

**CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION**

**New York City Criminal Justice Coordinator  
Bronx Community Solutions – Year Two  
First Quarter Report**

Period Covered by This Report: 07/01/06 to 09/30/06

**Service Targets** *(please see below for contract-to-date adjustment description)*

<b>Target</b>	<b>Reporting Period</b>	<b>Contract Year to Date</b>	<b>Goal</b>
<b>Track One</b>			
Intake	2148	2148	999
Completion of 50% of mandate	1411	1411	879
Completion of 100% of mandate as of 3/31/06	1220	1220	777
<b>Track Two</b>			
Intake	22	22	140
Completion of 33% of mandate	9	9	123
Completion of 66% of mandate	7	7	100
Completion of 100% of mandate as of 9/30/06	6	6	85
<b>Track Three</b>			
Intake	6	6	50
Completion of 33% of mandate	3	3	37
Completion of 66% of mandate	3	3	31
Completion of 100% of mandate as of 9/30/06	3	3	25

**Summary**

Bronx Community Solutions is an experiment that applies lessons from New York’s award-winning community courts to a courthouse handling 50,000 misdemeanor cases annually. Bronx Community Solutions is an alternative to incarceration program that targets non-violent misdemeanor offenders arraigned at the Bronx Criminal Court and combines punishment (community service) and help (drug treatment, job training, counseling). The product of a planning process involving the Unified Court System, the Bronx District Attorney’s Office, the Criminal Justice Coordinator’s Office of the City of New York, the defense bar, the New York City Department of Probation, local community boards, the Center for Court Innovation and others, Bronx Community Solutions began operations in January 2005 in one of the two full-time arraignment parts in the Bronx. Bronx Community Solutions then expanded to accept cases from both arraignment parts, conference parts and night and weekend arraignment parts. The project’s services are now available to all of the more than 40 judges working in the newly

consolidated Bronx County Criminal Division. The following describes Bronx Community Solutions' progress towards contractual deliverables during the specified reporting period.

### **Contract Modification Update**

As discussed in our most recent progress report, the Center for Court Innovation and the Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator have negotiated new contract deliverables. These new deliverables take into the fact that Bronx Community Solutions operations began contemporaneously with the onset of the new Bronx Misdemeanor Treatment Court, which targets a similar and overlapping population as the intended Track Three clients: chronic, substance abusing misdemeanants. Thus in our first year of operations many defendants who might have been appropriate for Track Three have instead been screened out and referred to the Treatment Court. Our goals for Track Three in year 1 of the contract have therefore been lowered accordingly. We continue to meet (and in fact far surpass) our milestones for Tracks One and Two.

Last quarter, we reported on our efforts to ensure that in year 2 of the contract we would have access to a sufficient number of Track Three clients. The fact is that many of the offenders referred to the Treatment Court are in the end determined not to be good candidates for the program: either they do not have a chemical or alcohol addiction, or they reject drug treatment (the program offers a minimum of six months outpatient treatment) outright. We are now working to implement a series of initiatives at the court that would allow Bronx Community Solutions to screen those clients who, under the current protocols, otherwise would be initially referred to the Bronx Misdemeanor Treatment Court. Since so many of these individuals are eventually determined not to be good Treatment Court candidates, Bronx Community Solutions believes that early screening for Bronx Community Solutions will garner a significant number of Track Three candidates. Bronx Community Solutions is working with court personnel, the district attorney's office, the defense bar, the Treatment Court, and other specialized courts in the Bronx to develop new screening and assessment protocols – protocols designed to ensure that those offenders who need a longer term mandate but are NOT Treatment Court-eligible will have access to Bronx Community Solutions. These new protocols will be implemented by the end of calendar year 2006.

Additionally Bronx Community Solutions staff are continuing to work towards assuming a more substantial screening role for all misdemeanor cases in the Bronx. For example, Bronx Community Solutions is planning to begin screening cases for the Bronx Misdemeanor Mental Health Court via video conferencing to Riker's Island for defendants who are awaiting their next court appearance at the misdemeanor conference part. This is an important population because "in" defendants tend to have more extensive rap sheets and tend to be facing substantial jail sentences, making them more attractive candidates for a long-term community-based mandate. Defendants assessed by project staff may be recommended for the misdemeanor mental health court, the misdemeanor drug court, or Bronx Community Solutions if they are to receive a community-based alternative. We have reached an agreement with the mental health court about initiating this process and are currently working out the technological aspects of doing these assessments via teleconferencing.

