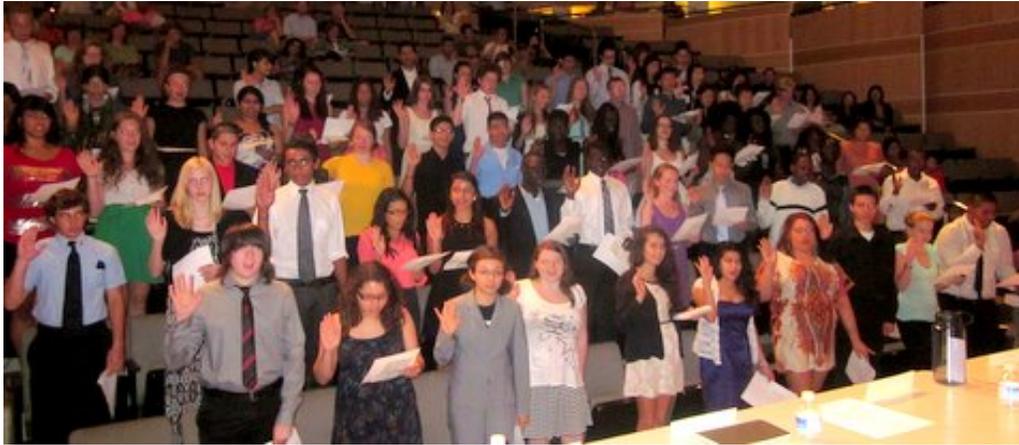


SALT LAKE PEER COURT

A PROGRAM OF UTAH LAW RELATED EDUCATION

FALL NEWSLETTER
2013



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From the Director

It is an honor to follow in the footsteps of Kathleen Zeitlin as Salt Lake Peer Court's Director. Over the course of 20 years, Kathleen built Salt Lake Peer Court, making it the successful program it is today and organizing the youth court movement in Utah. I am both proud to be a member of Utah's own restorative justice movement, and humbled by the large shoes that Kathleen has left for me to fill as Salt Lake Peer Court's second Director.

As a new Director, peeking out from underneath the righteous shadow that Kathleen's legacy casts, I plan on staying the course with a few minor experimental adjustments. In the coming months I will be working closely with two professors at the University of Utah to develop new treatment options for youth offenders and eliminate any treatment options that do not effectively decrease referred youth's likelihood to recidivate. We will be expanding our funds of knowledge by inviting youth offenders and their family members to participate in longitudinal studies that will be used to analyze the long-term effects that Salt Lake Peer Court has on their lives. I will also focus on building the restorative justice movement in Utah.

The restorative justice youth court movement is a humane, cost-effective, and progressive approach to juvenile justice. Nationwide, youth courts are developing and implementing restorative justice practices to deal with youth offenders in their communities and it is working. Youth courts with restorative justice models are effectively reducing the rate of recidivism within their communities while challenging the school to prison pipeline, the disproportionate minority contact with the justice system, and the for-profit privatization of juvenile detention centers. Rather than focusing on guilt and punishment, youth courts using the restorative justice model aim to address the causes of delinquent behavior and make right any wrongs by involving the community in the process of restoring youth offenders' value to the community. Salt Lake Peer Court does this through peer mentoring, community service, life skills classes, counseling, career exploration programs, after-school programs, and enrichment programs that suit a youth's interests.

Salt Lake Peer Court meets every Monday night on the 2nd floor of the Matheson Courthouse from 6-8pm. The public is welcome to come observe our hearings and learn more about our model of restorative justice. Please feel free to call me at the office with any questions that you may have: 801-322-1815. If you would like to be added to our e-list to stay up to date with Salt Lake Peer Court, shoot us an email at slpcourt@xmission.com with the subject: SLPC E-List.

Sincerely,

Tyler Bugden

Kathleen Zeitlin: A Retrospective

Salt Lake Peer Court is based on the very simple, but powerful idea that youth who have committed offenses should be connected with peer groups who hold them accountable and provide positive influence, encouragement and support. The peer groups conduct ‘court hearings’ using a restorative justice approach: providing opportunities to make up for the harm they have caused, develop needed skills, and make positive community connections. They also think ‘outside the box,’ coming up with requirements that are tailored to each particular youth.

Following the hearings, the peer mentor meets with the youth offender weekly to encourage positive behavior and monitor the mentee’s progress. Peer mentoring is critical to the program and is one of the keys to Salt Lake Peer Court’s continuing success. Much of the time, youth referred to Peer Court seem to have little hope for their futures. Yet when their peers let them know that they matter and they believe in them, it marks the start of changing behaviors and changing lives!

This is a program where youth are given a serious stake in their community – where they gain hands-on knowledge about citizenship and take an active role in addressing the early stages of youth delinquency. It eliminates social barriers and unites youth throughout our community. The youth volunteers bring energy, optimism, and belief in the abilities of the youth who come before them. And the work they do is transforming for them all.

I cannot overstate the dedication and commitment of the youth and adult volunteers who have made this program what it is today. We see the



effect they have in the courtroom, but we hear after-the-fact, usually from very grateful parents, about the relationships that were built and the lives that were truly saved!

History

Salt Lake Peer Court began in 1993 as a collaboration between West High School and members of the Capitol Hill Community Council, with critical support from the Salt Lake City mayor’s office and police department. Spearheading this new, innovative program was the Capitol Hill Community Council Chairperson: a woman named Pam Richardson Card. I remember her telling me how she “camped out” in West High Assistant Principal Teresa Piele’s office in the spring of 1993 and together they hand-picked a student volunteer group who they hoped would give the program a strong start. As the year progressed, those of us who were helping out were surprised by how well it worked and how these youth volunteers rose to the occasion and had an amazing influence on the students who were referred to them!

