

From the Youth's Perspective: How can Communities Help Youth?

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Introduction

This report reveals the opinions and findings from the 116 youth ages 12-19 involved in the Juvenile Justice System of Chester County who gave input on what helps them; 35 youth from focus groups and 81 youth filled out surveys. Results in this report reflect opinions from youth throughout all of Chester County and identify how the youth say the community can help them stay out of trouble and what the community can do to support the youth. For the purpose of this report, 'community' is defined as; parents, mentors and any community partners.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to assist communities and community partners with brainstorming, planning and developing supports youth can rely on in their community that help support youth and help youth stay out of trouble.

What can the community do to support youth?

Based on the aggregate data from the surveys and focus groups conducted by Voice and Vision, the youth reported they would like:

Businesses, Churches, Local Organizations:

- Allow participation in extracurricular activities such as free sports and community centers/ clubs and be able to earn the ability to apply for YMCA scholarship (boredom can lead to trouble)
- Offer more and varying options for community service hours that youth can do in their community
- Offer help filling out college/job applications and opportunities to take a tour of a local college/ trade school/business internships; productive futures like job shadowing, help with college fees, college shadowing help or a letter to the judge
- Have the opportunity to be involved in special events, like a motivational speaker
- Engage CTCs (Communities That Care) and other community leaders to develop ways to involve, encourage, and empower at risk youth to be a contributing member of the community (volunteer, delegate on board).
- Offer more opportunities and activities so youth have more 'things to do in the Community' and get involved with the youth (See youth examples on Page 4)
- Allow youth to enter all public places and not be banned
- Offer help with paying for therapy /rehab
- Offer the opportunity for youth to take part in small groups focused on developing social skills, relationship building/healthy peer support and problem solving.

Peers or Mentors:

- Offer peer support while on Probation and after, (youth to youth, so youth can better understand expectations, learn how to build a collaborative relationship with Probation Officer, provide an 'experienced' youth to talk to, have a peer to talk to/hang out with, and have help with job search, college applications, and schoolwork)
- Offer the opportunity to engage in person-centered incentives based on each individual's needs, interests, and what motivates him/her
- Offer the opportunity to be involved in a mentoring program

Parents:

- Facilitate a working relationship between parents and youth on parent involvement in youth's life.
- Assess the youth and parents' perception of current involvement. If needed, collaborate with family on how to increase parent involvement according to the youth's needs; youth want parent involvement and caring
- Offer peer support for parents (parent to parent to better understand expectations, what's going to happen, how to build a collaborative relationship with youth's Probation Officer, another parent to talk to)
- Calm down parents about their Child's Probation—do not embarrass youth, do not tell people

Notable: Only the [Western Chester County](#) respondents indicated wanting to avoid limiting participation in events at school. Downingtown is in the Eastern Region of the County.

Mental Health (MH), Substance Abuse (SA), Individual Education Plan (IEP)

All focus groups were asked if it was important if their Probation Officer knew if the youth had a MH diagnosis, Substance Abuse issues or an IEP. They all answered yes. Of those that answered yes they said: Therapy and support groups would be helpful for youth with a mental health issue or substance abuse; to help connect them to services/therapy; (JPO) can better support them by being educated on the mental illness or substance abuse issues. As for the 'IEP', youth said the Probation Officer can be supportive by being involved in school, asking to see the IEP document, and be more accommodating.*

*The youth stated these were areas of importance to them when being supported by their Probation Officer. Parents and youth alike may want these supports to be considered by community members as well.

Examples: Community Supports

Youth provided the following examples of how the community can help youth stay out of trouble:

Recreation Supports:

- Sport summer leagues
- Place for activities (Youth Center, bike/skate park, basketball court, football)
- Swimming party
- Youth advocating (focus groups, youth on City Council)
- Location for performing arts/music
- YMCA scholarships/gym membership discounts
- Boys & Girls Clubs
- Free recreation center (pool table, computer room, homework help, GED help, sports, tutoring)
- Teach youth art or sports
- New uniforms for sports
- Pay for the arts/education/sports
- Free club fees
- Scholarships for sports/that it would be free to join sport teams in the community
- Raise money so youth can join sports team
- Foundations (Hicks Foundation) to help raise money for sports
- Examples given for activities:
 - boxing
 - sober block parties
 - fairs / parades / festivals / community barbeques / concerts
 - library book club
 - gaming clubs
 - board games
 - video game place
 - corn hole and other summer stuff

Career/Job/ Volunteer Supports:

- Trips to visit colleges
- Help youth plan for the future
- Volunteer programs not forced on you

How Churches/Religious groups can help youth:

Responses were:

- Activities with prizes
- Teach art
- Clubs
- Pray for youth
- Space (for a variety of activities – not to be enclosed in a small area)
- Recording studio access
- Parties with prizes/ teen night with pizza and games
- Free Sunday breakfast
- Basketball
- Fix up Community Center
- Clubs for under 18
- McDonalds (gift cards)
- Glow paint
- They could have activities
- Classes for finances, budgeting, money management
- Reach out to youth

Some Comments Regarding Churches/Religious groups:

- “Churches make youth feel accepted.”
- Churches have activities, but too many rules and some youth said churches can be ‘judgemental’.

How A Mentor/Peer Can Help:

Youth said it would be helpful to have a mentor/peer:

- Relate to youth by talking/being a good listener, provide support, hang out, watch a movie, go places and stay out of trouble
- Mentor youth who don’t have parents: help youth out if needed, help with schoolwork, help apply for college and scholarships, help find a job
- If youth does have a mentor, it should be optional, they shouldn’t force you to have one
- It would be good for the younger kids (to have a mentor) because it gives them someone to look up to. In the beginning of probation, a mentor could help youth, walk youth through the process of probation
- Mentoring supports like Big Brothers Big Sisters

How Family Can Help Youth:

- Make sure youth is following the rules, call their Probation Officer
- Interact with youth's Probation Officer and youth more
- Help out if needed
- Talk to youth/ask if schoolwork done/meds are taken
- "Chill when I get in trouble, don't tell everyone"
- Hold youth accountable "Don't rat me out, but don't let me get away with it"
- Be supportive
- Provide transportation
- Set youth up so they don't make mistakes but don't make youth feel like "crap"
- Have open communication
- Don't put youth down

Conclusion:

Results indicate the youth under the supervision of Junvenile Probation of Chester County who participated in the survey and focus groups see the role(s) of community members as a valid and vital part of their continued success in staying out of trouble. Youth can provide clear and attainable examples of how Community members such as mentors, church/religious group leaders, businesses, and parents, can help them maintain their probation terms, keep/prevent trouble, and even have fun.