

Columbia County Youth Aid Panel

The Youth Aid Panel is a selected and trained group of community volunteers who work together to resolve summary and misdemeanor offenses committed by first time juvenile offenders in Columbia County who are willing to give an admission to the offense. A purpose of the panel is to settle minor juvenile matters out of Court and to help juveniles avoid obtaining an official Court record. Their acceptance of the invitation to participate in the panel process is voluntary. If declined the referral will be returned to the District Court or the Juvenile Probation Department.

A panel meeting is not an adversarial process and representation by a lawyer is unnecessary. Panel members discuss the nature of the offense and determine workable solutions to the issue at hand with the juvenile and family. The panel is not empowered to act as judge or jury in deciding guilt or innocence. Therefore if a juvenile intends to deny involvement in the incident the case will be processed through the Court system.

The panel develops a contract for the juvenile to complete which addresses the offense with accountability sanctions which may include: community service, restitution, apology letters, essays and special projects or assignments depending on the situation and juvenile. Time given to complete the contracts is between one to six months and a monitor from the panel is assigned to each case to maintain phone contact to check on progress. If at anytime the juvenile refuses the contract or fails to complete the conditions the case is returned to the court system.

An exit interview is set for the juvenile to present to the panel their accomplishments in fulfilling the contract conditions. At that time the case is considered closed and the juvenile will not have an official record.