### **Program Expansion**

This quarter, Bronx Community Solutions expanded court coverage by assigning a resource coordinator to Supreme Court Parts 25 and 35 to hear misdemeanor drug cases on Tuesdays and Wednesdays (and when otherwise needed). These two particular court parts are the official "narcotic" parts where all drug cases are adjourned on certain misdemeanor calendar days. When tracking cases, we noticed that many Bronx Community Solutions-eligible cases were being sent to Parts 25 and 35 on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Although the Court did not directly express a need for our presence, we noticed that there was a gap in our availability to these parts, in terms of providing information when needed, helping to craft recommendations with the court players (including the District Attorney's Narcotics Bureau), and providing training (formal and informal) to court personnel. This expansion gave us the ability to educate and train the staff of the Narcotics bureau with which we had little contact prior to our expansion. Additionally, this move was part of our overall plan to branch out to court parts where Bronx Community Solutions can have a meaningful role through a direct presence.

As part of this larger goal to be available to all court parts in the Bronx County Criminal Division by the end of 2006, Bronx Community Solutions resource coordinators also expanded courtroom coverage. Although Saturday coverage was already in place for this quarter, plans were made to coordinate Sunday coverage as well. Full weekend coverage will begin the first weekend in October of next quarter. In addition, Bronx Community Solutions staff made a presentation to the new class of assistant district attorneys, as well as new defense attorneys from both the Bronx Defenders and the Legal Aid Society, to review the parameters of the Bronx Community Solutions program. The presentation included a description of our role in the courtroom, offender eligibility determination, collaboration with the courts and the services that are provided.

### **Bronx Community Solutions Procedures**

The determination of acceptance into Bronx Community Solutions is made through the collaboration of judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys in the arraignment, conference or general calendar parts. Screening and identification of eligible clients is facilitated by Bronx Community Solutions staff stationed in the court room who review an eligible defendant's criminal complaint, rap sheet and Criminal Justice Agency pre-trial interview report to make recommendations to the court on an appropriate sentencing alternative based on the individual's criminal history and current charge(s). Sentences to Bronx Community Solutions always specify a length of mandate (which may include social service interventions or community service or a blend of both), a jail alternative to be imposed in the event that a defendant does not complete their mandate and an adjourn date by which the defendant must comply with their mandate.

To ensure compliance, intakes occur immediately after the court assigns an offender to the program whenever possible. In the case of night and weekend arraignments that occur after 9pm or on Sundays, offenders are expected to report to the Bronx Community Solutions office the morning of the next business day. Project staff conducts a short interview to explain the requirements of the program, review contact information and create a schedule for fulfilling the court mandate. Staff also perform a short social service assessment (including questions about whether the individual has a legal residence, a job or a history of drug treatment and/or mental health treatment), based on a similar assessment tool developed at the Midtown Community

Court. The assessment is designed to match the participant's needs to the services available through Bronx Community Solutions, as well as to identify further voluntary services that might be appropriate for the client after their involvement with the court is complete. Information generated by the assessment is logged into the Bronx Community Solutions' specialized computer database, which was adapted from New York City's other community court projects. The treatment and/or community service plan designed for the offender begins as soon as possible – on that day or on the next available day whenever feasible.

