

**DIVERTING YOUTH AND
REPAIRING HARM: AN
EVALUATION OF SAN DIEGO
TEEN COURT
FINAL REPORT**

APRIL 2007

Criminal Justice Research Division

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ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT: The San Diego **Teen Court**, which was first implemented in 1992, was a community-based alternative to the formal court system for youth between the ages of 13 and 17 who had committed a first-time misdemeanor or status offense. With the goals of deterring youth from re-offending and providing them an opportunity to learn how their actions affect their community, these young offenders went before a panel of their peers who served as prosecutor, defense attorney, judge, and jury. In 2004, **Teen Court** received funding from the California Corrections Standards Authority (CSA) to conduct a process and impact evaluation of the program. This final report describes the clients served during the two-year evaluation period, the interventions they received, and what effect the program had on knowledge change and later contact with the juvenile justice system.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The San Diego **Teen Court** program is a juvenile delinquency prevention program that provides experiential education in the juvenile justice system for teens who serve as youth volunteers, as well as meaningful sanctions to first-time low-level offenders. The program uses a Restorative Justice Model which incorporates the concept of “repairing the harm” caused to the victim and community through restitution, letters of apology, and community service. The expected outcomes of these efforts include an increase in youth’s sense of participation in the community, remorse for the offense, and inhibition of future delinquent acts.

In 2004, funding for a two-year evaluation (from June 2004 to November 2006) of **Teen Court** was provided by the California Corrections Standards Authority (CSA), one of **Teen Court’s** main grantors. This final evaluation report provides an overview of the program, how the program was implemented and modified during the evaluation period, a description of the research design (and subsequent revisions), and results from the process and impact evaluations.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The San Diego **Teen Court** model began in 1992 with the San Diego City Attorney’s Office Youth Court which received referrals from the San Diego County Probation Department. In 1998, the model was modified to serve only youth referred by the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) within the City of San Diego. In 2001, **Teen Court** was created as a private non-profit agency headed by a full-time paid Executive Director that receives referrals from both SDPD and San Diego City Schools Police.

As a juvenile diversion program, eligibility into **Teen Court** requires that clients be first-time offenders between the ages of 13 and 17 who commit a low-level misdemeanor or status offense (e.g., vandalism, truancy, petty theft, and/or drug possession). Clients are required to admit culpability, have parent’s/guardian’s agreement to participate in **Teen Court**, and agree beforehand to comply with the sanctions handed down by their peers.

Teen Court enlists youth volunteers for their program at high schools throughout the City of San Diego. This school-based effort is initiated by teachers as part of a classroom learning activity in which youth volunteers are expected to participate. These volunteers receive up to two hours of initial training by program staff about the differences between **Teen Court** and the traditional juvenile justice system, as well as background on the Restorative Justice Model.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In July 2004, **Teen Court** contracted with SANDAG's Criminal Justice Research Division to complete a formal process and impact evaluation of the program utilizing an experimental design. At that time, referrals were ample to support randomizing 300 offenders (150 clients to receive **Teen Court** services and 150 to a comparison group who were processed through the traditional juvenile justice system and may or may not have received diversion through another program). However, due to several factors, the program experienced a considerable decrease in referrals which could not sustain the experimental research design, and as a result, the evaluation was conducted without a comparison group. The process evaluation describes the characteristics of the clients and youth volunteers, while the impact evaluation explores knowledge gain and level of satisfaction among youth volunteers, clients and their parents/guardians, as well as number of re-arrests, type(s) of sanction(s) received, and behavioral changes among clients. To answer these research questions, a pre-post evaluation design was used.

How Many Clients were Eligible and Enrolled in the Program, and What were Their Characteristics?

Data available from the program showed a total of 256 offenders enrolled between January 2004 and May 2006. However, the program was required to report a proportion of clients to each of their various funders. As a result, there were 53 clients who were reported to the CSA (the funder for this evaluation) and who provided informed consent to participate in the study. Since all clients are screened for eligibility by the referring police officer, all clients were eligible for the program at time of enrollment. The majority of the 53 clients were male (58%) and over half (56%) were Hispanic. The average age of clients was 15.17 years. As reported by the clients, their academic performance was mostly above average to average, with more than three-quarters (80%) reporting they received As, Bs, or Cs on their last report card. Given that the target population was low-risk first-time offenders, it was not surprising that clients tended to have pro-social connections both at home and at school, as evidenced by almost all reporting having friends (92%) or someone in their family (88%) they could talk to about personal issues. In addition, over half (57%) were involved in some type of school activities.

What were the Types of Offenses Committed by the Clients?

Teen Court targets youth who commit low-level misdemeanor or status offenses, and as such, their offenses included loitering (28%), curfew violations (26%), shoplifting/theft (19%), possession of marijuana (11%), tobacco (6%), and/or alcohol (4%). Other offense categories (6%) included possession of a weapon, delaying a peace officer, and possession of graffiti tools.

What Sanctions did the Clients Receive?

Sanctions are used to foster awareness among clients about the harm they may have caused to an individual and the community as a whole. Clients could receive more than one type of sanction and were most frequently sentenced to write letters of apology (80%) either to their own parent/guardian (33%), the victim (20%), or some other entity (27%) such as a retail proprietor. Twenty-four percent (24%) were ordered to attend a workshop¹, most commonly to learn about

¹ Other workshops include topics on theft, anger management, and victim impact of drunk driving.

the effects and dangers of using drugs, alcohol or tobacco, and 18 percent were required to complete a research paper.

How Many Youth Volunteers Participated in the Program, and What were Their Characteristics?

SANDAG received informed consents for 278 youth volunteers, 209 of which reported their demographic data². Of these, 67 percent were female and 33 percent were male. **Teen Court** mainly trains high school youth volunteers, and as a result, the average age of was 16.2 years. Over half (56%) of the youth volunteers were Hispanic, 14 percent were Black, 12 percent were White, 12 percent represented other or mixed ethnic groups, and 6 percent were Asian.

Did Participation in *Teen Court* Relate to Clients Exhibiting a Positive Change in Attitudes and Behaviors Regarding Delinquency?

As part of the impact evaluation, clients were asked before and after participation to estimate how many times they engaged in specific activities within the past 30 days. Data from these pre-/post-tests indicate that clients were more likely to have participated in a greater number of school activities (6.0 versus 7.0 times), chores at home (43.2 versus 75.6 times), and turned down opportunities to use drugs and/or alcohol (4.0 versus 5.5 times) after participation. Data from the satisfaction questionnaire completed by clients' parents/guardians also indicated that they believed their children showed improvement in choosing their friends more carefully (94%), impulse control (93%), communicating at home (92%), showing more interest in school (88%), and volunteering (83%).

Was Participation in *Teen Court* Related to a Decrease in Recidivism?

SANDAG collected data on 48 of the 53 clients' arrest activity using the Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS). The remaining five clients did not have a date of birth on file and therefore, could not be located in ARJIS. Ninety-four percent (94%) of clients had no arrest one year after program completion.

What was the Level of Satisfaction with the Program Among Clients and Their Parent/Guardians?

As previously noted, clients and their parents/guardians were invited to complete questionnaires asking them to rate their level of satisfaction with the program's components, staffing, and volunteers. Clients and their parents/guardians were in agreement about **Teen Court's** impact on the client with 97 percent each believing that the program had a positive impact. Similarly, 89 percent of clients and 95 percent of parents/guardians felt the client's sentence was fair. Based on the clients' open-ended responses stating what they specifically liked about the program, approximately one-third (35%) said they learned the consequences of their actions, another third (30%) appreciated the support of their peers, and 20 percent felt the program staff was helpful.

² Youth volunteers were required to bring the demographic form home for their parent's signature; competing priorities may have reduced the number of forms turned into the program.

What was the Level of Change in Youth Volunteers' Knowledge of *Teen Court*, the Restorative Justice Model, and the Juvenile Justice System?

Some of the data from the youth volunteer knowledge tests indicated there were significant increases in youth volunteers' knowledge between the pre-test and first post-test, administered immediately after the training. Knowledge gains related to a better understanding the Restorative Justice Model, as well as how the ***Teen Court*** program differed from traditional juvenile court.

What was the Level of Satisfaction with the Program Among Youth Volunteers?

Of the youth volunteers who completed a satisfaction questionnaire, almost all felt the program was effective in teaching them about ***Teen Court*** (99%) and preventing delinquency (97%), and nearly three-quarters (72%) said they learned "a lot" about the legal system. When asked to rate the effectiveness of the role-playing exercises conducted to prepare them for the actual court session, 81 percent felt the exercises were either "effective" or "very effective". Eighty-five percent (85%) of the 48 individuals who served as attorneys rated the helpfulness of the special training they received as "helpful" or "very helpful".

How Many Youth Volunteers were Willing to Participate Again in *Teen Court*?

