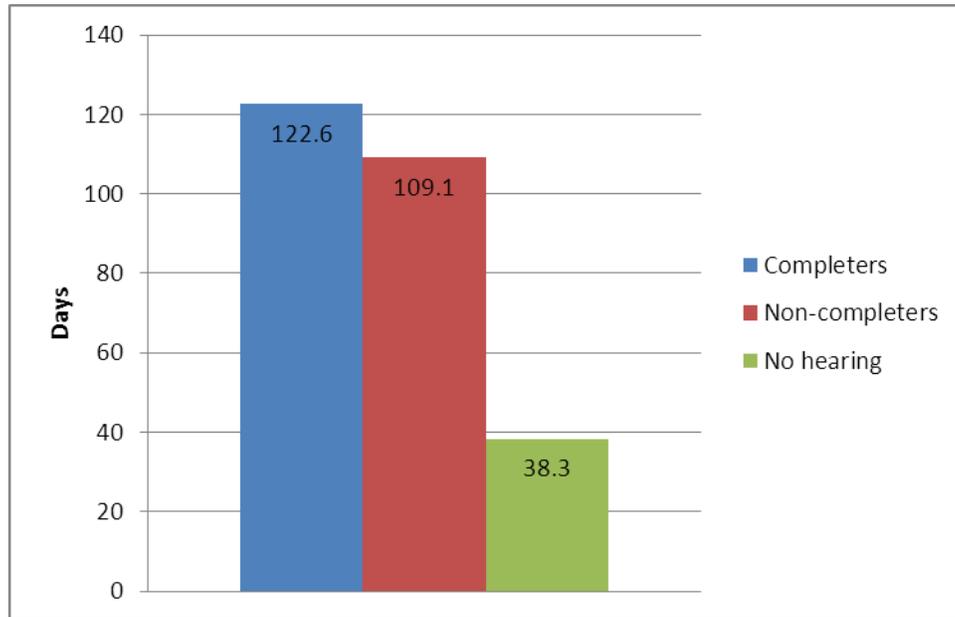
Figure 57. Montgomery County: Six- and 12-Month DJS Referral Rates by Completion Status



The remaining analyses focus on those youth who had at least 12 months of time at risk from their Teen Court hearing. Regardless of completion status, youth in this group who had a DJS referral within the one-year follow-up period were referred within as few as five days and in as many as 362 days after the hearing. On average these youth recidivated 114.4 days after their Teen Court hearing.

When comparing Teen Court participants on completion status and time until first referral to DJS after the Teen Court hearing, non-completers were referred, on average, 13 days earlier than completers (109.1 days vs. 122.6 days, respectively). Teens who did not have a hearing were referred to DJS on average 38.3 days after their intake date, or two to three months sooner than MCTC completers and non-completers. See Figure 58.

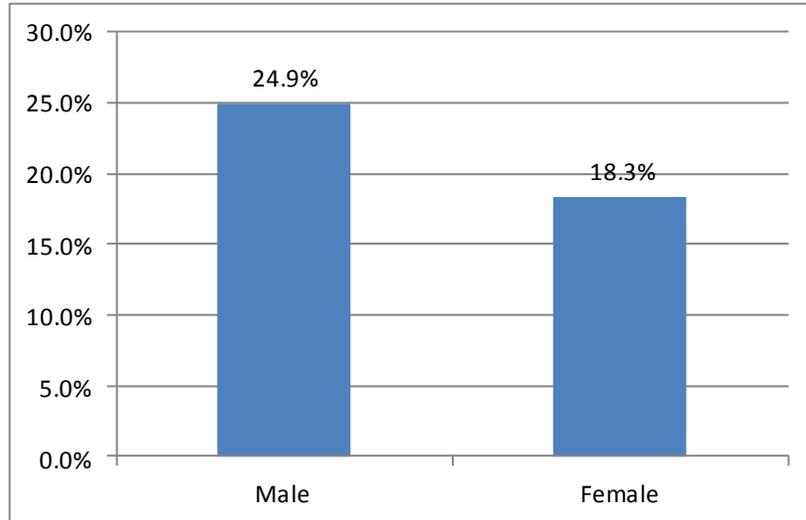
Figure 58. *Montgomery County: Mean Number of Days to First DJS Referral*



