



Spotlight on East King County Youth Traffic Court (*continued*)

Creating Safer Drivers

Youth Traffic Court helps young people to be safer drivers, which benefits them and other people on the road – a win/win! “A teenager participating in youth traffic court leaves with a far better understanding of their role as a responsible driver than if they had simply gone to adult traffic court,” Judge Klinge explains. “Instead of paying a fine and going on their way, they learn more deeply why it is crucial to drive safely.”

Many students who have completed the program note how it has improved their driving. One 16-year-old student cited by the Redmond Police for speeding says, “After going through Youth Traffic Court, I am more aware of the harm I can cause while driving, and to be more careful.”

“Accidental” Learning

Youth Traffic Court focuses on learning – both for the students who receive traffic tickets as well as their peers who handle their cases and lead the program. Although much of the learning is planned, Judge Finkle explains that students experience a lot of “accidental” learning. Such learning is spontaneous and informal, but often is very profound.

“Many of the student leaders in Youth Traffic Court think they are going to educate the respondents about being a safer driver, but they end up learning many things about skilled driving themselves by virtue of participating in numerous cases,” explains Judge Finkle. “Students in the program also learn to work with professionals, such as judges, which is a critical life skill.”

Continuing to Grow and Innovate

In 2021, Youth Traffic Court continued growing to the point that it had more cases than available calendar space. To help calendars run more smoothly, the student co-presidents – Shreya Karnik and Medhya Goel – pitched the idea of going straight to the restorative justice circle discussion, rather than first holding a “hearing.” Judge Finkle and Judge Klinge gave them the go-ahead to try it. The new format enables Youth Traffic Court to have two participants at a time in a single session, which helps improve learning about driving for everyone, while smoothing out the calendar if a respondent does not show up. “We thought it was important to help the students develop the confidence to try new things and to avoid being bound by the ‘old way’ of doing things,” says Judge Finkle.