Of the 171 youth volunteers who responded to the question of whether they would be willing to participate again in ***Teen Court***, 86 percent said yes, 8 percent said they were not sure, and only 4 percent said no. This reflects well on the program staff's ability to establish rapport with the youth volunteers and create a positive learning environment for them.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Since 1992, ***Teen Court*** has provided a diversion opportunity for first-time, low-risk juvenile offenders and a learning opportunity for peers identified through the local school district. Based on a Restorative Justice Model, the program's goal is to teach offenders how their actions harm others and to reduce the risk of future contact with the justice system. The process and impact evaluation SANDAG conducted revealed that the program targets appropriate low-risk offenders and provides a variety of useful interventions, based on the concept of "repairing harm" that were perceived as fair and useful by clients and parents/guardians alike. Clients self-reported greater pro-social behavior after participation and an official review of justice system records revealed no further law enforcement contact for the vast majority (94%) one year after participation. The ***Teen Court*** program also appears to be an educational and enriching opportunity for youth volunteers.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

CHAPTER 1

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INTRODUCTION

Most first-time offending juveniles in San Diego County who commit a low-level offense are diverted from the traditional juvenile court system to one of several social service agencies offering juvenile diversion programs. Such programs generally provide counseling and other services to the youth and family members with an eye toward preventing future delinquency. However, **Teen Court** is unique among these diversion programs in that instead of providing direct services, the program is designed to hold the youth accountable to the community and the victim, thereby teaching them the invaluable lesson of correcting the harm they inflicted.

In 2004, funding for a two-year evaluation (from June 2004 to November 2006) of **Teen Court** was provided by the California Corrections Standards Authority (CSA), one of **Teen Court's** main grantors. This final evaluation report provides an overview of the program, how the program was implemented and modified during the evaluation period, a description of the research design (and subsequent revisions), and results from the process and impact evaluations.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

San Diego **Teen Court** is a juvenile delinquency prevention program providing experiential education for teens in the juvenile justice system while offering meaningful sanctions to first-time low-level offenders. The program uses a Restorative Justice Model which incorporates the concept of "repairing the harm" caused to the victim and community through restitution, letters of apology, and community service. Because backlogs in the traditional court system prevent many youthful offenders from receiving meaningful and individualized sanctions to deter recidivism, **Teen Court** is one of two other programs that hands out individualized sanctions to first-time offenders. It is expected that participation in the program would increase youths' sense of participation in the community, remorse for the offense, and inhibit future delinquent acts.

Program History

The San Diego **Teen Court** model began in 1992 when the San Diego City Attorney's Office introduced its "Youth Court", which was operated entirely by volunteer professionals and received referrals from the San Diego County Probation Department. In 1998, the Mayor of San Diego formed the City of San Diego Peer Court which served the City of San Diego and received referrals from the San Diego Police Department (SDPD). Combining the best of Youth Court and Peer Court, in 2001, a member of the San Diego City Council and the San Diego City Attorney created **Teen Court** as a private non-profit agency headed by a full-time paid Executive Director that receives referrals from both the SDPD and the San Diego City Schools Police.

Clients

In order to be eligible for **Teen Court**, clients must be first-time offenders between the ages of 13 and 17 who commit a low-level misdemeanor or status offense (e.g., vandalism, truancy, petty theft, or drug possession). These clients are required to admit culpability, have their parent's/guardian's agreement to participate in **Teen Court**, and agree to comply with the sanctions handed down by their peers.

Some of the juvenile offenders served by **Teen Court** exhibit risk factors for future delinquency, including, but not limited to, substance use, poor academic performance, family history of criminal behavior and substance abuse, and negative peer influences. By participating in **Teen Court**, youth receive alternative sanctions decided by their peers (e.g., restitution, apology letters, jury duty, and/or community service) and, concurrently, learn the benefits of restoring justice to the community as a whole.

Upon receiving a client referral, **Teen Court** staff meet with the youth and their parent/guardian to conduct an intake interview to assess any risks and needs the youth may have that need to be addressed. At that time, the client is assigned a court date and a case number, given a subpoena, asked to sign a confidentiality waiver and to complete a demographics data collection form. The client's statement is given to staff who provide it to the youth volunteer defense attorney to help prepare the case and establish an appropriate sanction to be recommended to the peer jury.

After the client appears in **Teen Court**, an adult volunteer case manager meets with the youth and their parent/guardian to discuss the sanction and provide guidance on how to fulfill the obligation in a timely manner³. After 45 days time, the client appears before a Sanction Review Panel (SRP) comprised of three to five youth volunteers to show progress. If the client successfully satisfies their obligation within 90 days, the SDPD deems the case closed and the youth does not have a criminal record. Clients/offenders are referred back to the traditional juvenile justice system for processing if they: 1) fail to appear at the SRP, despite being given more than one opportunity to do so; 2) fail to complete their sanction; or 3) re-offend and are arrested before the 90-day sentencing period expires.

Youth Volunteers

Teen Court enlists youth volunteers for their school-based volunteer program at high schools throughout the City of San Diego. The seven high schools where the 278 youth volunteers were trained and provided informed consent to participate in this evaluation⁴ included:

- Hoover (61);
- Crawford (46);
- Montgomery (45);
- San Diego (45);
- Clairemont (28);
- Point Loma (25);

³ Typical sanctions include letters of apology, research papers, workshops specific to the offense, and community service.

⁴ Informed consent was received from students at two additional schools, but because their participation was tied to other funding sources, data are not included as part of this final evaluation report.

- School for Creative and Performing Arts (23); and
- San Diego Metropolitan Regional Center and Technical School (5)

The school-based program is initiated by teachers as part of a classroom learning activity in which youth volunteers are expected to participate. These volunteers receive up to two hours of initial training by program staff about the differences between **Teen Court** and the traditional juvenile justice system, as well as background on the Restorative Justice Model.

Youth volunteers who serve as attorneys (as opposed to jurors, bailiffs, and clerks) receive two additional hours of training with legal professionals and are usually awarded some incentive such as extra credit.

Specific topics and activities covered in the youth volunteer training include:

- Overview of the juvenile justice system and the application of the principles of Restorative Justice, as well as a cursory understanding of how personal actions affect everyone (community, victim, relationships);
- Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which asserts an individual's right to a fair trial in front of a jury of their peers;
- Mechanisms of **Teen Court** and youth volunteers' roles in the courtroom;
- Opportunity to practice unanimous jury deliberations and sentencing;
- Comparison of the traditional system and youth courts;
- Comparison between consequences for adults and minors in the court system;
- Explanation of the concept of juvenile delinquency; and
- Discussion about a minor's right to confidentiality.

Teen Court's Justice Project gives youth volunteers an opportunity to serve on a SRP which monitors the clients'/offenders' sentencing. Most of these youth volunteers are self-referred to **Teen Court** via the Internet. The role of **Teen Court** judge is filled by professional attorneys who learn of **Teen Court** through the American Bar Association (ABA). As an incentive, these adult volunteers receive Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits.

Once youth volunteers are trained and participate in a court session, they are invited to continue participating or observe hearings whenever their schedule allows. As a result, **Teen Court** enjoys the on-going participation of several experienced youth volunteers.

Program Staffing

When SANDAG began the evaluation in July 2004, **Teen Court** was fully staffed and operational. At that time, staff members included the Executive Director, one full-time Program Director who coordinated the youth volunteer training, one full-time Client Services Director, and one part-time data entry staff person. Subsequent changes to key personnel included the resignations of the original Executive Director in January 2006 and the original Program Director in March 2006. In September 2006, the Program Director position was filled, but that individual resigned shortly thereafter. In December 2006, the Client Services Director also resigned.

At the time of this report, it was the intention of the **Teen Court** Board of Directors to begin merging the program into an existing community-based agency that also provides diversion services

to youthful offenders. The agency was identified, and at the time this report was in production, negotiations were underway.

SUMMARY

The San Diego **Teen Court** diversion program received funding in 2004 to conduct a process and impact evaluation of its efforts to reduce further delinquency on the part of program clients, as well as the learning opportunity provided to youth volunteers. This first chapter of the final evaluation report described the history of the program, included an overview of the interventions, and provided an update on its current status. The remainder of the report describes the evaluation methodology, presents the results of the evaluation, and concludes with a summary.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the methodology used for both the process and impact evaluations of the **Teen Court** program, including research questions, data sources, and analytic strategies. Also set forth in this chapter are a description of the modifications that were made to the original research design and an explanation as to why those changes were necessary.

CHANGES TO THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Teen Court has been operational as a private non-profit since 2001. In January 2004, the program received a two-year grant from the California Corrections Standards Authority (CSA) to conduct a program evaluation. By July 2004, **Teen Court** had contracted with the San Diego Association of Governments' (SANDAG) Criminal Justice Research Division to conduct a process and impact evaluation utilizing an experimental design to determine how services were provided and how effective they were in reducing future juvenile delinquency (Table 2.1).

