

SALT LAKE PEER COURT

A PROGRAM OF UTAH LAW RELATED EDUCATION

WINTER
NEWSLETTER
2014



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From the Director

Salt Lake Peer Court is pleased to announce new partnerships with the Salt Lake Police Foundation (SLPF), the Salt Lake City Bicycle Collective, the University of Utah's ArtsBridge Program, and the Wasatch Community Gardens (WCG). By inviting these key community members to take an active role in the restorative justice process, we will improve the efficiency, the sustainability, and the accessibility of our youth court.

The SLPF recently awarded Salt Lake Peer Court with two grants. The first, the Transportation Access Plan, is used to give low-income families UTA passes so they can commute to and from court, school, counseling appointments, etc. Before we had funding for the plan, transportation - or the lack thereof - was a major obstacle to the success of our restorative justice program. When families could not participate or failed to appear because of issues with transportation, their cases were often escalated to juvenile court. This was unfair, and thanks to the SLPF, we have improved the accessibility of our program so that transportation should not be an obstacle to participating in our early intervention diversion program.

The Tablet Project is the second grant the SLPF awarded us. It has been used to purchase seven tablets. We use these tablets to enable instantaneous online file sharing between courts. This grant allowed us to modernize our process and cut back on printing costs and waste by building efficiency and sustainability.

This spring, youth offenders will be able to complete their disposition requirements by building a bike, creating art, or working at a local community garden. Our partnerships with the Salt Lake City Bicycle Collective, the ArtsBridge Program, and the WCG are all part of our campaign to develop disposition options (sentences) that focus on positive youth development. Contemporary movements and research in the juvenile justice arena overwhelmingly support positive youth development (PYD) programs like the Bicycle Collective, ArtsBridge, and WCG. These programs positively change youth offenders' behavior by treating them like resources to be developed rather than problems to be managed. As a result, offenders feel validated rather than punished and labeled as failures. This approach effectively reduces youth offenders' rate of recidivism while restoring their productive value to the community. By diverting at-risk youth out of the juvenile court system to PYD programs, we hope that these partnerships will end their cycle of court involvement.

The Bicycle Collective is an ideal educational context of empowerment for youth offenders interested in mechanics and engineering. Students studying with the Bicycle Collective will receive 18 hours of instructional time along their way to

building a bicycle that they ride away with after graduation. Equipped with mechanical skills to maintain their new bikes, students will be able to contribute to the sustainability of our city by commuting on their bikes.

In collaboration with the ArtsBridge program at the University of Utah, Salt Lake Peer Court has created “The Youth ARC: Artistic Reflections and Creativity.” A free arts program for students, the Youth ARC is a therapeutic and educational art class taught by a University of Utah ArtsBridge Scholar. An artistic challenge to the school to prison pipeline, the Youth ARC, our school to college collective, will provide students with a context of creative empowerment that affirms the formation of positive new identities. Each cohort of the Youth ARC will select the top pieces from the six-week class, which Salt Lake Peer Court will show at a public location to be announced.

The Wasatch Community Gardens’ (WCG) City Roots classes will teach students about plant care, nutrient cycling, harvesting, and other food-growing skills. These therapeutic outdoor classes will touch on topics of food justice while empowering students with access to healthy, organic, local food. During these weekly outdoor courses, students will experience the connection between environment, community, and food systems.

We are excited to begin offering a new and improved menu of disposition options aimed at positive youth development. In the coming months, we will track the progress of students participating in our new community partners’ programs, evaluating the effectiveness of each program, and making adjustments as needed.

As we continue to fine-tune our program from day to day, we are also planning for the future. Salt Lake Peer Court is now accepting applications for next year’s volunteer positions. If interested, please contact us at slpcourt@xmission.com. We meet 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.

Sincerely,

Tyler Bugden



Salt Lake Police Department’s Chief Chris Burbank and Tyler Bugden pose for a picture in Salt Lake Peer Court’s office. Chief Burbank hand-delivered the grant check from the Salt Lake Police Foundation.