The number of DJS referrals was also examined for completers, non-completers, and teens who did not have a MCTC hearing among those who had at least 12 months at risk and one or more DJS referrals during the one-year follow-up. Youth who completed the program had on average 1.7 referrals to DJS after their Teen Court hearing. Teens with at least one post-hearing referral who did not complete the program had a mean number of 1.8 DJS referrals in the one-year period. Teens that were referred to the program but did not have a MCTC hearing averaged 1.3 DJS referrals after their program referral date.

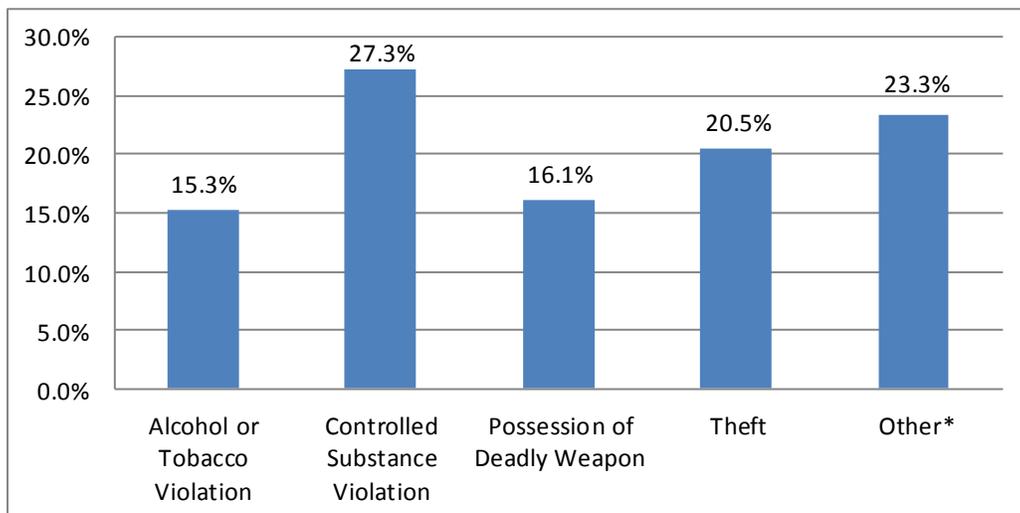
Youth who were referred to DJS after their hearing were approximately the same age (16.3 years of age) as those teens that had no DJS referral (16.4 years) in the one-year follow-up. As seen in Figure 59, of those youth at risk for 12 months or more, males' rate of referral to DJS was 24.9 percent, compared with 18.3 percent for females. With regard to ethnicity, the rates of referral to DJS were virtually the same for African American (28.7%) and Latinos/as (28.1%) in the 12-month tracking period. Asian American teens' post-hearing DJS referral rate over this period was 20.8 percent, while Whites' rate was 17.7 percent.

Figure 59. *Montgomery County Rates of DJS Referral at 12 months by Gender*



Case types were also compared with regard to DJS referrals during the 12-months post-hearing (or post-referral) follow-up. The most common type of offense charge among youth with a DJS referral in the 12 months was for a controlled substance violation (27.3%). As shown in Figure 60, youth with “other” types of cases, which included assaults, property offense, trespassing, burglary, and other offenses (see list below Figure 60), had the next highest DJS referral rate (23.3%). Teens charged with an alcohol or tobacco violation (15.3%) or a possession of a deadly weapon offense were least likely to be referred to DJS in the 12-month follow-up.

Figure 60. *Montgomery County Rates of DJS Referrals at 12 Months by Case Type*



\* Other includes assault, destroying property, disorderly conduct, disrupting school operations, failure to obey, false statement, resisting arrest, trespassing, and burglary.

Finally, referrals to DJS at 12 months were analyzed with regard to teens' previous history with DJS. At 12 months, 15 of 60 (25.0%) youth who had a prior DJS contact were re-referred to DJS, compared to 126 of the 557 (22.6%) teens who had no prior DJS contacts.