At the time this research study was designed, referrals were ample enough to support randomizing 300 youth offenders (150 clients to receive **Teen Court** services and 150 to a comparison group who were processed through the traditional juvenile justice system and may or may not have received diversion through another program). The initial plan called for San Diego Police Department (SDPD) officers to administer a one-page field consent with all youth they detained who they felt would be eligible for **Teen Court**. This field consent would be done prior to randomization and would allow the researchers to collect recidivism data on the control group. However, the original plan changed over time for several reasons, primarily the reluctance on the part of the SDPD to participate in the randomization process. The SDPD expressed concern that eligible youth who were randomized into the control group might not receive diversion services and would instead be processed through the traditional juvenile justice system. As a result of the SDPD declining to conduct the field consent, **Teen Court's** randomization was discontinued. From this point forward, referrals from the SDPD dropped considerably.

The program's only remaining referral source was the San Diego City Schools Police Department. However, between June and October 2005, **Teen Court** staff received only eight referrals from City Schools Police officers. According to City Schools Police, their referrals were low because youth they were arresting had either a prior criminal record or committed more serious offenses (thus, making them ineligible for **Teen Court**). At this juncture, it was evident that the program's referrals were significantly lower than expected and would not sustain the original design of 300 research participants. This sharp decline necessitated a second revision to the research design, which was approved in December 2005, and involved eliminating the randomization process, and thereby reducing the anticipated 300 youth in the study to 150.

In an effort to increase referrals, **Teen Court's** Executive Director obtained the presiding Juvenile Court judge's agreement to refer youth to **Teen Court**. In February 2006, SANDAG revised the evaluation protocol a third time to reflect this change in referral source and received IRB approval. This report reflects this research design and includes data on a total of 53 clients who provided informed consent between June 2005 and March 2006, with no control group. In addition, data were received and analyzed for 278 youth volunteers.

Table 2.1
TIMELINE OF EVENTS AFFECTING EVALUATION IMPLEMENTATION
2004 - 2006

Date	Event
July 2004	Teen Court contracts with SANDAG to conduct evaluation.
October 2004	SANDAG's first research design approved by local IRB.
February 2005	SDPD representative resigns from Teen Court Board of Directors.
May 2005	SDPD no longer administers field consent at arrest.
May 2005	First revision to research design: Teen Court staff to administer field consent. Revision approved by IRB.
June 2005	Key officer contact at SDPD transfers to another substation. Referrals from SDPD are greatly reduced as a result.
August 2005	SANDAG receives no-cost extension from Teen Court to continue evaluation.
October 2005	No referrals received from SDPD.
December 2005	Second revision to research design: randomization eliminated due to low number of referrals, reduces the number of clients to be studied from 300 to 150. Revision approved by IRB.
January 2006	Executive Director resigns.
February 2006	Third revision to research design: obtains referral source from of youth appearing in Juvenile Court who meet eligibility requirements. Revision approved by IRB.
March 2006	New Executive Director hired; Program Director resigns.
June 2006	New Program Director hired.
September 2006	Program Director resigns.
December 2006	Client Services Director resigns.
April 2007	Executive Director resigns.

SOURCE: SANDAG's *Teen Court Final Report*, April 2007

PROCESS EVALUATION

Background and Process

In general, a process evaluation includes an analysis of whether a program was implemented as planned and the reasons for any modifications. In this evaluation, however, **Teen Court** had been fully staffed and implemented for about two years prior to the start of the evaluation. Therefore, the research questions focused on other programmatic factors described below.

Research Questions

Four research questions were asked in the process evaluation, the answers to which are described in Chapter 3. The questions have been categorized by “clients” and “youth volunteers”. These questions are enumerated below and their corresponding data sources and methods of analyzing those data are described.

Clients

In order to learn more about the clients who participated, including demographics, types of offenses committed, sanctions received, and level of satisfaction among clients and their parents/guardians, the following questions were asked:

- Research Question 1: How many clients were eligible and enrolled in the program, and what were their characteristics?
- Research Question 2: What were the types of offenses committed by the clients?
- Research Question 3: What type(s) of sanction(s) did the clients receive?

Teen Court staff collected information to answer these questions using a standardized intake and demographics form. This intake form was administered with the client approximately two to three weeks prior to their **Teen Court** hearing. It collected information relating to the offense, school performance, level of community and school involvement, employment, family, and social support. The demographics form collected age, gender, ethnicity, head of household status, and household income. With the exception of sanction data, which were entered by program staff and sent to SANDAG one time at the end of the study, all other data were entered into a Microsoft Access database and forwarded to SANDAG on a regular basis.

Youth Volunteers

In order to learn more about the youth volunteers who participated, including demographics, the following question was asked:

- Research Question 4: How many youth volunteers participated in the program, and what were their characteristics?

To answer the fourth research question, **Teen Court** collected demographic information using a demographics form (which contained information identical to the client demographics form), entered the data into an Access database, and forwarded the data electronically to SANDAG on a regular basis.

Analyses

Due to the lack of a comparison group, the analyses of these data are descriptive. Frequencies and measures of central tendency are used to describe the data.

IMPACT EVALUATION

Background and Process

The goal of the **Teen Court** program is to provide a community-based alternative to the formal court system for youth ages 13 to 17 who commit a first-time misdemeanor or status offense. It aims to deter these youth from re-offending and provide them an opportunity to repair the harm caused to the community. As such, SANDAG conducted an impact evaluation to determine if the **Teen Court** program is effective in reducing rates of re-arrest among clients, improving client behaviors and attitudes, and increasing knowledge of all participants (clients and youth volunteers) about **Teen Court** and the Restorative Justice Model.

Research Questions

Six research questions were asked in the impact evaluation, the answers to which are described in Chapter 4. These questions are described as “Participant Improvement” and “Participant Satisfaction”, and are broken down by clients and youth volunteers under each category.

Participant Improvement and Satisfaction

Clients

- Research Question 1: Did participation in **Teen Court** relate to clients exhibiting a positive change in attitudes and behaviors regarding delinquency?
- Research Question 2: Was participation in **Teen Court** related to a decrease in recidivism?
- Research Question 3: What was the level of satisfaction with the program among clients and their parents/guardians?

To answer Research Question 1, changes in attitudes and behavior regarding delinquency was measured using pre- and post-tests developed by SANDAG researchers and **Teen Court** staff. These 28-item tests were administered by **Teen Court** staff to the youth on the day of their hearing and again approximately 30 to 90 days after the hearing when they proved compliance with their sanction.

Research Question 2 was answered through a data collection instrument designed by the researchers to capture information about re-arrest for any new offense for up to one year from the date of sentencing or until the client's 18th birthday (whichever came first). Re-arrest data was collected from the Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS).

Client and parent/guardian satisfaction (Research Question 3) were captured through questionnaires for each. These were administered at the time the client was given the post-test, which was approximately 30 to 90 days after the hearing when clients proved compliance with their sanction.

Youth Volunteers

- Research Question 4: What was the level of change in youth volunteers' knowledge of **Teen Court**, the Restorative Justice Model, and the juvenile justice system?
- Research Question 5: What was the level of satisfaction with the program among youth volunteers?
- Research Question 6: How many youth volunteers were willing to participate again in **Teen Court**?

Youth volunteers were administered an 11-question knowledge test at three points in time (see Table 2.2). All questions were based on the training curriculum completed prior to participating in the program. Data were available for 250 youth volunteers who completed the pre-test. There was a dramatic drop-off in the number of youth volunteers who completed both post-tests. One reason is that the program relied on teachers at each school to administer the second post-test (45 days after the court session), and due to competing priorities, this may or may not have occurred. Additionally, youth volunteers may have been absent from school the day the test was administered. Consequently, 74 individuals (30%) completed all three tests. The results of these knowledge tests were used to answer Research Question 4.

**Table 2.2
ADMINISTRATION AND COMPLETION OF THE
YOUTH VOLUNTEER KNOWLEDGE TESTS**

	When Completed	Who Administered
Pre-Test	First Day of Training (up to three weeks before hearing)	Teen Court Staff
Post-Test 1	Immediately after Hearing	Teen Court Staff
Post Test 2	45 Days after Hearing	Classroom Teacher

SOURCE: SANDAG's Teen Court Report, April 2007

To answer Research Questions 5 and 6, teachers at the participating schools administered a satisfaction questionnaire to youth volunteers after their participation in the program.

Analyses

Frequencies and measures of central tendency were used to describe the data. Inferential statistics (e.g., Chi-squares, t-tests, and sign tests for related samples) were applied.

SUMMARY

In June 2004, San Diego **Teen Court** contracted with SANDAG to conduct a process and impact evaluation of their program. An experimental design was originally planned to collect data on 300 first-time juvenile offenders (150 randomized into the treatment group and 150 into the comparison group). However, due to a drastic reduction in referrals made to the program between June and October 2005, randomization was discontinued. To accommodate a significant drop in client referrals from its two traditional referral sources (SDPD and San Diego City Schools Police), **Teen Court** and SANDAG found it necessary to revise the research design three times. This final report presents data compiled on 53 clients whose cases were heard in **Teen Court**, as well as 278 youth volunteers who served as attorneys, jurors, bailiffs, and clerks.

