

Bethlehem Youth Court

2019 Annual Report



The power of positive peer pressure.

Utilizing peer-led sentencing hearings to give youth a second chance.

Contents

- Board of Directors:2
- Co-Chairpersons:2
- Secretary:2
- Treasurer:2
- Ex-Officio Member:2
- Members:2
- Director2
- Contact Information:2
- End of Year Report3
- Introduction3
- Offender Statistics.....3
- Raise the Age4
- Community Service5
- Adult Volunteers5
- Members5
- Association of New York State Youth Courts (ANYSYC)7
- BYC Board Members7
- Financial7
- 5 Year Comprehensive Statistics8
- Community Service Totals9
- Community Service Sites for 2019 10

Board of Directors:

Co-Chairpersons:

Terri Egan
Thomas Spina, Jr., *Assistant US Attorney*

Secretary:

Sergeant Michael Whiteley, *Bethlehem Police Department*

Treasurer:

Maureen McLeod, PhD., *Sage Colleges Professor Emerita*

Ex-Officio Member:

Hon. David VanLuven, *Bethlehem Town Supervisor*

Members:

Det. Sgt. Gina Cocchiara, *Bethlehem Police Department*

Maureen Cunningham, *Bethlehem Town Board Member*

Adam Katz, *Assistant U.S. Attorney*

Nancy Maurer, *Director, Field Placement Programs, Albany Law School*

Jennifer Miller, *Albany County Probation Retiree*

Jacqueline Munroe, *Hall Principal, Bethlehem Middle School*

Gene Primomo, *Assistant Federal Defender*

Pamela Clark Robbins, *CEO, Policy Research Associates*

Michelle Sleurs, *Senior Probation Officer, Albany County*

James Smith, *Hall Principal, Bethlehem Central High School*

Director

Katrina Charland

Contact Information:

Bethlehem Youth Court
261 Elm Ave.
Delmar, NY 12054
(518) 439-4955 x1143 – office
(518) 320-2350 – mobile
byc@townofbethlehem.org
www.BethlehemYouthCourt.org

End of Year Report

Introduction

As a restorative justice based, non-profit diversion program, Bethlehem Youth Court's mission is to serve justice involved youth by providing them a second chance at a clean record through participation in peer-led sentencing hearings and to promote positive civic engagement for young volunteers. We have successfully carried out this mission for almost 25 years. This unique approach to youthful crime aims to restore balance after a young person commits an offense through the completion of community service and other positive sanctions.

Offender Statistics

Bethlehem Youth Court (BYC) handled 25 cases in 2019, with a total of 36 various charges with a 96 percent successful completion rate. Only one case was returned to criminal court for failure to comply. It is notable that while we did not carry as heavy of a case load as in previous years, the total number of charges/offenses handled is significant.

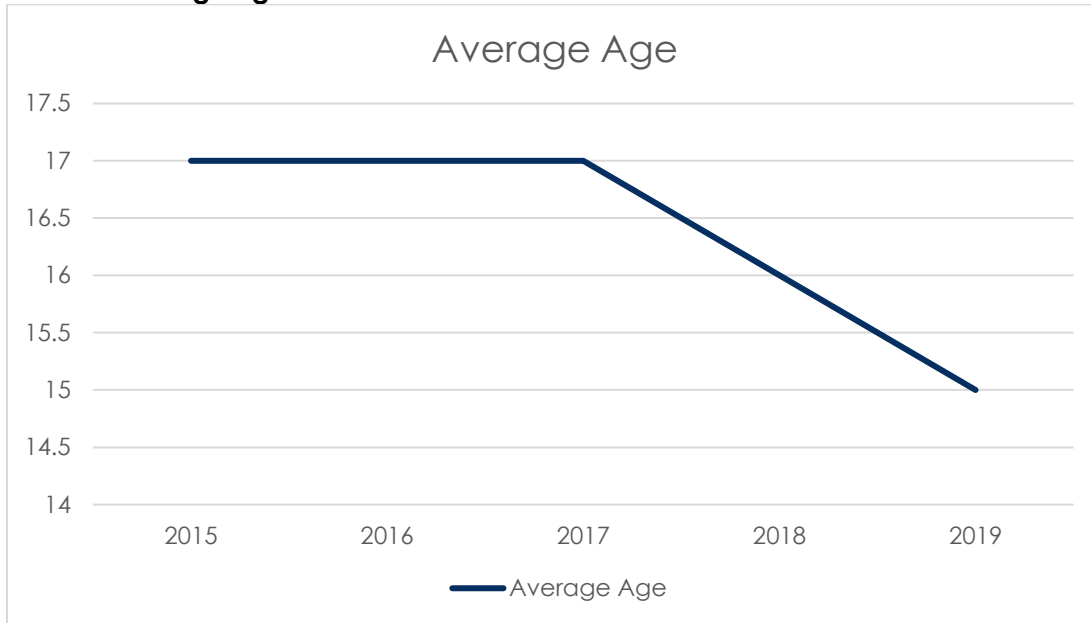
In 2018, we saw an uptick in graffiti cases, and that trend carried into 2019. The most common charge in 2019 was criminal mischief (most of which had some sort of graffiti involvement) at 19 percent of cases. The second most common offense was burglary at 17 percent of cases, which narrowly nudged unlawful possession of marijuana out of the top two most common offenses category for the first time in our statistically recorded history. This is quite significant because it reflects, and is consistent with, the shift in societal viewpoints surrounding marijuana and laws and policies related to how low-level drug offenses are handled.

