

Social Services at the Midtown Community Court

The Midtown Community Court targets quality-of-life offenses, such as prostitution, illegal vending, graffiti, shoplifting, farebeating, and vandalism. Typically, judges are forced to choose between a few days of jail time and nothing at all. But the Midtown Community Court sentences low-level offenders to pay back the neighborhood, while offering them help with problems that often underlie criminal behavior.

Youth Justice Services

Onsite Group Counseling

Resources: A one-session general psycho-educational group that covers topics most relevant to this population based on the results of a needs assessment and research on youth development. Topics include: legal consequences of arrest, educational opportunities, housing and shelter options, and stress/affect management skills.

Motivating Youth I and II: Building on the introduction to stress/affect management skills in Resources, these one-session groups are informed by evidence-based practice (motivational enhancement therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy) and are designed to mobilize a client's willingness to change. The groups discuss the impact of trauma on decision-making, negative coping skills like drug use and risky behavior, and help adolescents develop positive strategies for coping with difficult life experiences.

Individual Counseling and Treatment Plan

For adolescents who have immediate and serious social service needs, and/or more extensive criminal histories, staff conducts a thorough bio-psychosocial assessment and creates an individualized treatment plan with the client. Some examples of services that a defendant may be required to complete include:

- substance abuse treatment, community-based and residential;
- mental health counseling, individual or group sessions and long-term behavioral therapy;
- family counseling;
- family mediation;
- educational advocacy;
- school attendance and achievement programs;
- age-appropriate community service; and
- participation in youth court.

Adult Individual Counseling Session

In this one-session mandate, staff assesses, creates a service plan for, and refers defendants with high social service needs to offsite providers. Staff uses the evidence-based practice motivational interviewing to encourage clients to make change, seek help, and curb criminal behavior.

Drug Treatment Services

Cannabis Awareness Program: A one-session discussion group which aims to educate participants about the impact of marijuana use. Through self-reflection and psychoeducation, participants explore how their marijuana use can have negative implications on their own lives, and cause problems such as unemployment, failing relationships, and/or involvement with the criminal justice system. Referrals for ongoing counseling and marijuana support groups are available.

Treatment Readiness Program I and II: Three- or six-session programs, respectively, based on the evidence-based program Seeking Safety for individuals with histories of substance use. These groups use trauma-based cognitive, behavioral, interpersonal and case management principles to assist clients in exploring the relationship between substance abuse and trauma, and its impact on daily life. The primary goal of the program is to motivate and help participants enroll in long-term voluntary treatment.

Midtown Treatment Track: A three- to twelve-month mandate offered to defendants with a history of substance abuse who have extensive criminal histories. Following clinical assessment, the defendant is placed in long-term drug treatment. Modality of treatment (e.g., out-patient, detox/rehab, residential) varies based on clinical assessment results. Compliance is closely monitored by Midtown's clinical team, and defendants report back to the court on progress.

Prostitution Diversion Services

All defendants arrested for prostitution and mandated to services receive a thorough bio-psychosocial assessment to determine service needs.

Onsite Group Counseling

Women's Independence, Safety and Empowerment (WISE): A five- or ten-session program for English-speaking women arrested for prostitution. Co-facilitated by STEPS to End Family Violence, WISE uses trauma-based cognitive behavioral therapy and incorporates the evidence-based curriculum, Seeking Safety. The goals of the program are to identify victims of trafficking, and help women safely exit the sex trade and escape the cycle of re-arrest and re-victimization.

TransWomen Empowerment (TWE): A five- or ten-session program for transgender women arrested for prostitution. In partnership with STEPS to End Family Violence and other culturally competent partner organizations that serve transgender women, TWE provides counseling and resources to help participants safely exit prostitution.

Health Education for Men: a five- or ten-session program for men arrested for prostitution to address their needs, primarily victimization, health and mental health, and housing.

"John" School: a one-session group facilitated in partnership with the New York County District Attorney's Office. The goal of the group is to stop the participants from purchasing sex by educating them on the risks of prostitution for themselves, their families and the individuals, mainly girls and women, they purchase for sex. The curriculum focuses on the prevalence of victimization, exploitation and sex trafficking in prostitution, as well as information about healthy relationships and physical health.

Offsite Group Counseling

Offsite programming is culturally competent; the goals are to identify victims of trafficking, and help women safely exit the sex trade, and escape the cycle of re-arrest and re-victimization. Two examples:

New York Asian Women's Center's (NYAWC) Project Free: NYAWC provides group and individual counseling for Korean- and Mandarin-speaking women arrested for prostitution.

Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS): GEMS provides group and individual counseling for girls and adolescents arrested for prostitution. Programming is developmentally appropriate.

Shoplifting Diversion Services

Anti-Shoplifting Group: A one-session group for adult offenders charged with shoplifting. Participants receive psychoeducation on the factors contributing to their decision to shoplift and learn strategies for curbing future criminal conduct.

Choices: A six-session program informed by two evidence-based practices, Thinking for a Change (cognitive behavioral therapy) and motivational interviewing. Designed for recidivist shoplifters who are not substance abusers, Choices seeks to reduce criminal behavior by addressing underlying criminal thinking patterns.

Veterans Services

Veterans Intervention Program: a two-session program facilitated in partnership with the Department of Veteran's Affairs designed to identify the unique needs of veteran-defendants and connect them with VA services, including mental health and trauma counseling, medical services, substance abuse treatment, and advocacy services.

Unemployment Services

Pathways to Employment: a four-session group designed to help offenders reconnect with the world of work. Groups focus on helping defendants identify career goals, learn important networking and interviewing skills, create a resumé, and connect with job placement agencies.

Up Next: a six-week program for non-custodial fathers in need of workforce development. Participants are engaged through immediate assessment and delivery of concrete services around workforce and family needs, including resumé assistance, interview preparation, rap sheet repair, parenting skills training, and assistance lowering child support arrears.

Groups for Summons Cases

Quality of Life: one-session group that educates high-functioning defendants about the impact of low-level offenses on the community.

Responsible Driving Program: a one-session group conducted by Department of Motor Vehicles for defendants who are charged with reckless driving offenses.

Responsible Pedicab, Vending, and Taxicab Resource Program: Pedicab drivers, licensed vendors, and taxi drivers receive comprehensive informational guides that inform them about safe delivery of services, New York City regulations, and organizations to help them avoid future violations. A follow-up monthly one-session group provides further education to pedicab drivers, licensed vendors, and taxi drivers on New York City laws and safety issues and access to vocational services, while delivering a forum to discuss impact on the community.

Safe Cycling: a one-session group conducted by a cycling education organization, Bike New York, for defendants who violate NYC cycling laws.

For more information

Visit: www.courtinnovation.org/project/midtown-community-court

E-mail: info@courtinnovation.org