CHAPTER 3

PROCESS EVALUATION RESULTS

CHAPTER 3

PROCESS EVALUATION RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents findings from the process evaluation, including a baseline description of clients and youth volunteers who participated in the program between June 1, 2004 and November 30, 2006.

PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION

As part of the process evaluation, SANDAG compiled basic demographic data on clients and youth volunteers. Additional data collected on clients included school performance, family and social support, level of community and school involvement, type of offense committed, and sanctions received.

Clients

How many clients were eligible and enrolled in the program, and what were their characteristics?

Demographics

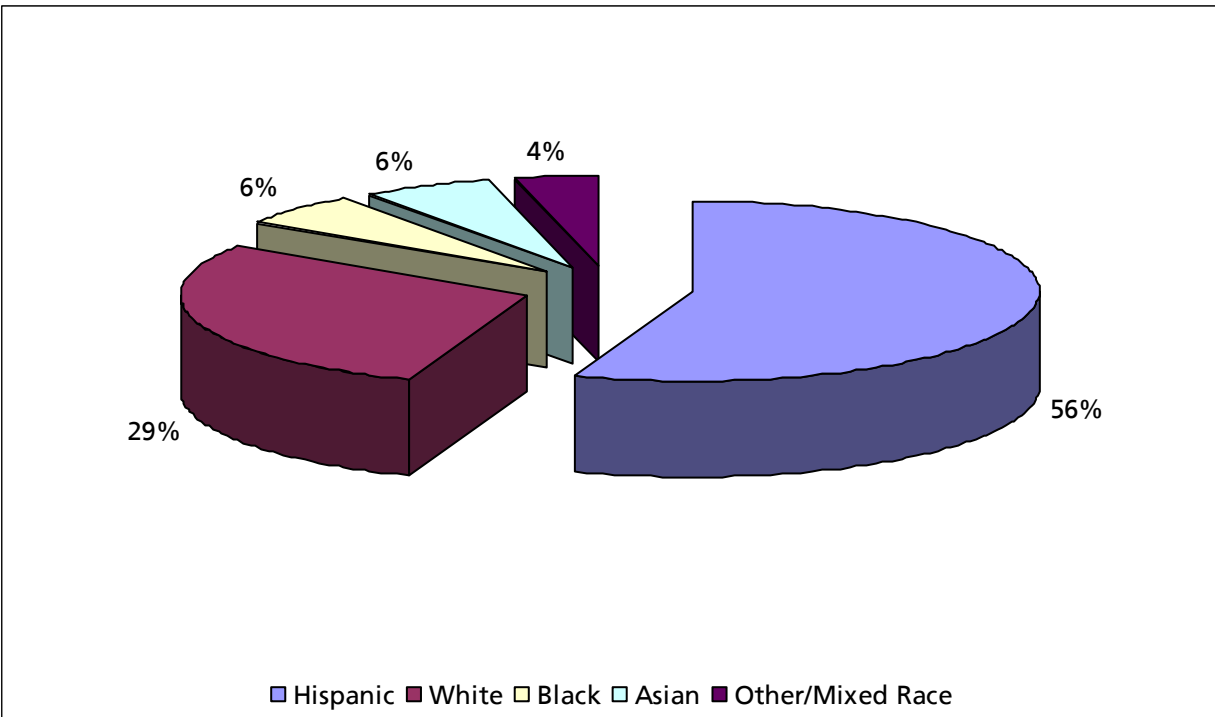
As of November 30, 2006, 53 clients who enrolled in **Teen Court** also provided informed consent to participate in the study⁵. According to program staff, the referrals they received from law enforcement had already been screened for program eligibility by the referring officer. Therefore, all referred youth were enrolled in the program.

Over half (58%) of clients were male and 42 percent were female. The age group reflected **Teen Court's** target population with an average age of 15.17 years ($SD = 1.3$). With the exception of one individual who was 12 years old and another who was 18 years old, all other clients ranged in age from 13 to 17 years.

The clients' ethnic breakdown is shown in Figure 3.1, including 56 percent who reported being Hispanic, 29 percent White, 6 percent Black, 6 percent other ethnic groups, and 4 percent Asian.

⁵ According to program records, total of 256 clients were served by **Teen Court** between January 2004 and May 2006.

**Figure 3.1
CLIENT ETHNICITY**



TOTAL = 53

NOTE: Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: SANDAG's Teen Court Final Report, April 2007

School Performance

To gain a broader awareness of the client's school performance and participation in **Teen Court**, the intake form contained questions about clients' current grades and whether they felt these were "typical" for them. When asked what grades they received on their most recent report card, almost half of the client said they received either As or Bs (20% and 27%, respectively), 33 percent reported receiving mostly Cs, 12 percent reported Ds, and 8 percent reported Fs. Seventy-one percent (71%) felt these grades were typical of their academic performance (not shown).

Family and Social Support

As research has shown, youth with minimal or negative peer and family influences in their lives are at higher risk for delinquency. Therefore, questions were asked at intake that explored the client's family and social support systems, including whom they lived with and whether they had someone they could talk to about important things in their life.

- 82 percent said they lived with their mother, 51 percent with their father, and 67 percent with siblings (based on multiple response choices);

- 88 percent had someone to talk to in their family about important things in their life, with parents being the most common response (83%), followed by siblings (39%); and
- 45 individuals who had siblings reported that they got along with them “well” or “very well” (not shown).

Economic stressors and lack of parental supervision may also be contributing factors to delinquency. To determine whether this influenced **Teen Court** clients, the researchers reviewed information from the demographics form which asked whether the client lived in a household headed by only one adult, the adult’s gender, and their annual household income. This demographic form was administered by **Teen Court** staff with the parent/guardian.

- 38 percent lived in a home with a single head of household—16 of which (80%) were female adults;
- 49 percent of these single heads of households were living on an annual income of less than \$40,000, which is below the City of San Diego’s median household income of \$50,415 (U.S. Census, 2000) (not shown).

Peer groups are typically very important among the age group targeted by **Teen Court**, and results from the intake form indicate that this was true for program clients.

- 98 percent of the clients said they had friends;
- 92 percent said they talked to these friends about personal issues; and
- 94 percent said they could count on these friends when needed (not shown).

Since research supports the link between negative peer influences and delinquency, the intake form asked questions related to parental knowledge and approval of the client’s friends. Of the client respondents:

- 71 percent believed their parents knew who their friends were;
- 78 percent said their parents had met their friends;
- 67 percent said their parents knew their friends’ names; and
- 59 percent believed their parents approved of their friends (not shown).

Research also suggests that active involvement in pro-social activities builds self-esteem and reduces delinquency. The intake form explored the types of school activities in which clients were involved, as well as any extracurricular hobbies and interests they enjoyed. Respondents were able to give multiple responses to each question.

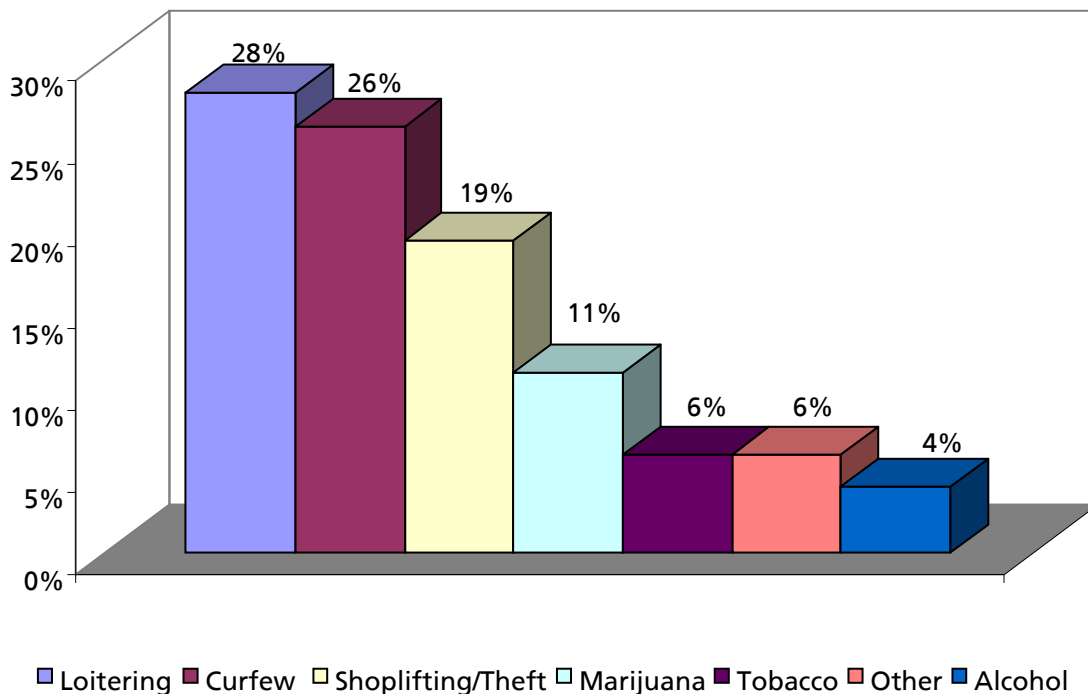
- 29 individuals (57%) said they were involved in at least one school activity, with 76 percent of those participating in sports, 48 percent in the arts, and 17 percent in an academic club;

- Of the 49 clients who responded, 76 percent said they enjoyed hanging out with friends in their spare time; more than half each said they play outside (57%), go shopping (51%), and do crafts (51%); 33 percent play video games; and 22 percent like to read (not shown).