Our second most common offense of 2019, burglary, may raise some eyebrows. The word "burglary" may conjure up some pretty serious images, after all burglary is a felony, and while the burglary cases we had in Youth Court were serious, when looking at the big picture, it was apparent to all parties involved, including the victims, that Youth Court was an excellent age-appropriate option for the offenses committed.

The average age of offenders is on a slightly downward trend, averaging just 15 years old in the past year. There were more 11 and 12 year-old participants than ever before as illustrated in Chart 1, which was a factor in the overall decrease in average age.

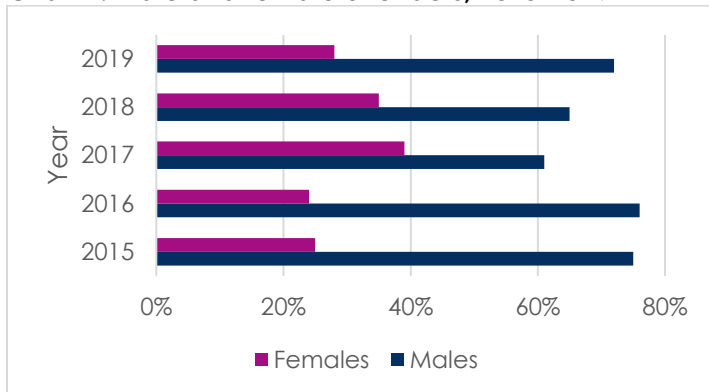
Community service is a significant aspect of program participation. In 2019, 450 hours of community service were sentenced by the peer jury. When volunteer time is taken into consideration, approximately 1,275 hours of service were performed. In addition to the completion of community service, sentencing options for program participants can include educational classes, writing apology letters and coming back to serve as a juror for another youth's case. In 2019 five participants attended drug and alcohol classes, and twelve participated in peer pressure classes. Of the 25 total participants, 14 of them wrote apology letters. These sentencing options align with restorative principles, offering early positive intervention aimed at restoring balance between justice involved youth, victims, and the community.

Chart 1: Average age of offenders from 2015-2019



There was also a fairly significant divide between the percentages of male and female program participants, which is similar to previous years' data, with males making up 72 percent and females 28 percent, as seen in Chart 2 below.

Chart 2: Male and female offenders, 2015-2019



Raise the Age

In 2018, new legislation, commonly referred to as Raise the Age, was being phased in. That transition continued into October 2019, when the age of criminal responsibility for most offenses increased to 18 years old. This long-anticipated change did not have any negative impacts on BYC, as we have had a long-standing, direct referral process that allows the Bethlehem Police Department to send cases directly to BYC. As the age of criminal responsibility went up, that policy expanded with it, allowing us to utilize the direct referral process for youth through age 17. We also worked with Bethlehem Police Department to expand that policy to cover youth who are charged with the lowest level of offenses, violations, since Raise the Age laws had not affected that demographic. This policy helps ensure that there is consistency for those young people who are given the option of Youth Court.

Community Service

In 2019, BYC participants performed community service at over 20 various sites and/or at local events in and around the Town of Bethlehem. The combination of having slightly younger participants and having an unprecedented number of 11 and 12 year-olds in the program made finding consistent and age-appropriate community service somewhat of a challenge. However, the Bethlehem Central Middle School garden proved to be an excellent solution. Community service had been performed at the garden in the past, but this past summer, it was an invaluable resource for our program and was a win-win for both the garden and BYC as we had several youths consistently help out. A special thanks to Bethlehem Central Middle School's Mark Warford who helped supervise, educate, and mentor the young people who helped weed, plant and tend to the vegetable and flower gardens.

Other notable annual community service events are the Delmar Dash, the town's Eggstravaganza, National Night Out, and Halloween Hay Day. A complete list of community service sites can be found attached to this report.

Adult Volunteers

BYC is primarily volunteer-driven, using both adult and student volunteers. Notable adult volunteers include our attorney mentors, who help trained members prepare for cases. Additionally, there are often interns and field placement college students. This past year, Jacob Sheingold, a SUNY Oswego student who interned with BYC previously, once again returned during his school breaks to help out. Kaitlynn Kennedy-Loos, a junior at Siena, did a field placement study with BYC.

