


Channels: 

Welcome

- [Send us your feedback](#)
- [Subscribe to the Tribune](#)
- [Advertise with us](#)

Monday, January 21



Leading The Way To Justice

BRENNA R. KELLY bkelly@tampatrib.com

Published: Sep 20, 2001

The Town 'N Country community takes a pioneering step in dealing with juvenile crime through a citizens' board.

TOWN 'N COUNTRY - A 14 year old who stole a bike from a school. A teen who got caught shoplifting.

Each arrested, charged, taken to the county's Juvenile Assessment Center.

Now what should happen to them?

On Saturday, people just like you will decide.

Seven Town 'N Country residents, including a grandmother, a 19-year-old music store manager, a baggage handler and a mobile home park manager, will meet as the Town 'N Country Neighborhood Accountability Board.

They will hear five cases of teens who are charged with a first-time misdemeanor.

The board will discuss the crime with the youth and the victim, then devise a plan to get the teen back on the right track and repair the harm the crime caused to the community.

If the child successfully completes the plan, he or she will not have a formal finding of guilt on record.

"I think everybody can say or do something that they wish they could suck back in like a vacuum cleaner," board member Christine Weber said. "Especially young people ... they deserve a chance. There's a lot a of people out there that don't believe that."

Leading The Way

be the first one in the state to hear cases, said Lora Karas, alternative sanctions coordinator for Tampa's 13th Judicial Circuit, which received a \$14,000 grant for the program. Boards also are forming in West Tampa, Palm River, New Tampa and Macfarlane Park.

"Unfortunately we have enough cases to give them," Karas said. Each year, of the 10,000 juveniles arrested in Hillsborough County, 3,000 of them go through a diversion program.

The Town 'N Country board plans to meet one Saturday a month at the Hillsborough sheriff's substation where members they will hear five cases at a time. A sheriff's deputy will be at the office during the hearings, which are not open to the public. To be eligible for the program, the teen has to admit they committed to the crime, waive his their right to a speedy trial, and - to ensure that the focus remains on Town 'N Country - live in 33615 and 33634 ZIP codes, Karas said.

Crime victims will be asked to come so they can explain to the teen how the crime affected them, both monetarily and emotionally.

"Victims can teach more than the JAC center can because these are just the adults in authority that the kids are fighting against anyway," Weber said.

The idea, officials say, is to get the children to understand the ramifications of their crime so they won't do it again. Board members, victims and the offender's families will decide on a five-week plan for the teen.

"We can give them housework, yard work, or community service," Weber said. The teen could be ordered to write an apology to the victim, or write an essay about how to "make it right to the victim, your family, your community."

Restrictions could be placed on television, video games, the teen could be ordered to obey curfew, or have perfect attendance at school.

"This provides an opportunity for a real wake-up call for the family," Karas said. And gives parents a reinforcement. If the teen does not complete the plan, the case will be sent to the state attorney's office for prosecution.

Neighbors, Not Judges

The board has been meeting around Lucy Carroll's dining room table for three months to prepare for Saturday. Carroll and her husband, Jim, learned about the program from the sheriff's Town 'N Country Community Council and decided to join because they want to help youngsters and reduce crime.

"These are not kids who have never been in trouble," Lucy Carroll, 60, said. "This is going to give them an opportunity to get away from it."

get away from it.

The members, who all live in Town 'N Country, spent two days training at the YMCA in a program taught by Florida Atlantic University. Each has a binder bursting with case studies and literature.

Weber, 41, learned about the board from a Hillsborough County Neighborhood Watch meeting. She and the Carrolls recruited some others, who then recruited more.

Sharon Robertson, 60, director of administration at the Tampa Marine Institute, learned about the Department of Juvenile Justice program, and urged Yarah Diaz, mother of a teenage son, to join. Robertson also recruited her neighbor Robert Grays. Grays, 49, thinks his experience will be valuable to the board and the teen offenders. Grays, an American Airlines baggage handler, was 15 when he started drinking, then he graduated to cocaine and crack. He has been sober seven years.

"I can tell them I understand what you are going through, I have been there," Grays said. "And I have lost everything behind it."

He has also been on the other side of the law. Before he became sober, he was arrested for drunken driving.

"I really want to help the victims, but I also want to give the kids an opportunity to get out from that burden," said Grays, who is also a minister at Without Walls International Church. He is also planning a prison ministry and a drugs and alcohol ministry.

The youngest board member is Jason Carroll, 19, no relation to Lucy and Jim Carroll. With his long hair and black T-shirts, Carroll doesn't look like the type who might be interested in juvenile justice. But growing up in Town 'N Country, the recent Sickles High School graduate said he has seen teens headed down the wrong path.

"I am closer to their age so I will be able to have an impact," said Carroll, manager of Warehouse Music. "It's going to be something as more of a shock value for me to be there. It's something that's not really expected."

Like the other members, Weber, property manager of Fountain View Estates, sees the board as a way to save a child before it's too late.

Making teens perform their community service or other sanctions in Town 'N Country will strengthen the area's sense of community, Weber said.

"You're creating what our sign says, 'what a neighborhood should be.' That's what they call Town 'N Country, and they're right. And if we can interrupt crime, that's cool."

(CHART) (C) NEIGHBORHOOD ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD

WHAT: A board of Town 'N Country residents who will hear misdemeanor cases and decide on sanctions for the child.

WHERE: Meets monthly to hear five cases of first-time juvenile offenders.

WHY: Provides an opportunity for the victim to be involved in deciding what sanctions should be placed on the offender; makes the offender aware of the impact of his or her behavior and provides an opportunity to take responsibility for it.

INFORMATION: Call Lucy Carroll at (813) 884-8736 or Christine Weber at (813) 884-3407

Subscribe to the Tribune and get two weeks free!



[Return to Top](#)



[Breaking News](#) | [Nation/World](#) | [Metro](#) | [Sports](#) | [Business](#) | [Baylife](#)
[Friday Extra](#) | [Classified](#) | [Recent Editions](#) | [Archive](#) | [Home](#)

TBO.com IS Tampa Bay Online
© 2001, Media General Inc. All rights reserved
[Member agreement](#) and [privacy statement](#)