What were the type(s) of offense(s) committed by the clients?

As previously described, **Teen Court** targets youth who commit low-level misdemeanor or status offenses. As Figure 3.2 shows, loitering offenses comprised 28 percent of the instant offenses resulting in program referral, followed by curfew violations (26%), shoplifting/theft (19%), possession of marijuana (11%), possession of tobacco (6%), and possession of alcohol (4%). An additional six percent of offenses were categorized as “other” and included possession of a weapon, delaying a peace officer, and possession of graffiti tools. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the instant offenses occurred on school grounds, with the other 71 percent taking place at either retail establishments, movie theaters, parks/beaches, private homes, and other locations (not shown).

**Figure 3.2
TYPES OF OFFENSES COMMITTED BY CLIENTS**



TOTAL = 53

NOTE: Cases with missing information are not included. Percentages are based on multiple responses.

SOURCE: SANDAG’s Teen Court Final Report, April 2007

What type(s) of sanction(s) did the clients receive?

Clients could receive more than one type of sanction and were most frequently sentenced to write letters of apology (80%) (not shown), either to their own parent/guardian (33%), the victim (20%)

or some other entity (27%) such as a retail proprietor (Table 3.1). Twenty-four percent (24%) were ordered to attend a workshop most commonly to learn about the effects and dangers of using drugs, alcohol or tobacco⁶, and 18 percent were required to complete a research paper. SANDAG received anecdotal information from the program that only one client, who participated in the research study, failed to complete his/her sanction and was referred back to law enforcement to be processed through the traditional juvenile justice system.

Table 3.1
TYPES OF SANCTIONS RECEIVED BY CLIENTS

Letter to parent/guardian	33%
Letter to another entity (proprietor, teacher)	27%
Attend workshop	24%
Letter to victim	20%
Write a research paper	18%
TOTAL	45

NOTE: Cases with missing information are not included. Percentages are based on multiple responses.

SOURCE: SANDAG's Teen Court Final Report, April 2007

⁶ Other workshops include topics on theft, anger management, and victim impact of drunk driving.

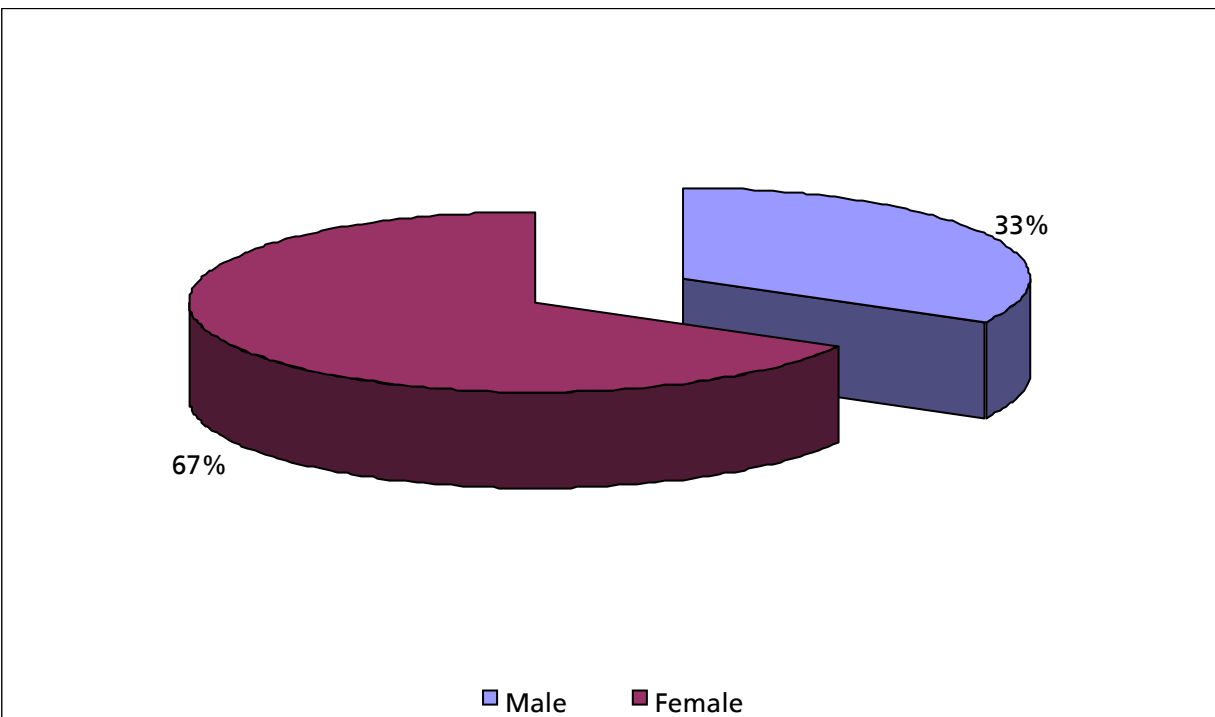
Youth Volunteers

How many youth volunteers participated in the program, and what were their characteristics?

Demographics

Between July 1, 2004, and November 30, 2006, SANDAG received demographic data for 209 youth volunteers, of which, 67 percent were female and 33 percent were male (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3
YOUTH VOLUNTEER GENDER



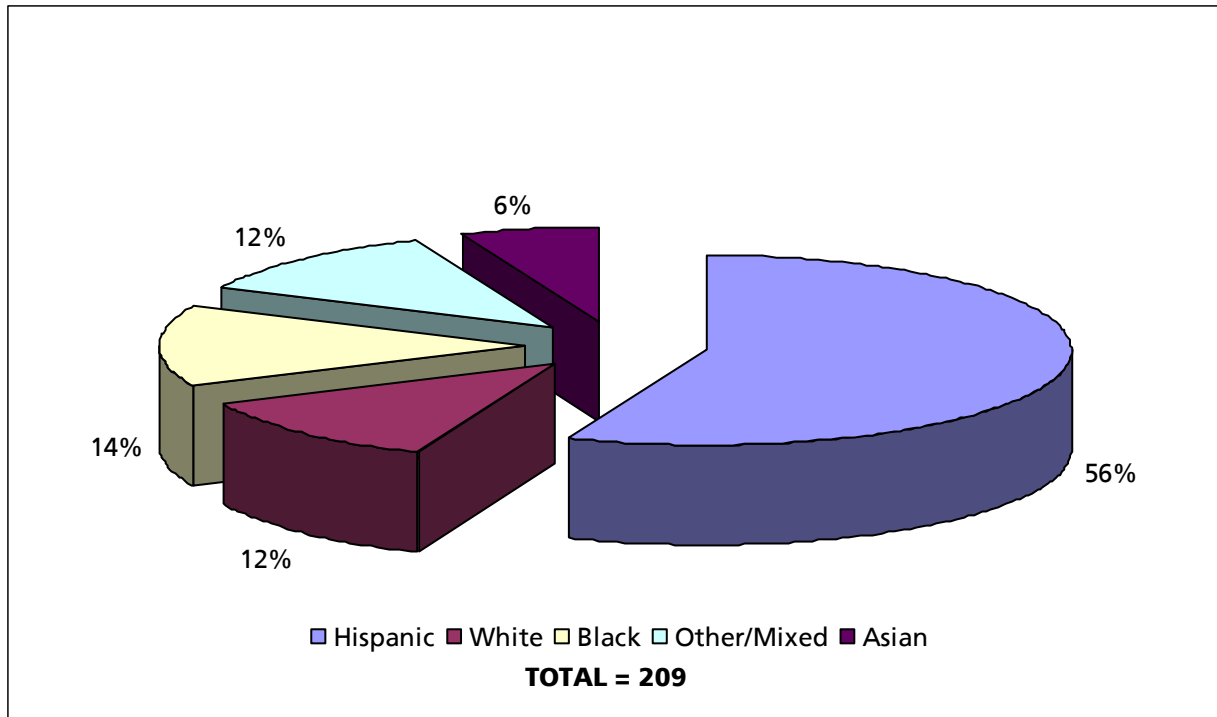
TOTAL = 209

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included

SOURCE: SANDAG's Teen Court Final Report, April 2007

Teen Court primarily targets high school-aged students to participate as youth volunteers, and as a result, the average age of youth volunteers was 16.2 years (range of 14 to 19 years, $SD = 1.04$) (not shown). The majority of youth volunteers were Hispanic (56%), followed by Black (14%), White (12%), those who identified as other or mixed race (12%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (6%) (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4
ETHNICITY OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERS



NOTE: Cases with missing information are not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG's Teen Court Final Report, April 2007; San Diego City School District, 2007

Almost the same percentage of youth volunteers and clients reported living in a single-parent household (34% and 38%, respectively), although fewer clients reported their households were headed by an adult female (87% versus 80%), or living on an annual income of less than \$40,000 (58% versus 49%)(not shown).

