

# Midtown Community Court: Documented Results

The Midtown Community Court, established in 1993, hears cases where defendants are charged with misdemeanor offenses, such as prostitution, illegal vending, graffiti, and possession of marijuana. Midtown sentences offenders to community service to pay back the neighborhood in which they committed their crime and provides them with social services to address their underlying needs.

The Midtown Court is located in one of the busiest commercial districts in the United States. The catchment area, which includes four police precincts and encompasses the area between 86th and 14th Streets and Lexington Avenue to the Hudson River, is home to approximately 750,000 people, in addition to which more than three million commuters work in Midtown. In the 1990s, the court was besieged by low-level crime, including drug dealing, illegal vending, and street prostitution. Results include:

## **Caseload**

In 2014, the court heard 29,348 cases (which consisted of 10,925 misdemeanor cases and 18,423 summonses). The most frequent misdemeanor charges were stolen property, trespassing, panhandling, and marijuana drug possession.

## **Sentencing**

Research indicates that, as compared with the downtown criminal court, for cases disposed at arraignment and convicted, the Midtown Court decreases the extremes of jail on one hand (10 percent vs. 18 percent) and time-served sentences on the other hand (four percent vs. 21 percent).

## **Compliance and Accountability**

In 2014, 80 percent of defendants at Midtown completed their community service mandates. This is a notably higher rate than is believed to

apply to defendants who were processed at the downtown criminal court. Furthermore, research indicates that although the Midtown Court is less likely to use jail as an initial sentence, it is more likely than the downtown criminal court to impose jail as a secondary sanction on those offenders who fail to comply with initial orders.

## **Community Restitution**

In 2014, defendants at the Midtown Court completed over 35,250 hours of community service or the equivalent of over \$255,650 of labor, including cleaning the courthouse, painting over graffiti, stuffing envelopes for local non-profits, and cleaning the streets of Times Square.

## **Cost Savings**

Research estimates that the Midtown Court saves an average of \$1.2 million annually. These savings result primarily from reduced costs of pre-arraignment detention (i.e., due to reduced arrest-to-arraignment time) and reduced use of jail as a primary sentence.

## **Workforce Development**

Midtown's on-site job training program UPNEXT enrolled 176 participants in 2014. Additionally, 37 participants were placed in jobs during the year. The average hourly wage for program graduates who were placed in jobs was \$9.60 an hour.

### **Adolescent Diversion Program**

In 2012, Midtown became the sole site in Manhattan for handling cases involving 16 and 17 year old defendants in the Adolescent Diversion Program. A pilot program initiated by New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, the Adolescent Diversion Program seeks to address the unique needs of adolescent defendants in criminal court by offering social services and alternative dispositions that eliminate the consequences of adult criminal convictions. Since the program began, the court has handled and provided services to 1,181 adolescent defendants.

### **Human Trafficking Intervention Court**

In recognition that many individuals, mostly women and girls, arrested for prostitution-related offenses may be victims of trafficking and other forms of violence, Chief Judge Lippman created the Human Trafficking Intervention Court program. The program began in October 2013 in 11 counties in the state; the Midtown Court is the Human Trafficking Intervention Court site in Manhattan and handles all prostitution-related offenses in the borough. The program aims to help individuals safely exit the sex trade by identifying victims of sex trafficking, linking individuals to social services, and reducing or eliminating consequences of criminal conviction for victim-defendants. In 2014, the court served over 320 such individuals.

### **Public Support**

A survey reported that the majority of respondents (64 percent) would be willing to pay additional taxes to support a community court like the Midtown Court.

### **Recognition**

The Midtown Court has been the recipient of several awards including the Serving Youth Opportunity Award (2010) by the New York City Employment & Training Coalition and the Golden Scroll Award (2007) by The Broadway Association. Both awards recognize the court's commitment to public safety through community involvement.

### **Further Reading**

(Available at [www.courtinnovation.org](http://www.courtinnovation.org))

Frazer, M.S. 2007. Examining defendant perceptions of fairness in the courtroom. *Judicature*, 91(1):36-37.

Hakuta, J., Soroushian, V., and Kralstein, D. 2008. *Testing the Impact of the Midtown Community Court: Updating Outcomes a Decade Later*. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation.

Henry, K. and Kralstein, D. 2010. *Community Court Research: 2009 Update*. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation.

Karafin, D.L. 2008. *Community Courts Across the Globe: A Survey of Goals, Performance Measures and Operations*. Open Society Foundation for South Africa.

Rempel, M., Hyntnen Lambson, S., Cadoret, C. R., and Walker Franklin, A. 2013. *The Adolescent Diversion Program: A First Year Evaluation of Alternatives to conventional Case Processing for Defendants Ages 16 and 17 in New York*. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation.

Sviridoff, M., Rottman, D., Ostrom, B., and Curtis, R. 2000. *Dispensing Justice Locally: The Implementation and Effects of the Midtown Community Court*. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation.

Sviridoff, M., Rottman, D., Weidner, R., Cheesman, F., Curtis, R., Hansen, R., and Ostrom, B. 2005. *Dispensing Justice Locally: The Impacts, Cost and Benefits of the Midtown Community Court*. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation.

### **For more information**

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

E-mail: [info@courtinnovation.org](mailto:info@courtinnovation.org)