### **Study Limitations**

This study attempts to evaluate the processes and outcomes of Teen Courts on multiple dimensions and using multiple metrics. As with all studies, it has limitations inherent in its design and sample. First, due to the voluntary nature of participation and the fact that not all eligible individuals elected to participate, the sample may be systematically different from the population of youth respondents, parents/guardians, and volunteers affiliated with the three Teen Courts studied. Second, the follow-up period between pre- and post-intervention interview administration for respondents and parents is relatively short (approximately four months, on average). Therefore, this study does not measure the potentially lasting impact of Teen Court. Third, the one-group design for the survey/interview sample limits comparisons that can be made between respondents and similar youth. This is to some degree inherent in the nature of Teen Court practices, as all eligible youth who agree to participate in Teen Court in these jurisdictions are accepted; youth are not assigned to conditions. Fourth, all data collected by survey and interview methods are self-reported, and research participants may have faulty recall or intentionally misreport certain information (for example, instances of subsequent trouble with the law). This limitation is mitigated by the pairing of the self-report study with the recidivism study, which uses official records to more completely capture qualities of the respondent population and determine youth outcomes following Teen Court participation. Finally, although this study included three diverse Teen Court settings in an attempt to demonstrate multiple approaches, the varying nature of Teen Courts around the country limits the ability to generalize this study's findings. It could be that Teen Courts elsewhere have better or worse outcomes, depending on their practices and the youth and communities they serve.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

---

This study employed multiple measures and methods to evaluate Teen Court processes and outcomes in three geographically diverse jurisdictions in Maryland. Methods included court observation, document review, pre and post intervention surveys and interviews, and recidivism measures. The following significant findings emerged:

1. Observation and document review uncovered surprisingly little variation among jurisdictions' practices, despite differences in offender and juror populations, offenses, and home institutions. The degree of similarity may reflect the formal and informal communication among their leadership (for example, their common membership in the Maryland Teen Court Association). This level of collaboration among Teen Courts likely provides valuable support for programs that often operate

as grass-roots organizations.

2. Recidivism rates measured at six months and 12 months after Teen Court showed dramatic differences depending on program completion. In all three Teen Court locations, youth who did not complete the Teen Court program were more likely to have a DJS referral and to recidivate more quickly than were youth who completed the program.
  - a. In Baltimore City Teen Court (which is more likely to accept youth with a prior DJS history and with more serious offenses than the other Teen Court locations in this study), non-completers were at least 2.5 times more likely to recidivate at both the six- and 12-month follow-up.
  - b. In Charles County, non-completers were about 10 times more likely to be referred to DJS at the six-month follow-up and nearly six times more likely to be referred to DJS at the 12-month follow-up.
  - c. In Montgomery County Teen Court, non-completers were seven times more likely to be referred to DJS at the six-month follow-up and four times more likely to be referred to DJS at the 12-month follow-up.
3. The percent of youth who did not complete the program and the percent of youth who recidivate was higher for given subgroups (e.g., prior DJS involvement, particular case types), suggesting that program enrichments targeted at particular subgroups may be warranted. These differences varied by court location.
4. All four populations studied (youth respondents, parents/guardians, youth volunteers, adult volunteers) indicated substantial support for the Teen Court programs in which they participated. Positive appraisals far outweighed negative ones. The same cannot be said for more traditional models of juvenile justice, in which youth offenders, families, and staff members have reported feeling frustrated and disenfranchised.<sup>34</sup>
5. A number of benefits are noted to accrue to youth who volunteer in Teen Court settings, in addition to respondents and their families. These benefits include an opportunity to serve others and their community, education and experience in a legal setting, and the chance to become a positive role model.
6. Youth respondents and their parents/guardians scored fairly high on measures of functioning and coping. This finding suggests that this population of youth offenders and their families are in possession of substantial strengths that can be drawn upon if they are engaged in services.

---

<sup>34</sup> Clark, 2007; Osher & Hunt, 2002.