Bronx Community Solutions clients are divided into three tracks, which run for different lengths of time and provide different services, as outlined below:

- ◆ Track One is reserved for low-level misdemeanor offenders who are engaged in the program for ten days or less, with an average mandate of 3 to 4 days. These individuals are typically sentenced to either community service or group classes, although some may receive a mandate that combines both elements. Group sessions cover such topics as drug treatment readiness, mental health readiness, job readiness and alternatives to prostitution.
- ◆ Track Two offenders are engaged at Bronx Community Solutions for 10 to 30 days. The average mandate length is 17 days. In addition to the group classes offered in Track One, Track Two clients have access to one-on-one counseling, family counseling and, in some cases, referrals to an outpatient drug treatment program.
- ◆ Track Three is reserved for a small number of repeat misdemeanor offenders and those with complex mental health, family and educational issues, who will be engaged at Bronx Community Solutions for more than 30 days. The average mandate length is 60 days. Participants in this track with a clearly-identified substance abuse problem may be offered, in addition to the services offered to Track Two clients, a longer term drug treatment program that combines periods of detox, residential and outpatient treatment. Participants with complex problems that no single program can address may be given a series of individual counseling sessions to be provided by partner agencies as a gateway to an extended voluntary engagement with services.

Bronx Community Solution's main social service tool is the 16 group classes taught every week at space provided by the New York City Department of Probation. The classes cover a wide variety of topics, from job training and mental health to examining the consequences of bad decision-making. Perhaps more importantly, all of the classes share a similar philosophy and teaching style: they treat participants with respect, encourage open discussion and feedback and offer each individual a chance to voluntarily pursue needed long-term services. On-site classes offered during this quarter included:

- 1) Orientation. Participants are provided with a brief overview of various social services, are encouraged and informed of how to receive housing, drug treatment, mental health services, entitlements, education and employment. Group facilitators are available for immediate referrals.

2) Job Readiness. Participants learn fundamental job seeking skills such as resume writing and interviewing skills to secure job placement.

3) Health Education. Participants are provided with an overview of the HIV epidemic that focuses on education and prevention strategies. Participants are encouraged to get tested and seek additional health referrals. This class is facilitated with help from a partnership with the Department of Health for additional health referrals, free testing, and on-site distribution of prevention resources.

4) Insight Education. In this therapeutically structured group session, individuals learn to identify negative behavioral symptomology and discuss solutions to pervasive mental health issues. Clinical referrals are available through partnership with Bronx Treatment Alternatives to Street Crime (TASC), and participants are encouraged to engage in voluntary mental health services.

5) Decision-Making. This group class focuses on taking personal responsibility for one's actions. Participants discuss plans for the future, emphasizing healthy decision-making, and understanding of the consequences of one's actions.

6) Accepting Responsibility and Corrective Thinking. New this quarter, this two-part class addresses the aggressive behaviors presented by individuals who are arrested for conflict-related offenses. It provides defendants with a cognitive approach toward behavioral change and a set of tools necessary to alter their behaviors by addressing their thoughts and emotions. These combined therapies will help participants examine and identify what triggers their anger and how to respond more appropriately to situations.

Participants who are scheduled for more involved interventions (typically those in Tracks Two and Three) are assigned a social worker, who helps them identify and enroll in appropriate services offsite. Case managers maintain frequent and ongoing contact with community-based partner providers to ascertain compliance status in programs (e.g. residential or out-patient drug treatment or a peer-counseling program for those involved in prostitution) and to troubleshoot issues that are affecting compliance with the judicial sanction.

Currently, five of the 16 social service classes taught weekly at Bronx Community Solutions are co-taught by representatives of agencies like Federated Employment and Guidance Services, Inc. (FEGS), the New York City Department of Health, NarcoFreedom, and Bronx Treatment Alternatives to Street Crime (TASC). By co-teaching these classes with Bronx Community Solutions staff members, representatives of these agencies are able to make immediate voluntary referrals to their programs for services like drug treatment, job training, and help with benefit-related questions. FEGS has also assigned a full-time staff member to Bronx Community Solutions who will teach weekly classes, conduct individual counseling sessions with participants, and identify service providers (including FEGS and other programs) who can work with participants with special needs. Other agencies, such as Urban Youth Alliance, Inc., provide additional voluntary services to program participants.

This year, Bronx Community Solutions has been working on expanding the social services available to participants even further, focusing on employment services, an issue identified as a top priority by judges. This includes working with the Center for Employment Opportunities to provide access to their week-long paid community service projects and the Doe Fund for long-term paid job-training mandates. The Center for Employment Opportunities is also collaborating with Bronx Community Solutions in developing a better job-readiness curriculum for Bronx Community Solutions' social-service classes and by providing professional-development training to Bronx Community Solutions participants.