SUMMARY

For this final report, SANDAG analyzed data from 53 **Teen Court** clients and 278 youth volunteers who participated in the program between June 2004 and November 2006. Due to lower than expected client referrals, much of the data are descriptive in nature rather than having a comparison group that would have allowed richer analysis. The data indicate that the majority of clients were Hispanic (56%) males (58%) who were currently enrolled in the 9th grade (37%) with an average age of 15.17 (range 12 to 18 years, *SD* =1.35). Loitering offenses (28%) were the most common reason clients were contacted by law enforcement. Clients tended to have family and social support as evidenced by 88 percent saying they had someone at home to talk to about important issues and 94 percent said they had friends they could count on. Clients were likely to engage in a school club or team (57%), most commonly sports-related activities (76%). Demographic data available for 209 youth volunteers showed that they were primarily females (67%), more than half of whom (56%) were Hispanic with an average age of 16.2 years.

CHAPTER 4

IMPACT EVALUATION RESULTS

CHAPTER 4

IMPACT EVALUATION RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

The results of the impact evaluation are presented in this chapter and focus on what effect, if any, the program had on clients' likelihood of being re-arrested. The research questions presented in this chapter address whether there were gains in client and youth volunteer knowledge about **Teen Court** and the Restorative Justice Model, as well as any changes in client behavior and attitudes after completion.

CLIENTS

Did participation in *Teen Court* relate to clients exhibiting a positive change in attitudes and behaviors regarding delinquency?

As described in Chapter 2, to measure change in client attitudes and behaviors regarding delinquency, SANDAG analyzed responses from the client pre-/post-tests, which asked the clients to estimate the number of times they engaged in positive and negative behaviors, as well as how many of their peers also engaged in these behaviors. In addition, SANDAG looked at the responses from the satisfaction questionnaire completed by the clients' parent/guardian which asked for examples of how the clients behaved after completing the program. There were 35 clients who completed both a pre-/post-test and 41 individuals who responded to the parent/guardian satisfaction questionnaire.

While there was an increase in the average number of times four of the seven positive behaviors were reported occurring, none of these changes was statistically significant (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1
AVERAGE NUMBER OF TIMES CLIENTS ENGAGED
IN POSITIVE BEHAVIOR IN LAST 30 DAYS

	Pre	Post
Took part in a school club/athletic team	6.0	7.0
Thought about what to do after graduation	10.3	9.7
Talked to an adult about a personal problem	2.0	2.4
Did chores at home	43.2	75.6
Volunteered in the community	2.6	2.5
Turned down a chance to get high	4.0	5.5
Didn't allow friends to talk you into doing something you knew you shouldn't do	5.4	3.6
TOTAL		35

SOURCE: SANDAG's *Teen Court Final Report, April 2007*

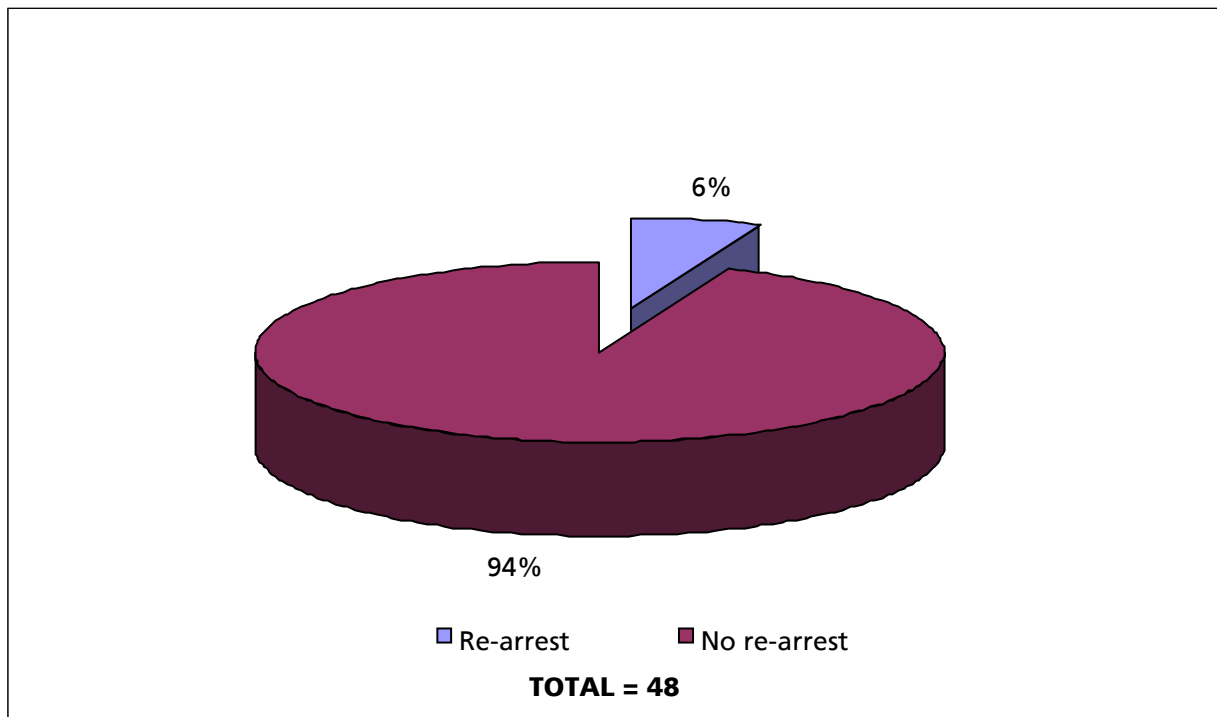
However, it is worth noting that some of these positive trends were supported by the clients' parents/guardians, many of whom noted their child showed improvement in choosing their friends more carefully (94%), impulse control (93%), communicating with them (92%), showing more interest in school (88%), and volunteering (83%) (not shown).

Was participation in *Teen Court* related to a decrease in recidivism?

To measure the rate of recidivism among clients who completed the program, SANDAG collected data on clients' arrest activity using the Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS). These records were used to gather information on 48 of the 53 clients' arrest activity up to one year after completion of their sanctions. Five clients did not have a date of birth on file and therefore, could not be located in ARJIS. As Figure 4.1 shows, only three clients, or 6 percent, had a subsequent arrest within one year of completing the program, all of whom were male; and 94 percent had no arrest one year after completion.

Recognizing that program eligibility required that the client have no prior arrests and that their instant offense was a low-level misdemeanor or status offense (such as truancy, or curfew violation), a low rate of recidivism could be expected. Although having a comparison group would have given a richer analysis to this data, none were available for this evaluation.

Figure 4.1
PERCENT OF CLIENTS ARRESTED ONE YEAR
AFTER PROGRAM COMPLETION



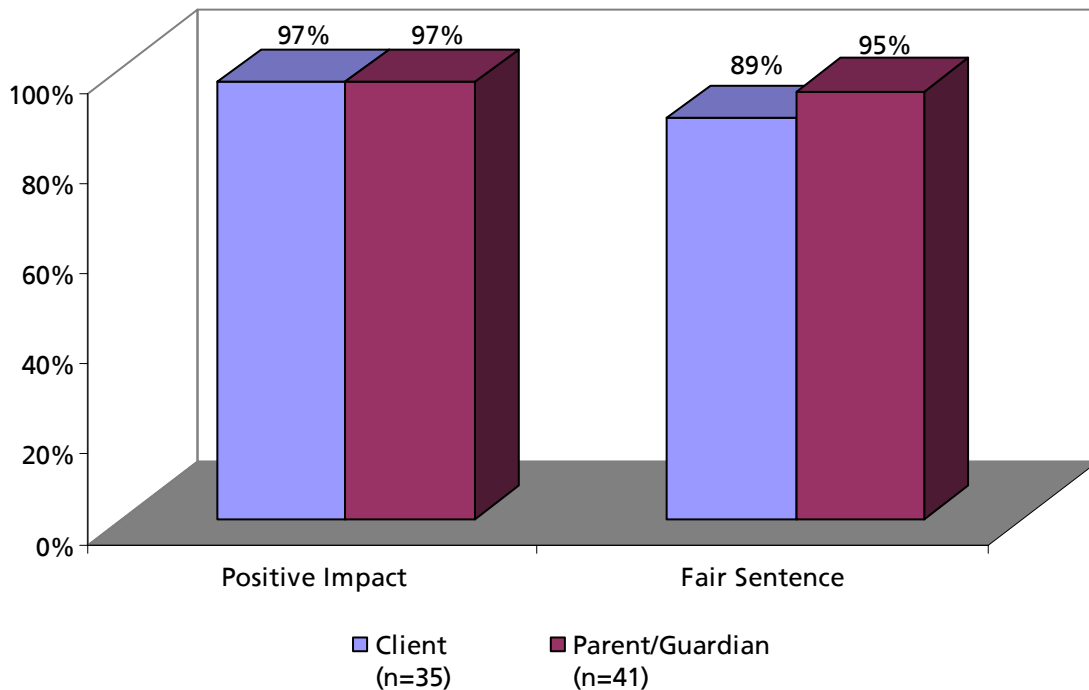
SOURCE: SANDAG's *Teen Court Final Report*, April 2007

What was the level of satisfaction with the program among clients and their parents/guardians?

