

# 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 onsite 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 cognitive behavioral therapy and are designed to maximize a client's potential to change. The groups discuss the impact of trauma on decision-making and 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;

- mental health counseling: individual, group, or family with community-based provider sessions;
- educational advocacy and achievement programs;
- age-appropriate community service;
- vocational or internship-based programs.

### 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 of motivational interviewing to encourage clients to make change, seek help, and curb criminal behavior.

### Drug Treatment Services

*Gateways to Prevention:* A one-session psychoeducational group<sup>1</sup>, often paired with community service, for individuals who evidence a low level of substance use or are beginning to experiment with illegal substances. Gateways to Prevention, which lasts one hour, relies on principles of risk, need, and responsibility in its approach to substance use intervention. The group will allow defendants to discuss life stressors that may contribute to their substance use and to learn healthy ways to respond, rather than merely react to stressors in their environments. The group educates clients about alternative ways to cope with overwhelming emotions/experiences

<sup>1</sup> This group is designed, in part, to absorb non-habitual drug users who previously would have ended up in TRP I, which was both more intensive and less tailored to their circumstances. GP can be combined with community service or individual counseling sessions to form a more robust mandate, where appropriate.

and assists them with building capacity for making positive decisions and understanding the consequences of substance use.

*Treatment Readiness Program:* A six-session program for individuals that utilizes the evidence-based principles of Seeking Safety as well as cognitive behavioral, interpersonal, and case management tools. Treatment Readiness Program is an appropriate fit for defendants who are experiencing significant functional impairments in their lives because of their substance use. Sessions run consecutively, Monday-Friday, and last one hour each day. Treatment Readiness Program also includes one individual case management session prior to the group cycle in which clients complete a screen with a clinician. This session's purpose is to build engagement in the mandate and to assess the client's goals, strengths, and needs. The group discusses the reasons people use substances, alternative ways to cope, and the relationship between substance use and life experiences. This mandate will serve as a way to connect clients to ongoing treatment in the community following the completion of the groups.

*Midtown Treatment Track:* A three- to 12-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. Defendants also engage in seeking safety and motivational interviewing sessions with staff.

### **Prostitution Diversion Services**

All defendants arrested for prostitution and mandated to services receive a thorough bio-psychosocial assessment to determine service needs. Defendants also engage in seeking safety and motivational interviewing session with staff.

### **Onsite Group Counseling**

*Women's Independence, Safety and Empowerment (WISE):* A five- or ten-session onsite 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 :* A five- or ten-session onsite 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, TransWomen Empowerment provides counseling and resources to help participants safely exit prostitution.

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

*"John" School:* An onsite 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 goal is to identify victims of trafficking and help them safely exit the sex trade and escape the cycle of re-arrest and re-victimization. Two examples:

*New York Asian Women's Center's Project Free:* New York Asian Women's center 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.

Those with a history of shoplifting may be mandated to our skills and Support Exchange program.

### **Mental Health Services**

*Skills and Support Exchange :* A six-session intensive mental health group. Skills and Support Exchange is appropriate for clients exhibiting non-emergent mental health needs and with a history of repeated court involvement. Sessions run for two weeks, lasting 45 minutes each. This group offers education, support, and concrete referrals to defendants struggling with the effects of mental illness on their lives. Skills and Support Exchange will use evidence-informed techniques to guide clients toward a stronger understanding of mental health and to supply them with pertinent coping techniques as well as community-based resources.

### **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- to six-session group designed to help those struggling to find employment connect with helpful resources that facilitate their reengagement with the world of work. Group sessions focus on helping participants learn important networking and interviewing skills, navigate their online job search, create a resume, and learn about the benefits of full time, sustainable employment. Upon completion of Pathways to Employment, individuals are afforded the opportunity for additional job search support through staff-guided application completion and interview preparation.

*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:* One-session group conducted by the 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: <http://www.courtinnovation.org/project/midtown-community-court>

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