

RED HOOK COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTER: DOCUMENTED RESULTS

The Red Hook Community Justice Center is a multi-jurisdictional community court (hearing criminal, family and housing cases) that seeks to advance a coordinated response to local problems such as drugs, crime, and landlord-tenant disputes. The judge has an array of sanctions and services at his disposal, including community restitution, educational workshops, GED classes, drug treatment and mental health counseling. The Justice Center is located in a geographically and socially isolated neighborhood in southwest Brooklyn that is home to one of New York's oldest and largest public housing developments. The Justice Center serves three police precincts with about 200,000 residents. Results include:

- **Caseload.** Each year, the Justice Center handles roughly 3,000 misdemeanor criminal cases, 11,000 summonses, 500 housing court cases, and 175 juvenile delinquency cases. Among criminal cases, the most frequent charges are drug possession, traffic violations, trespassing, public drinking and minor assault.
- **Sentencing.** The Justice Center seeks to reduce the use of jail and increase the use of alternative sanctions where possible and appropriate. Nearly half of all convicted cases receive a community or social service sentence, which reduces the use of jail as a response to misdemeanor offending.
- **Perceptions of Fairness.** Research indicates that when defendants hold more positive perceptions of the court, they are more likely to comply with judicial orders. In a recent study, Justice Center defendants held significantly more positive perceptions of the judge than defendants in a traditional criminal court.
- **Compliance.** More than 3 out of 4 Justice Center defendants complete their community service mandates compared to the 50 percent benchmark at comparable urban courts.
- **Community Restitution.** Each year, the Justice Center contributes approximately 70,000 hours of community service to Red Hook—about \$500,500 worth of labor, based on the minimum wage.
- **Public Trust.** Positive views of the justice system—police, prosecutors and courts—more than doubled among community members after the Justice Center opened.
- **Levels of Fear.** The percentage of residents who say they are afraid to go to the parks or subway dropped from 77 percent in 1999, before the Justice Center opened, to 43 percent in 2004.
- **Public Support.** In 2004, 78 percent of Red Hook residents felt “positive” about having a community court in their neighborhood.

- **Prevention.** In addition to handling court cases, the Justice Center frequently serves as a laboratory for new crime prevention. From 2004 to 2008, the Justice Center piloted an HIV/substance abuse prevention program for Red Hook youth, utilizing a peer education model. Participation significantly improved knowledge of HIV/AIDS and what constitutes risky sexual behavior. From 2008-2009, the Justice Center ran a youth engagement program for teenagers in the Red Hook Houses. These teens created innovative education campaigns that addressed issues relevant to youth such as drug dealing and dropping out of school. Other examples of prevention programs at the Justice Center include youth court, police-teen workshops, a summer photography project and an Americorp service program.
- **Recognition.** The Justice Center has served as a model for replication nationally and internationally, including courts in New York, Dallas, Hartford, Portland, Seattle, Liverpool (England), Melbourne (Australia) and Vancouver (Canada). The project has received numerous awards, including national prizes from the National Criminal Justice Association, the American Bar Association, and the Rudy Bruner Foundation. In addition, the Justice Center was the subject of an acclaimed PBS documentary, *Red Hook Justice*.
- **Further Reading (available at www.courtinnovation.org)**
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 - Frazer, M.S. 2007. Examining defendant perceptions of fairness in the courtroom. *Judicature*, 91(1):36-37.
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 - Karafin, D.L. 2008. *Community Courts Across the Globe: A Survey of Goals, Performance Measures and Operations*. Open Society Foundation for South Africa.
 - Moore, K. 2004. *Op Data, 2001: Red Hook, Brooklyn*. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation.
 - Swaner, R. and White, E. 2010. *Drifting between Worlds: Delinquency and Positive Engagement Among Red Hook Youth*. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation.
 - Swaner, R and White, E. 2009. *A Pilot Program on Youth Engagement: Lessons from Youth ECHO*. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation.
 - Swaner, R. 2009. *Teens Educating About Community Health: Examining the Efficacy of an HIV/Substance Abuse Teen Peer Education Program*. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation.