



COUNTY OF YOLO
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
JEFF W. REISIG, DISTRICT ATTORNEY

NEIGHBORHOOD COURT YEAR-END REPORT 2013



A New Initiative from the Office of District Attorney Jeff Reisig

Neighborhood Court seeks to address nonviolent and low-level crimes through community-based solutions to swiftly redress the harm caused by such offenses outside of the traditional criminal justice system. The purpose of the program is to address criminal violations that impact the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Court is an alternative to Criminal Court. Instead of charging cases for criminal prosecution, the District Attorney's Office may refer certain criminal cases (misdemeanors and infractions) to a panel of community volunteers who comprise the Neighborhood Court.

Neighborhood Court utilizes restorative justice concepts which identify crime as acts that cause harm to people and communities. Emphasis is placed on the offender voluntarily accepting responsibility for his conduct and repairing the harm done to the victim and the community.

Another goal of Neighborhood Court is for all parties to understand the root cause of the crime so that appropriate agreements can be entered into to help rehabilitate the offender and ensure the conduct is not repeated.

Ultimately, Neighborhood Court is a process that has the potential for the victim, the offender and the community to communicate directly with each other in a safe environment and work on repairing the harm in a way that will allow all the parties to move forward in a positive direction as equal members of our community.



Direct Victim Participation in Resolving Cases

The primary goal of Neighborhood Court is changing the focus in criminal cases from the defendant to the victim, to make the process victim centric. This program has now successfully transitioned from community based offenses to include cases where individual citizens are victims of crimes such as battery, theft, vandalism and trespassing. To that end, this Fall three victims chose to participate in Neighborhood Court Victim Offender Conferences. They were given the opportunity to express directly to the offender how the offender's criminal conduct personally affected them. They also participated in the agreement that determined how these offenders would repair the harm caused by their criminal offenses. Research suggests these conferences between victim and offender have the highest rates of victim satisfaction, offender accountability and lowest level of recidivism.

One victim of a battery stated that "the outcome [of the Victim Offender Conferences] would vary based upon the parties involved. This particular instance was exceptionally redemptive and positive. I enjoyed the positive outcome and the insightful process. I learned a lot and it provided me with an opportunity to improve my patience."

Another victim of a vandalism noted that the Victim Offender Conference he participated in led to reconciliation for both parties and a meaningful relationship. "It was a great process, to have this option to allow the community to solve these issues was so empowering."

The goal for Neighborhood Court in 2014 is to increase the number of cases where victims can choose to participate in Victim Offender Conferences instead of having their cases prosecuted in court. The vision of victims, offenders and community members sitting in a circle, discussing the crime, how to make things right and coming to an agreement as to what the offender will do to make things right is the future of the Neighborhood Court program.

Expanding into West Sacramento in 2014

Neighborhood Court is expanding into the City of West Sacramento in 2014. The program will be introduced on February 20th from 7-9 pm at the West Sacramento Library followed by the recruitment and training of volunteers.

The Volunteers

The community volunteers for Neighborhood Court serve as “panelists” and “facilitators.” Panelists are community residents from the affected communities who have agreed to meet with the parties involved in an effort to reach an agreement about how to repair the harm. Panelists have been trained in restorative justice and problem solving. Facilitators are also trained community volunteers who serve as a type of mediator in the Neighborhood Court process involving the panelists, the victim and the offender. The volunteers are NOT defense attorneys, prosecutors, or judges. They are local residents, merchants, students, parents, and retired folks who are committed to improving the quality of life in their community.



Neighborhood Court volunteers spent many hours in training to learn the dynamics of Restorative Justice.

Neighborhood Court would not be possible without the hard work of the dedicated volunteers.

ELIGIBILITY AND STATISTICS

To be eligible for Neighborhood Court, an offender must not be on probation or parole, pending any other criminal charges, and must not have a criminal history. Only certain offenses (some misdemeanors and infractions) are eligible for Neighborhood Court. Neighborhood Court is designed to resolve cases quickly and in the best interest of the victim and community.

Participants who successfully complete Neighborhood Court agreements will have their case closed. This means they will not have an embarrassing criminal conviction on their record that could impact future employment or licensing. Participants are able to quickly resolve their case instead of endless and expensive court appearances.

