

### Executive Summary

#### **YACC: An Evaluation of the Young Adult Community Conferencing Program in Magisterial District Court 15-1-04, West Chester, PA**

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**“Introduction:** The evaluation of the Young Adult Community Conferencing (YACC) program was requested by the Center for Resolutions and the Magisterial District Court 15-1-04. The primary purpose of this evaluation is to assess the first year of the program (Fiscal Year 2007) and to provide that information to the grantor, the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board. Based on the information secured through the various methods described herein, this evaluator concludes that the YACC program not only had a successful first year, but provides a model for addressing underage and binge drinking that becomes part of the legal system that could be used in Magisterial District Courts throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, particularly in jurisdictions with high numbers of young adults, particularly those towns and boroughs which are integrated with institutions of higher education.”

The Young Adult Community Conferencing (YACC) Program utilizes the “balanced and restorative justice” (BARJ) philosophy of justice to address young adults charged with “quality of life” summary offenses, often related to underage or binge drinking.

According to principles of the BARJ model, crime is an injury to individuals as well as to the community, and a high degree of crime control cannot be achieved without active community involvement. Implementation of this philosophy is directed toward achieving three main goals: accountability, community safety, and competency development.

The YACC program extends the concepts of restorative justice to young adults, ages 18 to 25, and is offered in exchange for fines and costs on summary offenses in which the victims are likely to be area residents generally rather than individuals. The intention is to address these young adults in a manner which takes into account their age, maturity, and nature of the offenses.

The time period of the evaluation is the start-up year of the YACC program. A portion of the year was spent developing program materials, recruiting, and conducting volunteer trainings. The program began functioning after these initial steps were completed. Forms were improved, and recruiting and training continued throughout the year.

Magisterial District Judge Gwenn Knapp of District Court 15-1-04 in West Chester identified both the need for a meaningful program for the young adult offenders that addresses the issues their crimes bring to the borough, and the parameters of such a program. Center for Resolutions, a non-profit agency responsible for Youth Aid Panel programs in Chester County, developed and implemented the program together with the Court.

Currently, there are enough donated spaces, volunteer community representatives, and volunteer facilitators to run four conferences each month, enabling eight young adult offenders to participate each month. At each conference, the offender discusses the offense, and community representatives have the opportunity to speak to the impact that behavior has on the community. Together they identify projects appropriate to the offense.

All participants completed survey forms to provide feedback on the process. In every survey, community members were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the way the case was handled. All offenders also expressed positive feelings on the process and their participation in it.

“The major strength of this project was the development and implementation of a community initiated, community based response to a longstanding problem of college towns everywhere.... The results of this new approach have been tangible demonstrations of student recognition of other skills they possessed that could be positive alternatives to alcohol or alcohol in excess.”