

Community Engagement

South Dallas Community Court staff members attend several community meetings each month, which may include budget town hall meetings and homeowners' association meetings. Court staff use these meetings to identify local problems and solutions, raise awareness about the work of the court, and make connections with community service sites.



South Dallas Community Court Judge Williams with a participant.

Outcomes*

- Annual caseload: Over 8,000 cases
- Number of social service referrals annually: Approximately 800
- Number of cases successfully completed annually: 6,050
- Hours of community service performed annually: Nearly 8,000 hours

*Fiscal year 2014-15 data

About Mentor Courts

In 2014, the South Dallas Community Court was selected by the Center for Court Innovation, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, to serve as one of four exemplary mentors to courts around the nation.

The mentor court initiative promotes the implementation and enhancement of the community court model and the wider application of its core principles in general court calendars.

The mentor courts—which were chosen in a peer-reviewed competitive process—host site visits, answer questions over the phone or Internet from practitioners, and participate in conferences and workshops.

For more information about the South Dallas Community Court, please contact dianne gibson, Community Court Manager, at (214) 542-6658 or dianne.gibson@dallascityhall.com.

For more information about community courts, please visit www.courtinnovation.org or contact the Center for Court Innovation at info@courtinnovation.org.

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South Dallas Community Court



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Community Courts

Community courts are collaborative (or “problem-solving”) courts that attempt to address the underlying issues that lead to criminal behavior and give justice system officials more meaningful options when handling lower-level offenses. They seek to implement new, creative approaches to community engagement; they spread evidence-based practices to link offenders to appropriate interventions; and they encourage the use of judicial monitoring to promote accountability and offer meaningful alternatives to incarceration.

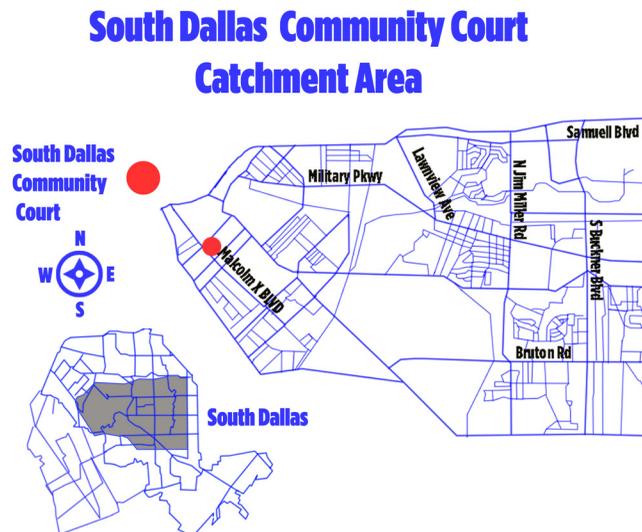
Overview of the Court

The South Dallas Community Court—as well as two other community courts in the city—is managed through the City Attorney’s Office and is focused on rehabilitating the defendant and restoring the community. By implementing innovative, evidence based practices, the courts are able to increase community engagement and offer meaningful alternatives to incarceration. The South Dallas Community Court opened in 2004 as the first community court in Dallas. Its three primary goals are: 1) swift justice, 2) visibility, and 3) community restitution.

Eligible Offenses

The South Dallas Community Court serves individuals arrested or ticketed for “quality of life” crimes classified as Class C misdemeanors or code violations. Eligible cases are typically arraigned within one week.

Typical offenses include assault, prostitution, possession of drug paraphernalia, illegal dumping, hazardous building conditions, and overgrown vegetation. The court also operates a drug court docket one day per week.



Social Services

The judge may require participants to attend rehabilitative and educational programs through the court’s social service partners, such as drug treatment or job-training programs.

Community court participants who plead guilty to code violations may be mandated to attend code compliance classes held at the community court.

Community Service

The court uses community service as a sentencing alternative, with eight hours of community service assigned in exchange for every \$100 fine. Additional community service hours may be mandated as a sanction for noncompliance.

Many participants are ordered to perform court-supervised community service in lieu of jail sentences, fines, or both.

Following the referral from the judge, community court participants meet with the community service coordinator to determine an appropriate assignment.

Examples of community service projects include litter pickup, outdoor beautification, and envelope-stuffing for local non-profits.