In a very exciting new development, Bronx Community Solutions, FECS, and Bronx Defenders have begun partnering on a new computer lab and job center that will be housed in space provided by Bronx Defenders with 20 computers donated by FECS. This new center will allow clients of all three organizations to access employment information online, provide a dedicated space for job-training and placement services and referrals, and centralize these three organizations' resources in one location. During this quarter, Bronx Community Solutions, FECS, and Bronx Defenders toured the new space, brought in the computers, and put together a plan of action to have this initiative up and running within the next year.

### **Compliance**

Case managers and compliance monitors rigorously track client participation and help clients to identify and address barriers to successful completion of their mandates. Attendance records for all Bronx Community Solutions-run classes and community service crews are promptly entered into the project's database, along with attendance records for services run by off-site partners, client contact logs and social workers' case notes. These records allow staff to respond immediately to non-compliance. When participants fail to attend their scheduled group class or community service assignment, case managers are notified and attempt to contact the client by phone and mail. Offenders are given one opportunity to reschedule their missed commitment; if a client again fails to comply, the determination to reschedule again is made on a case by case basis. If participants are unable or unwilling to fulfill their mandates, Bronx Community Solutions takes immediate action to notify the court of non-compliance. Similarly, when a client is successful and completes their mandate, a memo is generated for submission to the clerks of the court certifying that the individual has fully complied with the court's directives.

Bronx Community Solutions is currently exploring enhancing the frequency of judicial supervision, including making limited use of a judicial compliance part for individuals sentenced to longer-term mandates (tracks 2 and 3 participants) as well as for individuals reporting on their court date who have only partially completed their mandate. (Currently, individuals who appear on their court date are not required to see a judge.) In addition, Bronx Community Solutions has begun to identify - and contact - individuals who have completed the majority, but not all, of their mandate before their court date to seek to bring them into compliance. This has resulted in fewer individuals having their mandates rescheduled by court personnel on the court appearance return date. Since its inception, program compliance has consistently been maintained around 70%, a 40% increase over compliance rates in the county prior to Bronx Community Solutions' onset.

## **Voluntary Referrals**

One of the goals of Bronx Community Solutions is to engage participants in long-term, voluntary services after their court mandate is complete. Bronx Community Solutions has built relationships with a number of organizations who provide long-term voluntary services to Bronx Community Solutions participants. Service includes everything from helping someone get a job to assisting them in obtaining a birth certificate, a necessary first step for accessing services of any kind for individuals without valid identification. In 2005, about 5% of participants were referred to long-term, voluntary services by program staff – which is in line with what similar alternative to incarceration projects have reported in the past. However, in 2006 so far, the referral percentage has nearly doubled, increasing to 9.6% as new and valuable services have been added to the mix. Over half of these referrals are for employment or job training services, an area cited by judges as the most needed for defendants in the Bronx. Bronx Community Solutions has been working with a number of community-based partner programs, including Urban Youth Alliance, Federated Employment and Guidance Services, the Center for Employment Opportunities, and the Midtown Community Court, in an effort to get defendants the help they need to re-enter the work force and become productive members of the community.

## **Community Engagement**

This quarter, with the assistance of a grant from a private foundation, Bronx Community Solutions bolstered its community outreach efforts by hiring a community initiatives coordinator, whose principal responsibilities include promoting working partnerships with the community to help solve local problems. The new coordinator, T.K. Singleton, had worked previously at FEGS' Career Development Institute, which is located in the South Bronx and serves an older, out-of-school youth population. While at FEGS, she had the opportunity to create and maintain a comprehensive college-bound program for non-traditional college-bound youth. T.K. is an alumnus of one of the largest national AmeriCorps program, City Year. While at City Year, she had the opportunity to work at the start-up site New York as Recruitment Senior Corps member. As a Senior Corps member, T.K. developed and maintained strong relationships with community-based organizations and institutions of learning, which helped her to identify and recruit potential diverse young leaders, ages 17-24 to participate in City Year. She also participated in multiple community transformative service projects in which participants restored parks and schools. The addition of Ms. Singleton to the Bronx Community Solutions staff has greatly increased the program's capacity for community outreach.

