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# **NEWS RELEASE**

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## **PHILADELPHIA DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE NEEDS ADULT VOLUNTEERS TO SERVE ON COMMUNITY-BASED YOUTH AID PANELS**

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The Philadelphia District Attorney's Office is seeking adult neighborhood volunteers to serve on Youth Aid Panels. We are looking for special people who are willing to give their time to point first-time juvenile offenders away from the criminal justice system and toward more productive life choices.

Each Youth Aid Panel is made up of community volunteers who are extensively trained by the District Attorney's Office. Twenty-seven panels operate in every neighborhood in the city.

The Youth Aid Panel program is open to first-time juvenile offenders charged with misdemeanors or minor felonies that would otherwise be heard by a judge in Juvenile Court. The offending juvenile must first admit guilt and then is required to enter into a contract with the Panel. The contract could require anything from a community service project to a written essay to restitution. One panel member is assigned to monitor each juvenile's progress and adherence to the contract until all terms of the contract have been fulfilled. If the juvenile fulfills all terms of the contract, the juvenile's record is expunged. If the juvenile fails to fulfill the terms of the contract, the juvenile returns to Juvenile Court, and if the juvenile is found guilty, he or she will have a criminal record.

There are two key elements of the Youth Aid Panel program: 1. To give first-time offenders a second chance to avoid a criminal record and 2. To hold the offender accountable in terms of the seriousness of his/her actions as well as the effect their crimes have on their victims as well as the neighborhood as a whole.

The Youth Aid Panel program now handles a significant number of the nearly 11,000 juvenile cases brought each year into an already overburdened Juvenile Court system. Nine out of ten juveniles who enter the Youth Aid Panel program successfully fulfill contracts they make, and the overwhelming majority will never again return to the justice system. In the year 2004, 795 juveniles entered into and completed contracts and performed more than 18,000 hours of community service and paid restitution for damages.

Across the city, 190 volunteers donated 14, 464 hours of their time.

“None of this would be possible without the people who volunteer their time,” said District Attorney Lynne Abraham. “Youth Aid Panel Volunteers have saved countless young people from lives of crime and contributed to the safety and well being of their own communities,” she said.

If you are interested in helping kids by becoming a Youth Aid Panel Volunteer, please call (215) 686-6314, (215) 686-6305 or (215) 686-6310 and ask for ‘Youth Aid Panels.’