

value of having an ACT/CTC partnership is best exemplified by the recent award of a \$460,000, four-year grant to the Abington Police Department in collaboration with the Aldersgate Youth Service Bureau. This grant opportunity was specifically targeted to CTC communities in Pennsylvania and will fund two new programs: a Web site calendar of events for Abington youth and

a student forum currently being developed. Communities That Care helps ACT fulfill its mission begun in 1994 to continue to place youth as the most important aspect of the future. If you have questions or would like to find out how you can be involved in this effort, please contact Dr. Geary at 215-881-7533.

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## Youth Aid Panels: Successfully Serving Abington for One and A Half Years

An Abington Township police officer arrives at the scene to find 1) young people vandalizing a property, 2) an Abington youth caught shoplifting \$35 of merchandise at the Willow Grove Park Mall, 3) two Abington High Senior School students fighting on school grounds. What do these events have in common?

They involve young offenders who would typically be given citations for disorderly conduct and channeled into the local court system, ending up with records. In fact, these are typical cases handled by Abington's Youth Aid Panels that have been serving the community since December, 1999.

The panels comprise a group of local, volunteer residents who help Abington first-time offenders accept responsibility for their delinquent acts. Panels convene once a month to hear up to five cases each. To serve on Youth Aid Panels, community volunteers committed to three months of weekly training in skills for interviewing, assessment, and conflict resolution. They developed knowledge of available social services, laws, and ordinances.

Panelists only see juveniles who have been recommended by the responding officer and the juvenile detective assigned to

the case. Panelists meet with juveniles and family members to discuss the incident in question and then determine appropriate consequences. Often, juveniles are required to attend counseling, submit to random drug tests, write apologies or essays about their actions, and perform community service. All community service is directly supervised by an adult and has included shoveling snow for the homebound, assisting with projects at the Abington Art Center, and working with Special Olympics and various youth programs in the township.

"We attempt to match the consequences to the act," explains Sergeant Mike Webb, Commander of the Community Policing Division and a Youth Aid Panel liaison officer. "We feel that some juveniles just need an appropriate push in the right direction. We want to do the right thing by showing young people the consequences of their acts and having them serve the community they offended in a positive way."

There are currently four Youth Aid Panels serving Abington. In their first year and a half, panelists have heard close to 80 cases.