*The Bronx Community Solutions Advisory Board:* Unlike police departments or prosecutors' offices, which have staff dedicated to the job of community relations, courts have traditionally held themselves at a reserve from the public. This is in part due to judicial principles of impartiality and fairness – the job of the courts is to enforce and interpret the law, not respond to public opinion. But there's a price to pay for this separation in terms of public faith and confidence in the justice system, as shown by surveys of public opinion that consistently rate state courts as distant and out of touch with the public.

To address this gap between courts and communities, Bronx Community Solutions has organized a project Advisory Board, composed of 25 local residents, clergy leaders, representatives of Bronx-based social service agencies, high school students, a prosecutor, defense attorney and a representative of the Bronx Borough President's Office. The advisory board, which meets on a

quarterly basis, had its second meeting in July 2006. This meeting was attended by over 20 local residents, members of the faith-based and business community, police officers, attorneys and representatives of local community-based organizations, as well as government agencies. The meeting was also attended by a prosecutor from Stockholm, Sweden who was interested in learning about community engagement strategies. At the board's request, Bronx Community Solutions mapped the home addresses of 1,000 Bronx Community Solutions participants, looking for neighborhoods hit hardest by low-level crime. (While coincidental, home addresses are a good proxy for high-crime areas, as the majority of crimes are committed locally.) Bronx Community Solutions then asked the board to talk about the issues faced in these neighborhoods, as well as discuss how the advisory board could respond. The guideline followed was to start small, creating "safe spaces" one street corner or park at a time, and eventually work our way across the Bronx. Ideas included turning an abandoned property into a small business run by Bronx Community Solutions graduates, cleaning and maintaining step streets (built to help pedestrians get up steep hills, step streets are often dangerous and poorly maintained) with local groups, and identifying and supporting grassroots community-based organizations that do excellent work but are often unnoticed. Staff members acted immediately on the step streets idea, meeting with the Bronx Borough President's office to identify step streets in our high-crime neighborhoods. The idea was to send our community service crews out to clean these streets, in partnership with a community-based organization that would be responsible for ongoing maintenance.

The following community stakeholders attended the second Advisory Board meeting:

- Rev. Lawrence Craig, Rainbow Push Coalition
- Moia Dunlop, Bronx Lebanon Hospital Clinic
- Geraldine Eggleston-Hopper, Law Enforcement Advisory Committee
- Frank Fitts, President - 45<sup>th</sup> Precinct Community Council
- Roberto Gargia, Chair of Community Board 2
- Elizabeth Gill, 47<sup>th</sup> Precinct Community Council
- Marisol Halpern, Bronx Borough President's Office
- Hope Harley, Verizon Community Affairs
- Paul Henderson, NYC Probation
- Sister Barbara Lenniger, Thorpe Family Residence
- D. Mack, Law Enforcement Advisory Committee
- Loretta Masterson, Law Enforcement Advisory Committee
- Jonathan Meyer, Stockholm (Sweden) DA
- Aaron Mysliwicz, The Bronx Defenders
- Rosa Otero-Walsh, Patrol Borough Bronx Community Affairs.
- Barbara Robles Gonzalez, Bronx District Attorney's Office
- Meisha Ross-Porter, Principal - Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice

At the next meeting of the Advisory Board, scheduled for October 2006, the members will review the new mobile community service and youth initiatives proposed as potential areas of action. The board will receive more in-depth research and maps about the four target zones

included in our One Neighborhood Plan and will begin discussion around neighborhood priorities and ideas for Bronx Community Solutions projects.

*Community service projects in targeted neighborhoods:* Community service sentences are a fundamental part of Bronx Community Solutions. Since July 2005, Bronx Community Solutions has been responsible for scheduling and supervising community service for thousands of mandated offenders. Traditionally in the Bronx, as in other large urban areas, community service offenders have been sent to large public agencies like the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Metropolitan Transit Authority, where they do valuable work cleaning parks, train stations, and streets.