Another adult volunteer worthy of acknowledgement is Kelly Hart, a Federal Probation officer, who faithfully dedicates her time to attend hearings and help coordinate and oversee jurors. Her time and dedication are very much appreciated.

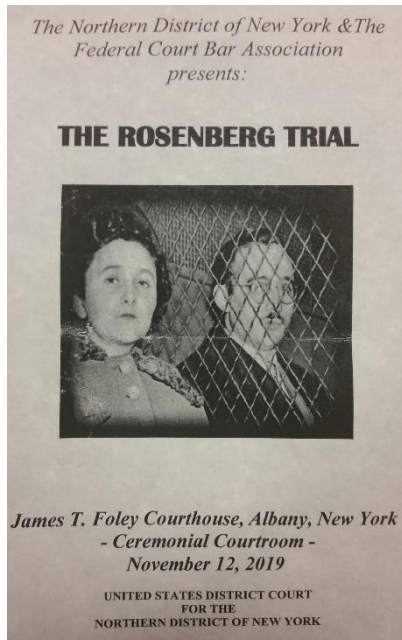
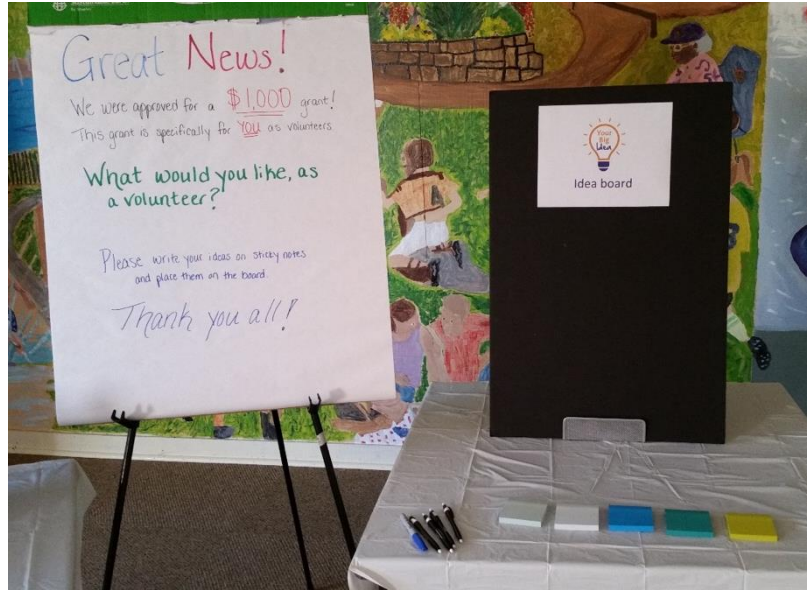
Members

In 2019, BYC held its annual spring training for new members. This training typically culminates with an induction ceremony/Law Day event, which took place on May 14th, 2019. Mike McGeown-Walker, Esq., a former BYC graduate student extern and current attorney mentor, delivered a keynote address. Hon. Ryan Donovan swore in 24 newly-trained volunteer members. During this event, which was open to the public, BYC also hosted the annual Judge Jordan Memorial Award scholarship competition, which is sponsored by the Police Benevolent Association and the Bethlehem Police Supervisors' Association. Three students, Sarah Cohen, Sanaa Amir, and Grant Napierski, participated. Sarah received the first place \$750 award and Sanaa received second place \$250 award. Since there were three participants but only two awards, the police associations pooled together to offer a gift certificate for third place as a gesture of gratitude for participation.



Left to right: Bethlehem Police Department's Det. Sgt. Cocchiara, Sanaa Amir, Sarah Cohen, and Officer Mike Berben

Over the summer, BYC was awarded a \$1,000 grant from the Pioneer Bank Foundation to cover expenses related to volunteer appreciation item. During an in-person pitch to board members of the Foundation, BYC Director outlined the need to show volunteers how much their time and dedication to the program is valued. Once the grant was awarded, BYC hosted an ice cream social to gather volunteers and brainstorm ideas for how they would like to spend the grant funding. Ultimately, it was decided to order hoodie sweatshirts for trained members as a token of appreciation.



In November 2019, BYC held a field trip to attend a trial reenactment at the Federal Courthouse in Albany, hosted by the United States District Court for the Northern District of New York. The BYC Director, along with six volunteer members, one youth program participant, a parent, and a board member, Jennifer Miller, all attended the event. Special appreciation and thanks to the Town of Bethlehem's Senior Services for helping coordinate and providing transportation to and from the event.

