

SALT LAKE PEER COURT

A PROGRAM OF UTAH LAW RELATED EDUCATION

SUMMER
NEWSLETTER
2015



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From the Director

Salt Lake Peer Court has just completed another year of serving students, families, and schools by offering a free restorative justice alternative to juvenile court in Salt Lake City. Over the course of the 2014-2015 academic year, Salt Lake Peer Court held hearings at the Matheson Courthouse 25 times, serving more than 300 referred youth and their families. This year, Salt Lake Peer Court served 186 youth who were referred to our program for the first time.

Our community-driven program would not be possible without the support of our two biggest community partners, the Salt Lake City School District and the Salt Lake City Police Department. Leaders like the former Chief of Police Chris Burbank and Director of Student Services Misty Suarez at the Salt Lake City School District have supported our program in more ways than one. The Salt Lake City Police Department has provided funding for our program and encouraged their School Resource Officers (school police officers) to refer first-time youth offenders to Salt Lake Peer Court instead of juvenile court. The Salt Lake City School District has also provided funding for our program as well as encouraging administrators, counselors, and teachers to use Peer Court as an alternative to juvenile court. The Salt Lake City School District has further supported our program by providing translators at the courthouse and giving our high school volunteers a half credit for completing 40 hours of restorative justice training and 32 hours of courtroom service each year.

Before the end of the academic year, Salt Lake Peer Court successfully recruited youth volunteers from East High, Highland High, Horizonte, Innovations, and West High, as well as a handful of private and charter schools in the greater Salt Lake area. I am proud to say that we have accepted more than 120 compassionate students to serve as panelists and mentors for their peers during the upcoming academic year. Salt Lake Peer Court has designed a rigorous 40 hour training curriculum that will begin with two days at Camp Tuttle. During the 40 hours of training, students will participate in a bias awareness workshop, multiple mock hearings, and various breakout sessions focusing on courtroom procedures, ethics, and restorative justice practices.

Students will also complete a pre-survey that will be compared with a post-survey that they will take at the end of the academic year. We will use survey results to evaluate our program and to fine-tune it to the needs and interests of our volunteers. Salt Lake Peer Court conducted a pre and a post survey of our youth volunteers for the 2014-2015 academic year and the results were encouraging. While the 40 hours of training that we program is both powerful and informative, the more than 30 hours of courtroom and mentoring experience that these students get profoundly impacts their education and personal development.

Students who volunteer for Salt Lake Peer Court are exposed to the real and honest hardships that prevent many of their classmates from doing basic things like making it to school on time. Our volunteers are also given the unique opportunity

to not only witness how students of color are disproportionately disciplined in school, but to simultaneously help those students academically while ensuring that those students do not get wrapped up in the juvenile court system. Salt Lake Peer Court's volunteers learn the responsibilities of service and mentorship that necessarily result from privilege.

This July, I will be leaving my position as the Program Director of Salt Lake Peer Court to prepare to study at the S.J. Quinney College of Law. It has been two years since I took over for Kathleen Zeitlin as the Program Director of Salt Lake Peer Court. Over these two years, I hope that I have been able to give Salt Lake Peer Court as much as it has given me. The volunteers, the donors, the board of directors, and the community partners that make this program successful have pushed me to grow both personally and professionally. I am so thankful that I have had the chance to do the meaningful community-driven and community-powered work that is restorative justice.

While I am leaving to continue my professional development by attending law school, I hope to continue to stay involved with this amazing program.

Kayley Richards will replace me as the new Program Director of Salt Lake Peer Court in July. Kayley comes to Salt Lake Peer Court with a Masters of Science in Criminal Justice from Weber State University. She also brings invaluable experiential knowledge to our program; Kayley has served as an AmeriCorps Vista volunteer with the Utah State Prison system, has worked as a Jail Screener for Salt Lake County Pretrial Services, and most recently worked as a Probation Officer in Missouri, where she supervised juveniles on judicial and non-judicial probation. Kayley understands the importance of restorative justice practices and empowering youth to engage in the community in positive and productive ways. She will be a fantastic Program Director, especially if you offer her all of the patience, support, and encouragement that you showed me during my two years with Salt Lake Peer Court.



Kayley Richards

If you would like to connect or schedule a meeting with Kayley, you can reach her via email starting July 6th at slpcourt@xmission.com or call her at 801-322-1815.

Tyler Bugden

A Message from Iris Salazar, the former Program Coordinator

Over the last 15 years, I have dedicated much of my life to Salt Lake Peer Court as a high school volunteer, an adult adviser, and the Program Coordinator. I have seen that being a part of Peer Court is more than volunteering one day of the week, calling a mentee, earning a school credit, or dropping a line on a resume. I have seen many volunteers - young and old - return year after year to be a part of something that is more than just another intervention program.