Bronx Community Solutions has sought to increase the number of community-based organizations (such as business improvement districts, block associations, churches, and soup kitchens) that serve as community service sites. Through this "mobile community service," offenders are transported to small and medium-sized community-based projects throughout the Bronx in Bronx Community Solutions' 15-passenger community-service van. The idea is to partner with local non-profits to assist in visible and tangible efforts to improve safety and neighborhood quality of life. Partnering with these types of organizations instead of large public agencies also helps build relationships between the Court and the local community and often gives offenders a greater sense of accomplishment and investment in their work.

This quarter, as a part of the mobile community service initiative, Bronx Community Solutions launched the Tag Team Graffiti Cleanup Unit, in which offenders travel in the community-service van to neighborhoods throughout the Bronx to clean up graffiti on the exterior walls of a building. The Tag Team Graffiti Cleanup Unit is a free service that represents a partnership between Bronx Community Solutions, the Bronx County Criminal Division, and the New York Police Department. This partnership came out of a meeting with Deputy Inspector James Kehoe, the NYPD's Bronx graffiti expert, who expressed a need for this work and provided Bronx Community Solutions with a list of graffiti hot-spots in each precinct. Towards the end of this quarter, the Tag Team Graffiti Cleanup Unit cleaned up two sites and established a schedule of regular cleanups throughout the Bronx.

*Other Community Engagement Initiatives:* As a result of bringing on a new community initiatives coordinator, and thus developing new community initiative planning capacities, the program was able to meet a number of goals in the way of community/court engagement. Staff members began attending more local meetings, in order to both introduce Bronx Community Solutions to different constituencies and listen to residents' concerns about quality of life and safety issues that they face in their neighborhoods. Bronx Community Solutions staff also presented at the borough-wide quarterly meeting of New York Police Department Community Affairs officers. This was an excellent opportunity to build strong and mutually beneficial relationships with Bronx precincts: Community Affairs officers were able to understand how Bronx Community Solutions can be of use to their precincts and Bronx Community Solutions was able to gauge what kinds of quality of life and general policing issues the officers face daily. Bronx Community staff also engaged in other community-based activities, such as National Night Out Against Crime, a police day that is intended to help residents get information about how to take back their neighborhoods from crime. Additionally, program staff are working on

developing a Bronx “Judge for Yourself” program. Borrowing from a concept developed by a community court in Salford, England, “Judge for Yourself” is a program in which citizens meet with judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys and discuss how the court responds to real-life low-level criminal cases; staff members have begun the planning process for hosting this kind of an event (or series of events) in the Bronx.

Finally, the preparations for two new youth initiatives got underway this quarter. First, clinic and planning staff began discussions about a youth basketball league that would bring together disconnected young people who are involved in the courts along with police and court personnel in an attempt to build positive relationships between criminal justice system players and young people involved in criminal behavior. In collaboration with the Center for Court Innovation, Bronx Community Solutions also began discussions around development of a project at Evander Childs High School in the Bronx, which would also focus on improving relations between young people and the police. Given the well-documented tensions between these two groups, the idea is to bring together police officers and student leaders for an open exchange of information and sharing of perspectives around the issue of policing.

### **Case Study**

When Jacquelyn pled guilty to possession of marijuana she was sentenced to perform two days of community service and participate in two days of social service programs at Bronx Community Solutions social service. At the time she was smoking marijuana heavily and using heroin on an occasional basis. She was living and spending time with others who were using drugs heavily. She wasn't sure what to expect from her social service mandate, but when Jacquelyn attended her first group, led by case manager Robert Fagan, she said, “Everything he was saying applied to me.” When Jacquelyn looks back now on that time, this is what she says: “I was tired of doing nothing. Now when I see clients who are in the situation I was in, I realize that I was always had an excuse for everything. I was ready to do this but coming to participate in groups at Bronx Community Solutions was the push I needed. I wanted to be myself again.” Jacquelyn asked the staff for help getting treatment. Bronx Community Solutions was able to quickly arrange an interview with an intake counselor at Liberty Management and activate her Medicaid coverage. After successfully completing residential treatment at Arms Acres, she entered supportive, transitional housing with assistance from Bronx Community Solutions, and she's positive about her life and eager to stay away from situations and people that used to encourage her to use. Now Jacquelyn's court case has been successfully completed, but she still stops by the say hello or have lunch with the staff.