At the end of that first year, tragedy struck. Pam Card, our fearless leader who made it all happen, suddenly passed away. Pam gave the final year of her life to this program and we could all see the amazing benefits! So

we all dedicated ourselves to work together to continue the vision of this program. I want to acknowledge a few of these community members who were most instrumental: Kathy Hunt, Robin Webb, Marlu Gurr, and Hazel Horsfield all worked together to advance the program.

In 1996, Peer Court received its first large grant from the Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ). We expanded citywide, and became a program of Utah Law Related Education, a non-profit organization supported by the Utah State Bar. I became the new program director. Over the next 17 years I was to have the opportunity to work with about 5,000 parents and their children, 1,500 youth volunteers and over 500 adult volunteers, who currently perform approximately 10,000 hours of service every year!

During this same period of time, other peer courts were being created all over Utah and the entire nation. In 1996, there were about 70 peer courts nationally, but currently there are about 1,400!

Supporters

Salt Lake Peer Court has many, many supporters, but I would like to especially acknowledge Kathy Dryer and Janet Hilliard with Utah Law Related Education for all their support over the past 17 years! From the inception of the program the support from the Salt Lake City School District has been instrumental to our success: they provide the ability to recruit youth volunteers and referrals of youth who have committed offenses. They also provide needed information on the students’ progress during their involvement with Peer Court. Also critical is our collaboration with Salt Lake Police Department School Resource Officers who refer youth offenders to the program. Salt Lake County Division of Youth Services provides counseling and life skills

classes, and the Third District Juvenile Court provides six courtrooms every week. Many other local programs provide community service opportunities and other support services for the youth and their families.

My Retirement

After almost 20 years of involvement with Salt Lake Peer Court, the time finally seemed right for me to retire and this past June I did just that. Even though it seemed like abandoning 'my baby,' handing the reins over to the new director, Tyler Bugden, definitely made the transition easier! He has sustained and expanded on the vision of this program. But it would not have been possible without the continued presence and commitment of Iris Salazar, who has worked as Program Coordinator for the past 8 years! She has made the transition possible and is now Tyler's 'right hand,' just as she was for me!

Salt Lake Peer Court is a demonstration of the synergy and success that happens with great vision, successful community collaboration, and making the most of the passion and commitment of the youth in our community! It was my great privilege to have played a part in this innovative program.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Zeitlin

Q & A with Summer Vasquez, East High Class of 2014

With three years of experience as a panelist and a mentor, Summer is a respected leader in the courtroom and a fantastic mentor. She fills the room with her positive attitude, and is a great team player. Summer is an excellent ambassador for Salt Lake Peer Court and the restorative justice process.

What do you like about restorative justice? Do you think it works? My favorite thing about restorative justice is that it feels like helping instead of punishing. I definitely think restorative justice works. It is effective because we recognize that punishment alone is not effective in changing behavior and crime control primarily depends on the community. The referred youth aren't committing horrendous crimes, so a lot of the time courts won't see these kids till it escalates. But Peer Court deals with the problems as soon as they pop up and deals with the underlying problems - effectively hindering the school to prison pipeline.

Tell us about your experience on the panel. What do you like about being a panelist? What do you like about being a mentor? I love that peer court trusts its youth volunteers enough to let us make the decisions and listen to all the sides of the case. Doing this has given me a new perspective on the justice system, schools, problems with our society, and the reasons behind the "trouble" in "troubled youth." My favorite part about being a mentor is being able to see how the student evolves and grows from the Peer Court experience.

Tell me a success story about one of your mentees. What type of offense was it? How old was the student? How did you help him/her graduate from our program? My first mentee of peer court was referred for fighting with another classmate. They were in eighth grade at the time. As a panel, we were able to help him become more confident and better able to problem solve through counseling. Through our contact, I watched him become more confident and graduate quickly from the program.

What other extracurricular activities/clubs are you involved in? I ran cross-country and run hurdles and sprint for East High Track and Field.

What future goals do you have? College? Career? My future goals are to earn a Health Promotion and Education degree from the University of Utah and attend medical school there. Then go on to be an emergency room pediatrician.

How has Peer Court helped you be a better person? Peer Court has helped me to look at the reasons behind behavior rather than judging at a superficial level. I came in my first year very shy, but it has helped me speak up and be more of a leader.





Salt Lake Peer Court Training

Top Left: Salt Lake Peer Court at the 11th Annual Utah Youth Court Conference in St. George, Utah this summer.

Top Right: Salt Lake Peer Court, along with members of the Sandy and Layton Youth Courts, participate in a service to clean up trash along the Virgin River in St. George, Utah.

Bottom Left: Members of Salt Lake Peer Court discuss values with Marlu Gurr at the overnight Camp Tuttle training in August.

Bottom Right: Salt Lake Peer Court mentor-panelists engage in a dialogue about ethics at their final pre-hearing training.

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Administrative Office of the Courts, AmeriCorps, Lowell Bennion Community Service Center (University of Utah), The Park Café, Third District Juvenile Court, Vinto Pizzeria, Xmission

!!!Tax-Deductible Donations!!!

Salt Lake Peer Court is a nonprofit operating on a shoestring budget. Donations of any size are always welcome! Donations can be made at Paypal.com. Our Paypal.com address is slpcourt@xmission.com

Checks can be sent to: Salt Lake Peer Court
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