7. Youth respondents and their parents/guardians reported very low rates of problems at home, with friends, in school, and with the law between the pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews. This supports the analysis of recidivism data, and also suggests that Teen Court may be helping youth curb problematic behaviors.
8. Youth respondents and parents/guardians did not show statistically significant improvement between pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews on standardized measures of coping, family functioning, and civic engagement. It may be that the brief period of a few months between administrations is too short a time to see substantial change; that the intervention is not making an impact on these domains; that a larger sample would show changes; and/or that Teen Courts could benefit from partnering with family and mental health service providers in order to generate a greater impact in these areas.
9. Youth respondents indicated that peer jurors acted as a “neutral” influence on them. Perhaps a greater degree of opportunity for interaction with these peers – during structured events, celebration ceremonies, or something similar – might improve the degree of positive peer influence.

In summary, Teen Court is an intervention that seeks to utilize peer influence and serve youth with minor offense histories outside the traditional juvenile justice system. It employs peer jurors and adult volunteers, uses questioning to get at pertinent information on potentially complex cases and circumstances, and involves youth respondents’ families. Data obtained from DJS indicate youth in all three counties who completed the Teen Court program had fewer subsequent instances of recidivism than youth who did not complete the program. For example, the small number of Charles County Teen Court non-completers were about 10 times more likely to be referred to DJS at the six-month follow-up and nearly six times more likely to be referred to DJS at the 12-month follow-up period than completers. In addition, youth who do not complete the program recidivate faster than those who complete the program. These findings suggest that Teen Court programs tend to impact recidivism rates positively.

Youth who participate in this program reported positive functioning prior to their Teen Court hearing, and this assessment does not appear to change in a statistically significant way during the time between initial intake and completion of sanctions. Benefits may accrue in terms of the experience youth have before a true jury of their peers, in the ability to avoid a potentially costly juvenile court record, and in very low self-reported rates of serious difficulties following Teen Court involvement. Many respondents interviewed (86.4 percent) indicated that Teen Court was beneficial to them. The vast majority of respondents interviewed (94.5 percent) considered their sanctions fair: many said they learned their lesson, they understood what they did was wrong, and they deserved the sanctions.

Their parents and guardians were equally positive about the Teen Court experience with 83.3 percent of the seventeen parents/guardians interviewed finding the experience with Teen

Court positive, with one neutral and one negative response. When asked whether the Teen Court experience was valuable for their children most (14 of 17, or 82 percent) said yes.

Moreover, Teen Court benefits appear to accrue to youth volunteers as well as youth respondents, providing a meaningful service opportunity to youth and, in some cases, directing their future career choices. In responses to qualitative questions, youth respondents, their parents or guardians, youth volunteers, and adult volunteers share their perception that this is a valuable program for holding youth accountable while providing them with the opportunity to learn from their behavior.

After thorough review, the overall findings of this comprehensive, two-year evaluation strongly support the continued operation of Teen Court programs in Maryland.

## References

- Butts, J. A., & Buck, J. (2000). *Teen Courts: A focus on research*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved September 14, 2010 from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/183472.pdf>
- Butts, J. A., Buck, J., & Coggeshall, M. B. (2002, April). *The impact of teen court on young offenders*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute. Retrieved June 26, 2009 from <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410457.pdf>
- Clark, R. L. (2007, September). *Public and professionals' views of the juvenile justice system in Georgia*. Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia, Athens, GA. Retrieved September 6, 2012 from <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/childfamilypolicy/publications/juvenilejusticeviews.pdf>
- Filler, D. M., & Smith, A. E. (2006). The new rehabilitation. *Iowa Law Review*, 91(3), 951-991.
- Forgays, D. K., & DeMilio, L. (2006). Is Teen Court effective for repeat offenders? A test of the restorative justice approach. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 49(1), 107-118.
- Garrison, A. H. (2001). An evaluation of a Delaware teen court. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 52(3), 11-21.
- Gould, L. F., Hussong, A. M., & Keeley, M. L. (2008). The Adolescent Coping Process Interview: Measuring temporal and affective components of adolescent responses to peer stress. *Journal of Adolescence*, 31(5), 641-657.
- Harris, M. B., & Franklin, C. G. (2003). Effects of a cognitive-behavioral, school-based, group intervention with Mexican American pregnant and parenting adolescents. *Social Work Research*, 27(2), 71-83.
- Harrison, P., Maupin, J. R., & Mays, G. L. (2001). Teen Court: An examination of processes and outcomes. *Crime & Delinquency*, 47(2), 243-264.
- Hirsch, J. S. (2008). Catholics using contraceptives: Religion, family planning, and interpretive agency in rural Mexico. *Studies in Family Planning*, 39(2), 93-104.
- Kendall, J. (2003-2004). Can it please the court? An analysis of the teen court system as an alternative to the traditional juvenile justice system. *Journal of Juvenile Law*, 24, 154-164.
- Kowalski, K. M. (1999). Courtroom justice for teens – by teens. *Current Health* 2 25(8), 29-31.

