

## JUVENILE JUSTICE INITIATIVES

The Center for Court Innovation operates a broad range of programs that work with young people. The Center's initiatives focus on five key areas: early intervention, prevention, victim assistance, alternatives to confinement, and youth engagement.

### Early Intervention

The Center for Court Innovation operates community courts in Red Hook and Harlem that are experimenting with new approaches to delinquency cases.

- **Red Hook.** Located in a low-income Brooklyn neighborhood, the Red Hook Community Justice Center seeks to provide the juvenile justice system with an expanded set of tools with which to respond to delinquent behavior. This means enhancing both service delivery (offering links to mentoring, tutoring, community service, counseling and other crucial supports) and monitoring (providing case management services to track participation in services). The Justice Center has encouraged the Probation Department to adjust more cases, diverting them from formal case processing. And by providing the judge with new sentencing options, the Justice Center helps to reduce the chances that a young person will be placed in a custodial facility.
- **Harlem.** The Harlem Community Justice Center works intensively with young people at the first signs of delinquent behavior, giving them the help they need to avoid further offending. The Justice Center courtroom handles cases involving young people apprehended for non-violent drug and property offenses, linking participants to services like drug treatment, counseling and education. Compliance is monitored by the judge, who requires participants to come back to court frequently to report on their progress. Each year, more than 300 young people participate in programming at the Justice Center.

### Prevention

The Center's prevention programs target young people who are at risk of future criminal justice involvement, focusing on accountability and skill building to allow youth to make more positive decisions about their lives.

- **Youth Court.** The Center for Court Innovation operates youth courts in Red Hook, Staten Island, Harlem, Greenpoint, and Newark, New Jersey. Youth courts train local teenagers to serve as jurors, judges and advocates, handling real-life cases involving their peers. The goal is to use positive peer pressure to ensure that young people who have committed minor offenses pay back the community and receive the help they need to avoid further involvement in the justice system. Key features include: holding young people accountable for their actions through community service, letters of apology, or essays; linking young people to appropriate social services (tutoring or mentoring); and providing intensive leadership to youth court members. The Center's youth courts handle 400 cases and train 100 members per year. The Center provides training to youth courts across New York State.
- **Attendance Court.** Attendance court provides schools with a new tool to address chronic lateness and unexcused absences before a formal report alleging educational neglect is written. This voluntary program features a flexible and comprehensive approach to identifying and serving the needs of the

entire family. The program coordinator conducts a detailed assessment of every participating family, develops individualized service plans that may include referrals for counseling, tutoring, mentoring, parenting skills, and after-school programs and monitors program and school attendance. Regular hearings, presided over by a hearing officer (a retired judge or justice system professional) are convened to review each student's progress in meeting established goals. Attendance court works with 50 youths per year.

#### Victim Assistance

The Center works with young people who have experienced violence in their lives, emphasizing counseling and links to other support services.

- **The Child and Adolescent Witness Support Program.** The Child and Adolescent Witness Support Program helps young people overcome the negative impact of traumatic crime experiences. Based in the Bronx District Attorney's Office, the program provides support to a young person through the investigative, pre-trial, trial, and post-trial phases of the criminal prosecution. In particular, the program offers on-site trauma-focused therapy to help overcome the impact that exposure to a violent crime can have on the physical, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional functioning of a young person. The program provides services to over 100 young people each year.
- **Youthful Offender Domestic Violence Court.** The Center helped launch youthful offender domestic violence courts in the Bronx and Brooklyn to address the needs of teen victims and abusers. The courts hear misdemeanor criminal cases involving domestic violence charges in which the defendant is between the ages of 16 and 19 years old. The model is primarily designed to promote victim safety through links to a specialized victim advocate and social services. At the same time, the youthful offender domestic violence court model seeks to enhance accountability of adolescents arrested for dating violence through educational classes that focus on healthy relationships and respect. The youthful offender domestic violence courts work with 600 victims and defendants each year.

#### Youth Engagement

The Center's youth engagement programs seek to involve youth in policy and neighborhood issues that directly affect them.

- **Youth Justice Board.** The Youth Justice Board is an after-school leadership program that applies the insights of young people to improving New York City's juvenile justice system. The board brings together a diverse team of 15 to 20 New York City teenagers to study an issue that affects them. Participants conduct extensive interviews formulate policy recommendations, and present their findings to elected officials and key state and local policymakers. The issues the Youth Justice Board has addressed include school safety, juvenile reentry, alternatives to detention, and permanency planning. Many of the Youth Justice Board's ideas have been implemented, including the creation of teen spaces in Family Court and information packets to explain the court process to foster care youths.
- **Youth ECHO.** Youth ECHO seeks to reduce teenage crime in the Red Hook Houses by engaging young residents to become change agents within their peer groups. Youth Echo understands that crime and delinquency spread within peer groups when opinion leaders model and encourage criminal

behavior and that the opposite is also true: when popular teens model pro-social behavior, their peers often follow. The project uses ethnographic research methods to identify youth leaders in the community and then recruits participants to design and carry out a youth-led project designed to change their peers' perceptions of juvenile crime.

#### Alternatives to Confinement

The Center for Court Innovation operates alternative-to-confinement programs in Queens and Staten Island that hold local teens accountable, provide accurate information to the courts about compliance, and provide needed services to participants.

- **QUEST.** Queens Engagement Strategies for Teens (QUEST) is an alternative-to-detention program that supervises youths who have delinquency matters pending in Queens Family Court. Housed in a church in Jamaica just blocks from the Queens Family Court, QUEST provides both community monitoring and after-school programming. On-site social workers and case managers meet regularly with participants and their families to ensure that they are getting the help they need and complying with the conditions of release. Through a specialized program component, QUEST Futures, QUEST provides intensive services to young people with mental health concerns in the juvenile justice system in Queens. QUEST Futures works with young people with mental health disorders beginning at the earliest stages of the delinquency process and remains involved with them and their families throughout the life of their cases. QUEST Futures provides screening, assessments, treatment planning, service coordination, case management, and supervision. All told, QUEST works with over 270 young people each year.
- **Staten Island Youth Justice Center.** The Staten Island Youth Justice Center is a youth development, support and after-school program serving justice involved adolescents in Staten Island. It consists of two principal components – a teen-led youth court, in which locally trained teenagers hear actual cases involving peers, and an alternative to juvenile detention, in which young people arrested for delinquency are supervised in the community while their cases are pending in family court. By intervening in the lives of young people at the point of their initial encounters with the justice system, the Staten Island Youth Justice Center aims to stop the cycle of crime for young people while reducing reliance on detention rates, offers all participating young people leadership development and civic engagement training and opportunities designed to prevent further involvement in the justice system. In its first year of operation the Youth Court heard 139 cases and trained 40 members. The alternative to detention program received 65 referrals from family court.

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The programs described above represent just a sampling of the Center for Court Innovation's juvenile justice work. Other youth initiatives include an effort to combat gun violence in Crown Heights, a job training program for teens at the Midtown Community Court, community service leadership training in Harlem, and a variety of youth development projects in Red Hook, including photography classes, police-teen workshops and an AmeriCorps community service program.