Clients and their parents/guardians were in agreement about **Teen Court's** impact on the client, based on response choices of "positive", "negative", or "no impact", with 97 percent each believing that the program had a positive impact. In addition, 89 percent of the clients and 95 percent of the parents/guardians felt the client's sentence was fair (Figure 4.2).

Based on the clients' open-ended responses, it appeared that the program met one of its major goals to help the client learn how their actions affected others. More than one-third (35%) of the clients said they appreciated the help they received in understanding the consequences of their actions, another third (30%) said they were grateful for the support of their peers, 20 percent found the **Teen Court** staff to be helpful, and 15 percent reported other things such as having their record cleared and getting help with community service hours).

Figure 4.2
SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAM AMONG
CLIENTS AND THEIR PARENTS/GUARDIANS



NOTE: Cases with missing information not included

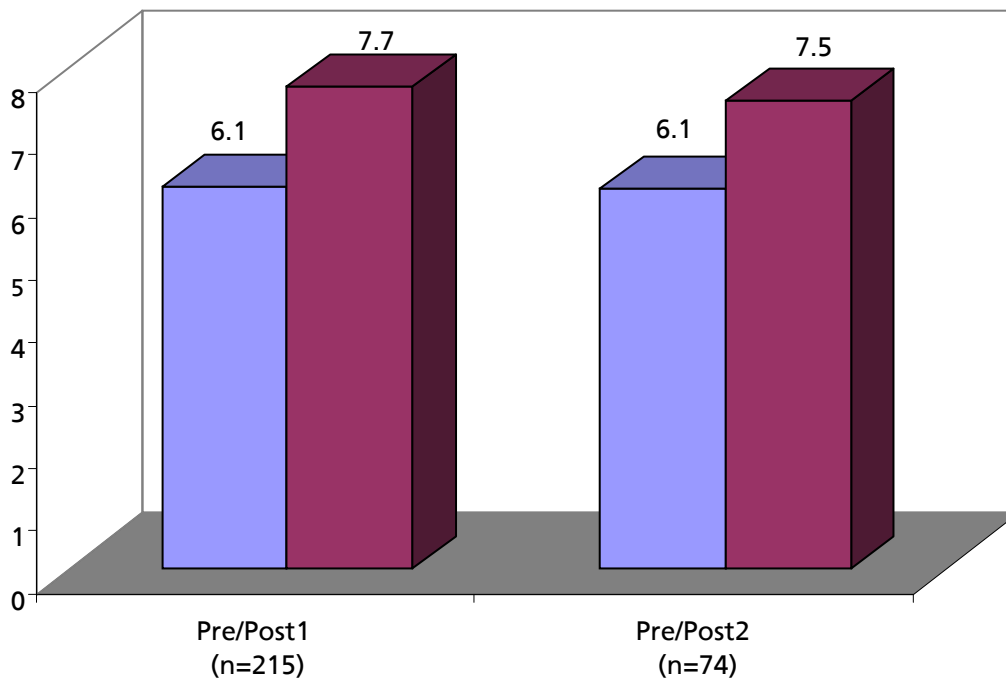
SOURCE: SANDAG's Teen Court Final Report, April 2007

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS

What was the level of change in youth volunteers' knowledge of *Teen Court*, the Restorative Justice Model, and the juvenile justice system?

As previously described, the youth volunteers completed an 11-item knowledge test before their training, at its completion, and then 45 days later. As Figure 4.3 shows, youth volunteers' mean knowledge scores rose significantly between the pre-test and the post-tests⁷. Of the eleven questions, the average number answered correctly rose from over 6 to almost 8. This demonstrates that participating in the *Teen Court* program was a successful educational opportunity for students overall.

Figure 4.3
YOUTH VOLUNTEERS' AVERAGE SCORES
AT EACH TESTING POINT



NOTE: Cases with missing information are not included

SOURCE: SANDAG's Teen Court Final Report, April 2007

⁷ The pre-test score is compared to the two post-test scores separately due to the large decrease in the matched number of tests.

Table 4.2 describes the eleven items asked on the tests, the percent who answered each question correctly initially and again after the training. As shown here, significant knowledge gains were made on five of the eleven items, with five showing non-significant increases, and one showing no change. For example, only 15 percent had some knowledge coming into the training about the Restorative Justice Model, which significantly increased to 68 percent (Sign Test, n=74, 36 positive difference). Similarly, while more than half (54%) were previously aware of the differences between **Teen Court** and Juvenile Court, that also significantly increased to 92 percent at post1 (Sign Test, n=74, 25 positive difference).

Table 4.2
PERCENT OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERS ANSWERING
CORRECTLY ON PRE/POST KNOWLEDGE TEST

	Pre	Post 1
Identify the elements of Restorative Justice*	15%	68%
Who makes opening statement in court?*	20%	59%
Teen Court and Juvenile Court operate the same way*	54%	92%
Where does the right to a jury come from?*	77%	82%
Does the right to a jury apply to juveniles?*	12%	43%
Who has role to make sure correct procedures followed?	86%	94%
Teen Court requires oath of confidentiality	83%	95%
Everything in police report is true and accurate	52%	59%
Which crime has no victim?	77%	86%
Appropriate jury deliberation	77%	82%
Why do we sentence youth in Teen Court ?	52%	52%
TOTAL		74

*NOTE: Differences are significant at $p < .05$.

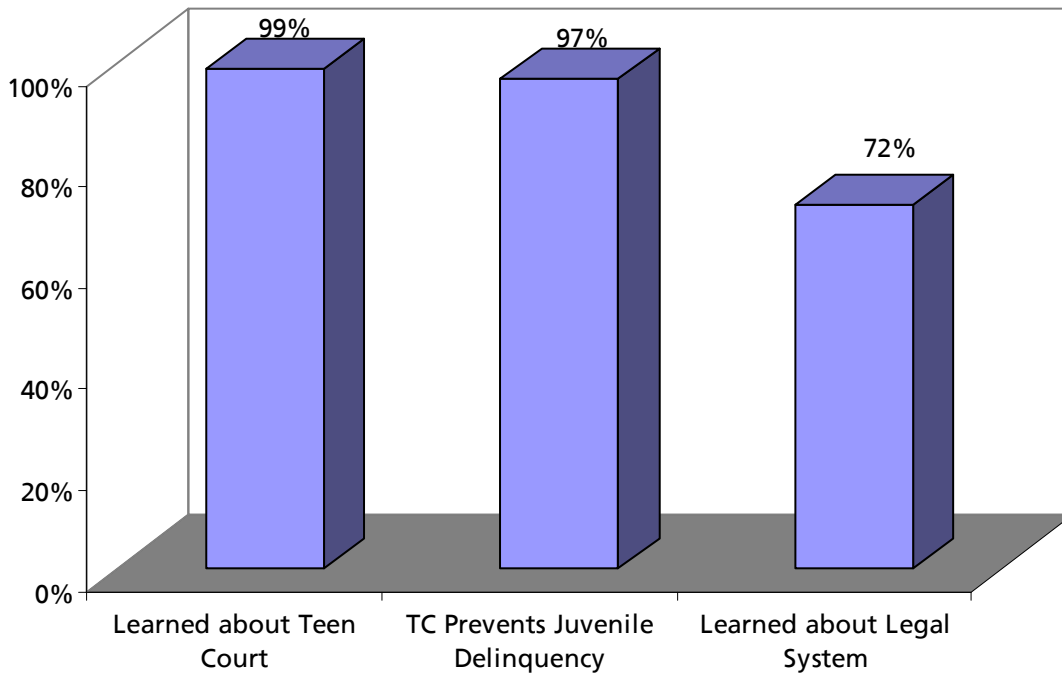
SOURCE: SANDAG's Teen Court Final Report, April 2007

What was the level of satisfaction with the program among youth volunteers?