We have made profound connections with the referred youth, their families, the high school volunteers, the advisors, the interpreters, and anyone that has been involved with Peer Court. We will most likely never know the positive level or the outcome of our influence on each other, and there are times when we may see an undesired outcome. Nonetheless, we learn and grow from it; we build experiences to pen in our life books.

Not only have we intervened at crucial times in youths' lives, we have also been there for hurting parents, for the concerned school administrators, and to serve as allies to young individuals who needed our support, encouragement and kindness. As the mentors, advisors, and staff, we have done more than track a referred youth's case. We have done our best to empathize, and to seek out resources that we hoped would help the youth make a life change. We never saw an overnight success, but we know that successful lives – SUCCESSFUL LIVES - take a lifetime of experience to build.

My message to current and future Peer Court participants is to take the experiences from Peer Court and use them to better yourselves by being open to learning new things, to realizing your abilities, to helping someone, to empathizing, and to truly loving to serve. It is these moments of gaining knowledge, of learning to care for another person, and loving to serve others, that will leave the biggest impact on your lives. These are the experiences that will mold a future-you that will have you questioning the yesterday-you, and putting into action the today-you.

This is why I return, and, I dare say on behalf of others, this is why long-term Peer Court volunteers, both young and old, continue to volunteer with Peer Court. Along with the lives of the youth we serve, our lives have been impacted. There is a desire that cannot quite be quenched that keeps many of us coming back for more.

For some of us, we reached a point when we said, "It's time". We have moved on with our lives, holding our Peer Court life experiences in a special place in our life book. It does not mean we are over the program, or have satisfied that desire to serve. It simply means that this chapter in our lives must come to an end and we will start a new one where all the life-building experiences we have learned can be carried with us on our journey.

Thank you all for allowing me to be of service to our community through Salt Lake Peer Court over the last 15 years. Keep building the experiences of service and kindness, and commit to learning a genuine desire to make a change for our youth.

Iris Salazar

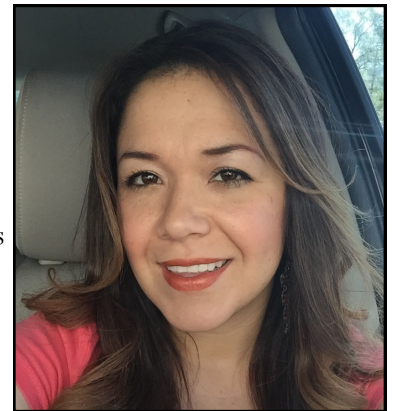


New Program Coordinator: Jenny Sanchez

Jenny Sanchez started working with Salt Lake Peer in October, 2014 as the part-time Program Assistant. After months of working with Jenny, it was clear to Tyler and Iris that Jenny would be the perfect replacement for Iris as our Program Coordinator. Jenny started working in her new capacity as the Program Coordinator in June.

Jenny is currently earning her bachelors of Social Work from the University of Utah, and she previously volunteered as a tutor in East High's Gear Up. Jenny has worked as an interpreter since 2006 and has worked closely with Salt Lake's Hispanic community for a decade. Jenny is excited to be Peer Court's new Program Coordinator; she is eager to work for Peer Court and use the restorative justice program as an alternative that will contribute to her learning. She is excited to work with families and individuals in the community.

If you would like to connect or schedule a meeting with Jenny, you can email her at coordinator.slpc@gmail.com or call her at 801-322-1815.



Panelist Voices: Restorative Justice and Salt Lake Peer Court

"In Peer Court I have learned the importance of being a good example to my mentees, other panelists, and in my community. I have learned the skills needed to be a leader and have a strong voice. I've learned to be a leader through effective communication and listening skills. I have also gained a better understanding of restorative justice."

Jasmine Juarez

"... the practices have shown me a different way into providing accountability without punishment."

Uriel Flores

"What I have learned this year from peer court is the subconscious racism that I had in me prior to this year. I walked into peer court with not quite the mentality, and peer court, metaphorically speaking, whipped me into shape."

Ben Pearce

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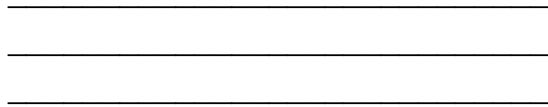
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Salt Lake Peer Court works to combat the disproportionate involvement of low-income and minority students in America’s school to prison pipeline by providing youth who commit minor offenses with an alternative to the Juvenile Justice System. Our Strategy 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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