Logalbo, A. F., & Callahan, C. M. (2001). An evaluation of teen court as a juvenile court diversion program. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 52(2), 1-11.

Maryland Teen Court Association (2012). *Welcome to the Maryland Teen Court Association*. Retrieved August 8, 2012 from <http://www.mdtca.org/>

National Association of Youth Courts (2010). *Youth Court list by state*. Retrieved September 14, 2010 from <http://www.youthcourt.net/content/view/7/14/>

Norris, M., Twill, S., & Kim, C. (2011). Smells like teen spirit: Evaluating a Midwestern Teen Court. *Crime & Delinquency*, 57(2), 199-221.

Osher, T., & Hunt, P. (2002, December). Involving families of youth who are in contact with the juvenile justice system. *Research and Program Brief*. National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice. Retrieved September 6, 2012 from <http://www.ncmhjj.com/pdfs/publications/Family.pdf>.

Patrick, S., & Marsh, R. (2005). Juvenile diversion: Results of a 3-year experimental study. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 16(1), 59-73.

Patterson, J. M., & McCubbin, H. I. (1987). Adolescent coping style and behaviors: Conceptualization and measurement. *Journal of Adolescence*, 10(2), 163-186.

Pearson, S.S. & Jurich, S. (2005). *A national update: Communities embracing youth courts for at-risk youth*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum. Retrieved September 20, 2010 from <http://www.aypf.org/publications/Youth Court - A Community Solution.pdf>

Rasmussen, A., & Diener, C. I. (2005). A prospective longitudinal study of teen court's impact on offending youths' behavior. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 56(1), 17-32.

Recklitis, C. J., & Noam, G. G. (1999). Clinical and developmental perspectives on adolescent coping. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 20(2), 87-101.

Schneider, J. (2008). Youth courts: An empirical update and analysis of future organizational and research needs. *Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence Reports and Essays Serial*. Washington, DC: George Washington University. Retrieved September 20, 2010 from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/222592.pdf>

Sherrod, L. R. (2003). Promoting the development of citizenship in diverse youth. *Political Science and Politics*, 36(2), 287-292.

Smith, S. (2007). *Peer-driven justice: Development and validation of the Teen Court Peer Influence Scale (TCPIS)*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Florida State University.

Smith, S., & Chonody, J. M. (2010). Peer-driven justice: Development and validation of the Teen Court Peer Influence Scale. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 20(3), 283-292.

Stickle, W. P., Connell, N. M., Wilson, D. M., & Gottfredson, D. (2008). An experimental evaluation of teen courts. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 4(2), 137-163.

Tambor, C. (2008, April 14). Pro bono: Minor juries, major justice at Baltimore's teen court. *The Daily Record*. Retrieved February 19, 2009 from <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1P2-16246930.html>.

Tavitian, M. L., Lubiner, J., Green, L., Grebstein, L. C., & Velicer, W. F. (1987). Dimensions of family functioning. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 2(2), 191-204.

Weisz, V., Lott, R. C., & Thai, N. D. (2002). A teen court evaluation with a therapeutic jurisprudence perspective. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 20(4), 381-392.

White, D. (1999). Teen court works! *Education Digest*, 65(1), 26-28.

Wilson, D. M., Gottfredson, D. C., & Stickle, W. P. (2009). Gender differences in effects of teen courts on delinquency: A theory-guided evaluation. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 37(1), 21-27.