Salt Lake Peer Court held a Winter Social in December for all of our fantastic volunteers. Between dinner and dessert, our youth and adult volunteers posed in our green-screen photo booth, competed in a gingerbread house-making contest, enjoyed games, and danced to the music of DJ Daniel Lee, a youth volunteer from Highland High. Salt Lake Peer Court volunteers (from left to right): Sanja Visnjic, Giulia Easthope, Renata Visnjic, James Yost, Oliva Netzler, Anthony Mora, Jasmine Sanders, and Alexis Lucero.

Panelist Voices:

Sarah Silcox, West High Class of 2014

I am grateful I volunteer for Salt Lake City Peer Court. This organization helps at-risk youth in the city as an alternative to the juvenile justice system. Peer Court aims to avoid the “school to prison pipeline,” where students who commit minor offenses at school end up with criminal records and limited future opportunities. The most common offense is truancy, which may seem mundane but is often due to complicated and sensitive issues. Cases are brought before a panel of high school volunteers. They ask the youth and their guardian relevant questions to gauge what programs would benefit each person. The volunteers’ focus is restorative justice, which emphasizes improvement and positive feedback for the youth offender. Students who fall behind in class often get negative reinforcement in many forms: a fail grade, parent disappointment, and society’s disapproval. I believe that helping the students, whether by assigning in-school tutoring or tracking sheets, is more effective than focusing on their obstacles. My first mentee had issues with truancy and his school eventually expelled him. To have your school simply give up on you would feel terrible. Peer Court may not always succeed, but it gives teens another chance to believe in themselves.

Some students, including me, joined the program initially for volunteer hours. But it is inevitable that every volunteer comes to care about the cases they see, and especially their mentees. The emotional connection improves the volunteers as people. I have volunteered since junior year and I find Peer Court fulfilling because of the varied lives it shows. Before I became involved with Peer Court, I had a very limited view of school and society. I was surrounded by a bubble of fortunate and ambitious students at school. My parents were supportive and excellent resources. People referred to Peer Court usually have trouble at home or at school that I have never experienced. I am still learning about other’s lives in my second year of Peer Court. Though at times idealistic, Peer Court sincerely tries to help students. I hope that the program continues to do the great job it has done so far.

Adviser Voices:

Kathryn Ouke, University of Utah Class of 2015

I have been volunteering with Peer Court for three years now and I can’t express it enough, how, for everyone involved, this restorative justice program changes lives for the better. Since I started, I have seen a positive growth in leadership skills, openness, and confidence not only in myself and other volunteers, but especially in the students that are referred to Peer Court. Key features of this program allow these students to excel in these skills. One of these features is letting students be held accountable for their actions. Referred students must understand that they have caused harm to themselves and/or others, and are encouraged to seek positive solutions to fix the issue by their fellow peers. The next key feature is to get the referred student involved in the community.

Having a student involved in their community facilitates the last feature, which is developing needed skills. We want these students to come out of the program with the confidence and leadership skills needed to continue the progress that they’ve made after they graduate the program. Giving these students strong mentors and getting them involved in the community allows them to notice their potential and strive toward making constructive changes in their lives.

I am proud to be an adviser with Salt Lake Peer Court. Everyone that I have worked with, advisers and panelists, sincerely believe in this program and continue to make it a meaningful and powerful alternative to the juvenile justice system. The youth who have been referred to Peer Court exemplify the program’s success. They come out of the program with better grades, a better sense of themselves, and overall, a more positive outlook on their future. Many continue in the program, paying it forward and helping their peers as well.



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Salt Lake Peer Court works to combat the disproportionate involvement of low-income and minority students in America’s school to prison pipeline by providing youth who commit minor offenses with an alternative to the Juvenile Justice System. Our Strategy aims to break the cycle of poverty by giving low-income and at-risk youth a chance to escape a lifetime in the revolving door of America’s justice system.

As youth and adults working together, caring and showing respect for one another, we will improve our neighborhoods, cities, and juvenile justice system. Through youth-led education and coordination with local community agencies, we will assist our peers and their families to strengthen their ties to school and community while building positive new skills.

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