

Young Adult Court

The Young Adult Court (YAC) is a pilot program in the Orange County Superior Court focusing on young adults who are charged with an eligible felony in Orange County. The goal of this program is to reduce recidivism and promote positive life outcomes by (1) providing developmentally appropriate support to participants of the program and (2) permit them the opportunity to have their felony charge reduced to a misdemeanor or dismissed. The Young Adult Court is currently held alternating Fridays with Judge Maria Hernandez presiding in Department C1 of the Orange County Superior Court. The Young Adult Court is a collaboration between several agencies and stakeholders, including the Orange County Superior Court, the Orange County District Attorney's Office, the Orange County Public Defender's Office, the Orange County Probation Department, as well as a number of community providers that offer assistance with counseling, housing, employment, and education (e.g., the Orangewood Foundation). In an effort to help these young adults to succeed and to ensure that they do not recidivate, this collaborative project offers intensive supervision through probation and provides services in a variety of areas, including, but not limited to, referrals to and assistance in finding stable housing, stable employment, registration and enrollment in junior college and university studies, parenting classes, and basic life skills. The Young Adult Court takes referrals of defendants from Orange County that are between the ages of 18 to 25 years old that meet program criteria. The members of the YAC team meet and discuss the defendants that are referred to this program and determine which are acceptable candidates. In addition, priority is typically given to defendants who have needs that the court is suited to address (i.e., housing, food insecurity, education). The Young Adult Court program also includes a research component in collaboration with the University of California, Irvine (<https://3dlab.psychology.uci.edu/young-adult-court/>). Dr. Elizabeth Cauffman, who has done extensive research in the area of juvenile law and the impact of the criminal justice system on young adults, leads a research team that includes a long-term comparative study of the defendants in this program. In order to determine if young adults who go through the YAC program do better, worse, or about the same as young adults who do not, the UCI research team interviews all participants who are eligible for the program, regardless of whether they are invited to participate in YAC or not. The research addresses, among other things, the impact that these holistic services have on young adults and whether it will affect their long-term progress and levels of recidivism.