Association of New York State Youth Courts (ANYSYC)

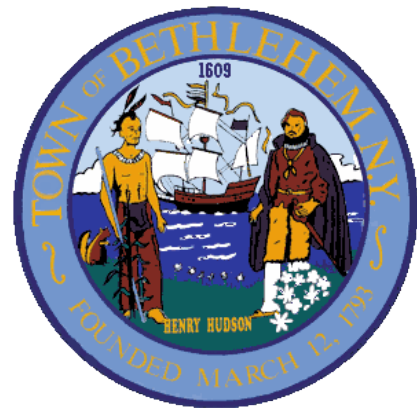
The ANYSYC was very busy in 2019, primarily planning a Directors' Symposium, which was held in Long Island at Stony Brook University in November. The symposium consisted of a networking meeting one evening, and an all-day conference the following day. BYC's Director, Katrina Charland, along with Colonie Youth Court Director, Violet Palombo, both attended. Katrina continues to be an active member of the association and maintains her role as Secretary for the organization.

BYC Board Members

In 2019, our Board of Directors welcomed Bethlehem Police Department's Det. Sgt. Gina Cocchiara to the board. This took place after Secretary Mike Whiteley was promoted to Patrol Sergeant. In his new capacity, Sergeant Whiteley can serve as a liaison to the broader department, while Det. Sgt. Cocchiara will continue the direct connection to the Bethlehem Police Department's Family Services Unit, which handles the majority of cases referred to BYC.

Financial Outlook

BYC received two grants in 2019. One grant, previously mentioned in this report, was \$1,000 from the Pioneer Bank Foundation, and the other was \$1,750 from the Stewarts Holiday Match. BYC continues to seek alternative funding sources, but the Town of Bethlehem's financial support is the most consistent and vital to the program's success, for which we are grateful. The second most impactful source of funding comes from our annual letter campaign. Each year, we reach out via mail to community members and local businesses who have had a connection to BYC in the past. This appeal usually yields over \$4,000, which is a testament to the community's generosity and support of BYC's core principles and mission.



5-Year Comprehensive Statistics

Data prior to 2015 is available upon request.

Comprehensive Statistics 2015-2019							
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Breakdown	
Total # of cases	12	21	31	31	25	Total:	120
% of successful cases	100%	100%	97%	97%	96%	Average:	98%
Total # of community service hours sentenced	240	381	636	583	450	Total:	2290
Total # of community service hours performed by program	785	1031	1632	1678	1275	Total:	6401
Average # of hours sentenced per offender	20	18	20.5	18.8	18	Average:	19.06
Average age of offender	17	17	17	16	15	Average:	16.4
% Males	75%	76%	61%	65%	72%	Average:	69%
% Females	25%	24%	39%	35%	28%	Average:	30%
\$ Restitution Paid	\$0	\$160	\$45	\$0	\$3,333	Total:	\$3,538
Apology letters written	1	4	7	4	12	Total:	28
Educational classes sentenced	3	4	14	10	14	Total:	45
# of offenders who signed up as volunteers	1	2	0	1	0	Total:	4
Most Common Charge	UPM (39%)	UPM (41%)	UPM (27.5% of cases)	UPM (33%)	Criminal Mischief (19%)		
Second most common charge	Vehicle and Traffic Infractions (22%)	Vehicle and Traffic Infractions (32%)	Petit Larceny (15%)	Petit Larceny (20%)	Burglary 17%		

Community Service Totals

Bethlehem Youth Court Community Service Hours for 2019		
Volunteers/Participants	Formula	Total Hours based on 25 cases heard
Attorney Mentors	3hrs/case x # of cases	75
Jurors	Approx. 10 jurors per case x # of cases heard	250
Youth Court Members	4 advocates (3 hours/case), plus 1 victim advocate (2 hours/case) plus 3 other roles (1 hour/case) x # of hearings	425
Intern/Field Placement Student	Community service coordinator/supervisor	50
Jury Coordinator (adult volunteer)	1 hour/case	25
Offender Hours	Total hours sentenced	450
Total # of Community Service Hours		1275

Community Service Sites for 2019



1. Adopt-a-Highway clean-up (BYC)
2. Albany City Recreation
3. American Legion
4. Arbor Hill Elementary School
5. BYC Annual Letter Campaign
6. BYC Fundraiser – Returnable can drive for deposit as donation
7. BYC Law Day Event – set up and clean-up
8. BCHS – working with a custodian
9. Bethlehem Central Middle School Garden
10. Camphill Village
11. Clearing fire hydrants/storm drains of snow
12. Clipper Gods
13. Community Education
14. Delmar Dash
15. Eggstravaganza (Town of Bethlehem)
16. National Night Out
17. Regional Food Bank
18. Special Olympics
19. Town of Bethlehem – Courtroom cleaning and Parks and Recreation deep cleaning
20. Unity House
21. Walk and Roll (Pedestrian and Bicycle event)

Classes: (Each offered on multiple occasions)
Drug and Alcohol Class
Peer Pressure Class