REFERRALS	DPD	UCD	TOTALS
CONFERENCES HELD	125	28	153
PENDING COMPLETION	28	9	37
COMPLETED PROGRAM	95	19	114
FAILED PROGRAM	2	0	2

(As of 12/31/13)

AVERAGE TIME TO COMPLETION	
NEIGHBORHOOD COURT	25 DAYS
CRIMINAL COURT	180 DAYS

CRIME TYPES FOR ACCEPTED CASES
Petty Theft
Drunk in Public
Vandalism
Minor in Possession of Alcohol
Public Urination
Open Container in Public
Noise Violations
Battery
Resisting Arrest

**Example of agreements that are
entered into by the offender and the NHC panelists**

Violation

Agreement

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Theft | The Offender will write a four page essay on the impacts and consequences on the community of shoplifting. The Offender will write an apology letter to Nugget Market. The agreement will be completed within two weeks of the conference date. |
| Drunk in Public | The Offender will contact the UCD Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs Intervention Service Coordinator within two weeks of the conference and make an appointment to take/complete BASIC/ATOD programs. Continue to meet as deemed necessary through 2013. Comply with all direction given, including further education and attending alcoholics anonymous. The Offender is to be in full compliance by 12/31/13. |
| Public Urination | Complete three hours of community service with the Davis Graffiti Abatement Program. |
| Noise violation | Write a one page paper covering and summarizing the Davis Noise Ordinance and how it applies to parties. |
| Noise violation | The Offender will contact the eight neighbors closest to his residence in person and give each neighbor a letter with his contact information (email and phone number) and encourage them to contact him directly if there is a concern about noise from his home. |

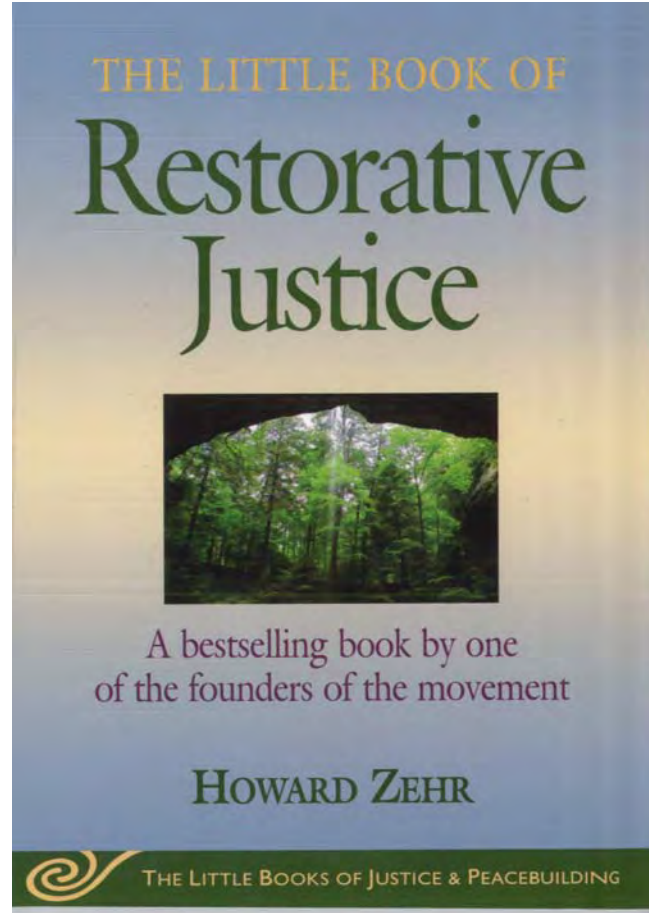
What Offenders are Saying

...I really appreciate that a program like Neighborhood Court exists in the community. I think treating cases like mine in this more intimate, reflective manner is much more effective than a full on criminal court...

...I felt extremely comfortable throughout the entire session. I was pleased with the overall conduct and structure of Neighborhood Court. I am very gracious to have been able to take part in this program...

... This is a great program that lets first offenders understand what they did and how their offense affects others. This program also gives the offenders a chance to make things right. Having everyone be respectful to one another really made a comfortable atmosphere, easier to talk and come to a resolution...

...I felt the Neighborhood Court program was well run and very fair to both myself and the community. I would strongly advise it to anyone who has the option, and I am very grateful for the experience...



What Volunteers are Saying

...All around, I have been extremely impressed with the program and find that the concept of restorative justice is something that the criminal justice system needs to really invest in to reduce crime... -- Katie Reilly

...Neighborhood court provides a process that promotes positive listening, support and understanding. Restorative justice facilitates problem solving, healthy resolution and increased awareness for all participants by the community for the community. It also creates a stronger, more cohesive relationship with UCD. I believe law enforcement and other agencies share this view to some extent... -- Ray Carboni

...It's very exciting to be part of a program that's helping people get their lives together and restore their place in the Davis/UCD community. The Neighborhood Court Program is making a valuable contribution to Yolo County's criminal justice system... -- Joe Schwartz

...I think this program is off to a very good start. My experience thus far has been that panelists have a reasonable understanding of the "restorative" theory behind the program, as reflected in their questioning and comments. Facilitators vary in respect to their "directiveness" in the process, but all seem to have handled the cases well. In none of the cases that I have participated in have I felt the facilitator was particularly challenged, but we have been dealing with very minor offenses. In my experience thus far, all of the offenders seem genuinely to have benefited from the process and, in some cases, to have expressed sincere gratitude for the panel's efforts. I'd like to see the program expand to include property offenses and offenses involving individual victims... -- Manny Medeiros