



Neighborhood Justice

June 2010
Volume 2 Issue 5

Newsletter of the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office Youth Aid Panels
R. Seth Williams – District Attorney

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Upcoming Training
- 1 AAA: Not Just for Motorists
- 2 From the Juveniles
- 2 Community Resources
- 3 Food for Thought
- 4 Hail and Farewell
- 4 Friendly Reminders

"As AAA is an invaluable service to have when we are stranded on the side of the highway, Panelists are just as vital to youths in Philadelphia who have gotten themselves stuck along the road of life."

Upcoming Training

Contrary to original plans, the District Attorney's Office will hold training classes for prospective panelists in the fall of 2010. This decision is due to the depreciating numbers of our current panelists. Presently, the number of applicants waiting to be trained is lower than adequate. If you know anyone who may be interested in becoming a panelist, please encourage them to move forward in the application process by submitting an application to our office. The brochure and application can be found on the Philadelphia District Attorney's website at:

www.phila.gov/districtattorney/crimePrevention_YouthAidPanel.html

Alternatively, prospective applicants can call the office and we will mail them a brochure and application. It may take some time for our office to get into contact with the applicants due to conducting the required background check. However, if they have any questions or concerns, they are free to contact us at any time.

AAA: Not Just for Motorists

By Randy Duque, Managing Director, Good Shepherd Mediation Program

A few weeks ago, I had a pleasant dinner with my brother at a quaint Mexican restaurant in the Northeast. When we left the establishment in the warm spring evening, we hopped in his car only to find it not starting. Luckily, I had my AAA Card and got the assistance we needed to get the car running again.

As AAA is an invaluable service to have when we are stranded on the side of the highway, Panelists are just as vital to youths in Philadelphia who have gotten themselves stuck along the road of life. To assist Youth Aid Panel members with being the "roadside assistance" for young people in our community, here are some points to follow:

Attend – It is not only important to show up to your assigned YAP meetings, but to attend them regularly in order to maximize the number of juveniles you aid.

Please see *AAA: Not Just for Motorists* on page 3

From the Juveniles

By A Youth Aid Panel Juvenile

“Negative Consequences for Making Bad Decisions”

“I had to fulfill requirements on a contract in order for my criminal record to be expunged. Others are not so lucky.”

“To err is human, to forgive is Devine’ is what people who are overly forgiving tend to say. Unfortunately, not in every case can certain wrongs be made right with a simple ‘its okay’ after an ‘I’m sorry’. There are things that are sufficiently serious that for justice to be done, the legal system has to be involved. But what are the possible consequences of different wrongs?”

Before the bad decision is carried out, there is almost always a thought process behind it; some instant in time in which that person thought if they should do what they planned or not. This is where preventative action needs to be taken. See, one of physics most known laws is that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. The best thing would be that if we thought out the possible reactions as a result of our initial actions, we could determine how easy we make our own lives. Unfortunately, not everyone chooses to do so.

What does a young person have to lose? As one who has pretty much lost everything, I can testify to the fact that it is a lot more than you would think. As in the case of many youths whose minds have gone astray, the judicial system had to be involved in the matter. I had to fulfill requirements on a contract in order for my criminal record to be expunged. Others are not so

Please see *From the Juveniles* on page 4

Community Resources

Many panelists have expressed concern for the lack of resources available for the juveniles in the program. In response to this, Assistant District Attorney Lakeisha Fields has been working to find more resources that will fit with our program and enable the panels to send their juveniles to more case-appropriate sites. One such resource is through **Greater Philadelphia Cares** (www.gpcares.com). This program has over 100 volunteer opportunities per month. Our contact for this program is **Terry Baxter** and her contact information is 215-564-4544, volunteer@gpcares.com.

Another program is To Our Children’s Future with Health; **Step Up** located in West Philadelphia, with access to the 18th and 19th Police Districts. This program provides referral programs for our juveniles which include after-school and interest-based programs. Our contact for this program is **Dameon Mack** and his contact information is 215-879-7740, dmack@toctfwh.org.

We are actively seeking additional resources. If you have programs that your panel already implements which you would like to share, please contact ADA Lakeisha Fields at 215-686-6310.