Youth volunteers were also given the opportunity to complete a satisfaction questionnaire at the end of the court session asking how effective the program was in teaching them about **Teen Court**, preventing delinquency, learning the legal system, and training them for the role they played in the court session. There were 180 questionnaires completed and received for analysis, and all seven schools were represented.

The youth volunteers' responses indicated that the program's training curriculum was well matched to the volunteers' real-life experience serving on **Teen Court**. As Figure 4.4 shows, almost all of the youth volunteers felt the program was effective in teaching them about **Teen Court** (99%) and preventing juvenile delinquency (97%), with nearly three-quarters (72%) reporting that they learned "a lot" about the legal system.

Figure 4.4
SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAM
AMONG YOUTH VOLUNTEERS



TOTAL = 180

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included; percentages are based on multiple responses.

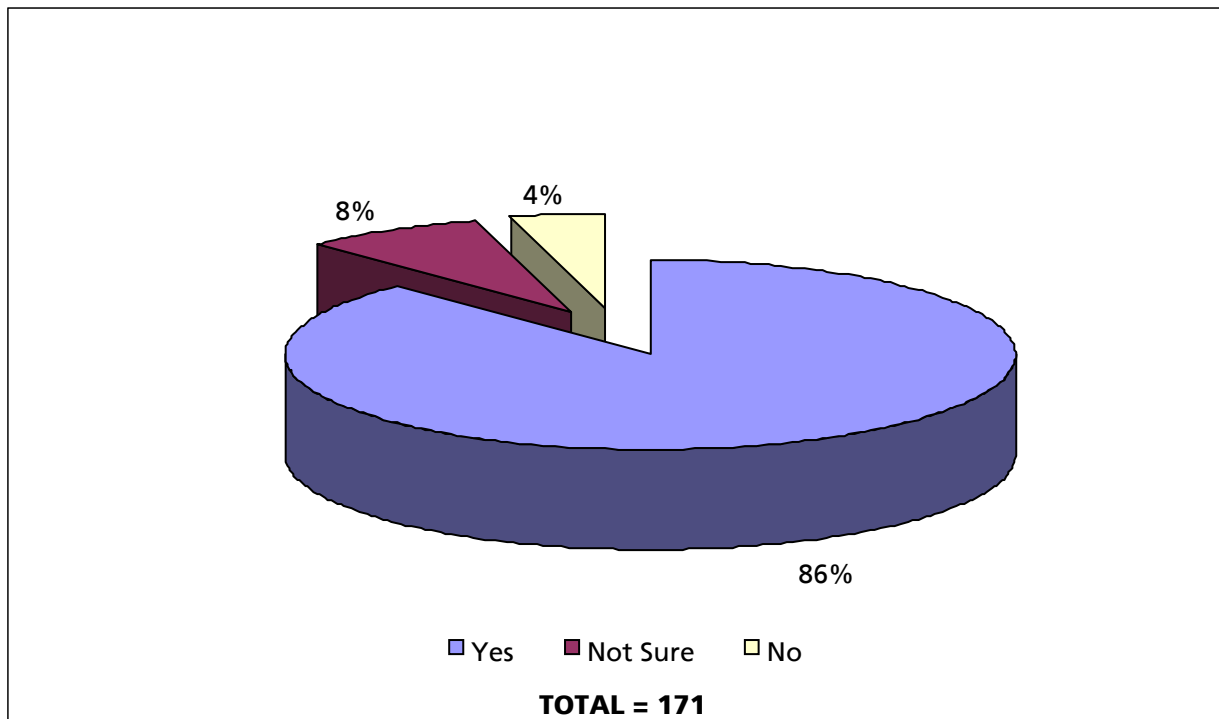
SOURCE: SANDAG's Teen Court Final Report, April 2007

With regard to the role they played in the **Teen Court** session, about half (51%) of the survey respondents were jurors, 24 percent were attorneys, and 24 percent served as bailiffs, clerks, or case presenters. All individuals were asked to rate the effectiveness of the role-playing exercises conducted to prepare them for the actual court session, and of the 176 who responded to the question, 81 percent felt the exercises were "effective" or "very effective". The 48 individuals who served as attorneys were also asked to rate the helpfulness of the special training they received, with 85 percent saying it was helpful or very helpful (not shown).

How many youth volunteers were willing to participate again in Teen Court?

As shown in Figure 4.5, of the 171 youth volunteers who responded to the question of whether they would be willing to participate again in **Teen Court**, 86 percent said yes, 8 percent said they were not sure, and only 4 percent said no. This reflects well on the program staff's ability to establish rapport with the youth volunteers and create a positive learning environment for them.

Figure 4.5
YOUTH VOLUNTEERS WILLING TO PARTICIPATE AGAIN IN TEEN COURT



NOTE: Cases with missing information not included; percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: SANDAG's Teen Court Final Report, April 2007

SUMMARY

This final report describes the results from the impact evaluation on 53 **Teen Court** clients and 278 youth volunteers who participated in the program between June 2004 and November 2006. The impact evaluation found that clients' self-reported behavior pre- and post-participation did not change significantly after program participation. However, almost all of the parents/guardians reported positive changes in their child's behavior and only three participants (6%) had been arrested within one year of completing the program. The program also appeared to offer a positive learning experience to the youth volunteers, with significant knowledge gain demonstrated and almost nine in ten expressing a willingness to participate again.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

This final chapter summarizes the findings and implications of the results of the San Diego **Teen Court** program. A part of the program's sustainability plan was to merge with a larger community-based organization; and at the time of this report, negotiations were in progress with verbal commitments by both parties to form such a partnership. This chapter discusses recommendations for potential improvements to the program if that partnership is established and if Teen Court continues to expand its services for youth and families in San Diego.

SUMMARY

The Program

Using the Restorative Justice Model, which focuses on holding an offender accountable and requiring them to "repair the harm" caused to the community, **Teen Court** provides a juvenile diversion program for youth who are first-time offenders between the ages of 13 and 17 who commit a low-level misdemeanor or status offense (e.g., vandalism, truancy, petty theft, and/or drug possession). The program receives referrals from the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) and San Diego City Schools Police and serves youth within the San Diego city limits. Clients are required to admit culpability, have their parent's/guardian's agreement to participate in **Teen Court**, and agree beforehand to comply with the sanctions handed down by their peers.

Teen Court enlists youth volunteers from San Diego City high schools through a school-based program initiated by teachers as part of a classroom learning activity in which youth volunteers are expected to participate. These volunteers, who are trained on the differences between **Teen Court** and the traditional juvenile justice system and the Restorative Justice Model, serve as jurors, attorneys, bailiffs, clerks, and case presenters during the actual **Teen Court** session. The youth volunteers design and hand down sanctions they feel are appropriate to the offense committed, and review the client's progress and completion of the sanction.

The Program's Impact

As described in this report, SANDAG's Criminal Justice Research Division completed an evaluation of the **Teen Court** program with funding the Corrections Standards Authority (CSA) between June 2004 and November 2006. While a number of practical realities necessitated changes to the experimental research design, 53 clients and 278 youth volunteers agreed to participate in the evaluation. Data collection methods to document who participated, what impact the program had, and how satisfied participants were included demographic forms, satisfaction questionnaires, knowledge tests, and data collection from archival records.

Successes

Some of the key successes the program experienced during the two-year evaluation included:

- a low recidivism rate (6%, or three individuals) among clients who completed;
- significant gains in knowledge among youth volunteers about the Restorative Justice Model and operational differences of both **Teen Court** and traditional justice system;
- a willingness by 86 percent of youth volunteers to participate again in the **Teen Court** process; and
- a high level of satisfaction with the program among clients and their parents/guardians. Specifically, 97 percent each felt the program had a positive impact on the client and 89 percent of clients and 95 percent of parents/guardians felt the client's sentence was fair and appropriate.

Challenges

Despite several challenges faced by the program over the two-year evaluation period, **Teen Court** showed resilience through the uninterrupted provision of services to clients and youth volunteers. Some of the key challenges the program confronted included:

- the loss of the SDPD's participation in the randomization process;
- beginning June 2005, a sharp decline in referrals to the program by their two main referral sources—SDPD and City Schools Police; and
- significant staff turn-over in early 2006, including the resignation of the Executive Director and Program Director.

CONCLUSION

At the time of this report, there were plans to merge the **Teen Court** model with an existing social service agency which currently provides juvenile diversion services. It is encouraging that **Teen Court** has explored ways to continue to offer its quality educational school-based programs to youth volunteers through an experiential setting, as well as the invaluable service of helping youthful offenders understand how their actions have impacted their families, the victim, and the community as a whole and give them the opportunity to repair the harm their offense may have caused. To learn more about **Teen Court**, visit their Web site at www.sdteencourt.org.