Food for Thought

By a Youth Aid Panel Juvenile

“Vandalism”

“Vandalism is a growing national problem. Last year, this senseless crime cost United States citizens over one billion dollars. Vandalism can affect your family, friends, property, community and your pocketbook. Vandalism is wrong because you are destroying someone else’s property. It makes properties look bad and makes the community look worse than it is. Now that I see it was wrong, I look back at it in the other person’s shoes and I would be very upset if someone had vandalized my property.

Vandalism becomes a crime when you put “art” on someone else’s property. If graffiti is truly an art form, people would have tags all over their own homes and vehicles which is not the case. At its best, graffiti is just a way for immature people to seek pleasure and at its worst; it is messages between rival gangs and drug dealers. Graffiti is a gateway crime that leads children and adolescents astray and sends a message that a graffiti-covered neighborhood is ripe for criminal activity.

Graffiti is definitely not art. There is no one who appreciates tags on public and private property. While some graffiti can look artistic, it is still vandalism because the surface which is being painted upon is not owned by the person and is detrimental to the owner of the property.”



AAA: *Not Just for Motorists* from page 1

Assess – When hearing a juvenile’s case, remember to actively listen to the youth’s and parent’s stories as sources of good information to build a meaningful contract. Rather than assigning the same stipulations on a contract by offense, listen for key points that would not only tailor the contract to the individual; but also help in reducing the chances for the juvenile to repeat or get into future arrests.

Address – In addition to making quality assessments to create solid contracts, it is also important to keep in mind the Restorative Justice aspect of the meeting. While you are helping youths to become productive members of the community, you must also recognize that part of becoming upstanding citizens is for the youth to repair the harm that was made to the greatest extent possible.

While standing around on the sidewalk waiting for AAA to arrive wasn’t the most pleasant event of the night, it was a relief having them come to our aid and helping us through with what would have been a long walk home. Furthermore, the AAA worker was not only skilled in diagnosing the issue, but more importantly; I valued the fact that he was kind and courteous with my brother and me. Likewise, as a Youth Aid Panel volunteer, your role not only assists youths in Philadelphia get back on the road to a better future for themselves, but is appreciated when performed with patience and care.

“Your role not only assists youths in Philadelphia get back on the road to a better future for themselves, but is appreciated when performed with patience and care.”

From the Juveniles from page 2

lucky. Jail time is considered the last measure. The ultimate punishment. The complete loss of freedom; isolation from the rest of civilian population and an extended period in that state. This is not where anyone would like to be.

To avoid this and other consequences, a very simple action must be taken. Follow the law. Although it is something at times may be easier said than done, it is something that is worthwhile. The easiest way to avoid negative consequences is to avoid the actions that lead to them.”



Hail and Farewell

We would like to welcome the following Crime Prevention Officers:

Officer Padua replaces **Officer Jonas** at the **24th (A)** Police District

Officer Centeno replaces **Officer Blackford** at the **35th** Police District

In Memoriam:

Bernice Fields, Chairperson of the **19th (B)** district panel recently passed away. Bernice served as a dedicated panelist for 14 years.

Robert Leibowitz, senior panelist of the **7th** district panel recently passed away and served as a dedicated panelist for 10 years.

Former panelist, **James McGowan** of the **15th** district recently passed away.

Joining us as a Youth Aid Panel law clerk on May 24, 2010 is **Erica Baiocco**. Prior to joining the Youth Aid Panel, Erica worked in the Drug Treatment Court Unit of the District Attorney's Office for over two years. Erica graduated with a B.A. in Criminal Justice from Temple University in 2008.

Friendly Reminders

- Please make sure the paperwork from your panel's cases is sent to our office in timely manner.
- Please leave the duty of rescheduling cases to the District Attorney's Office. This prevents over-scheduling and cases getting lost in the mix. Keep the lines of communication open with us. We are here at all times to answer any questions.
- Please let us know in advance if and when your panel decides to take a vacation day.

The Philadelphia District Attorney's Office

1401 Arch St.
7th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Phone:
215-686-6310/6305/7600

Fax:
215-686-4071

E-mail:
Kara.zavilla@phila.gov

The same folks who administer the Youth Aid Panels bring NEIGHBORHOOD JUSTICE to you:

R. Seth Williams, District Attorney

George Mosee, Deputy District Attorney

Lakeisha Fields, ADA Coordinator

Kara Zavilla, Law Clerk

Erica Baiocco, Law Clerk

Michelle Yarnell, Secretary