

Overview

For three decades, the Midtown Community Justice Center (formerly Midtown Community Court) has inspired criminal justice reformers around the world and served as a hub for testing new ideas in New York City. Established in 1993, the Midtown Community Justice Center re-thinks judicial response to low-level offenses such as shoplifting and illegal substance use. Instead of a traditional punitive approach, the Midtown Community Justice Center offers social services and community service, individualized for the participants that are restorative for the people and communities we serve. Through this problem-solving justice approach, the court seeks to reduce crime and incarceration and improve public safety, quality of life, and trust in justice.

Our Work

The Midtown Community Justice Center (Justice Center) is operated by the New York State Unified Court System in collaboration with the Center for Justice Innovation. The Justice Center holds two specialized court parts: Misdemeanor Mental Health Court and the Emerging Adult Court part to hear misdemeanor charges, including trespassing, petit larceny, and drug-related charges.

In response to the New York City mental health crisis, the court launched the Misdemeanor Mental Health Court part. The Misdemeanor Mental Health Court (AP18) launched in 2022 and is currently held at the Justice Center every Friday. The court helps people with severe mental health issues and co-occurring disorders navigate the justice system while engaging with meaningful social services to ultimately reduce their involvement in the justice

system. Social workers collaborate with participants to craft meaningful engagements and individualized responses to the intersectional issues people living with mental health challenges routinely face.

The Justice Center also operates a special docket that serves the entire borough of Manhattan: Emerging Adult Court. The Emerging Adult Court was built to be uniquely responsive to the needs of people aged 18-25, with programming based on research around youth development. This docket also responds to behavioral trends of the population seen across New York City. The Justice Center offers a variety of facilitated spaces for young people to unpack how trauma affects decision-making, build coping skills, support healthy relationships, and manage stress effectively. All of these groups help these young people to build and develop positive socioemotional wellness strategies.

Engaging the Community

The justice system is stronger, fairer, and more effective when the community is invested in what happens inside its doors. At the Justice Center, we invite the people who live and work in the neighborhood to be involved in identifying local problems and crafting solutions. The Justice Center embraces a participatory planning approach, empowering local leaders, community members, participants and stakeholders to become agents of change in their communities and collaboratively identify and solve local issues. Collaborators in this work include the Justice Center judge and program staff, New York City Police Department precinct commanders and officers, defense bar and

Manhattan District Attorney's Office representatives, service providers, and representatives from business improvement districts and other community organizations. Court staff also attend a wide range of community meetings and events, lead community service projects and develop uniquely responsive community-based workshops. Through these activities, the court strives to respond to community needs and address issues that impact the neighborhood.

Community First: This program is a street outreach initiative that builds trust with people in the Times Square area who are facing mental health issues, housing instability, or other crises to connect them to the resources and services they need. With an approach focused on human-to-human connection, Community First offers material goods like clothes, food, hygiene supplies, and harm reduction materials, connections to critical supports and services, and help breaking down complex goals—like finding employment—into concrete action items. The program launched in January 2021 in partnership with the Midtown Community Justice Center; Times Square Alliance; Fountain House, a mental health organization; and Breaking Ground, a housing agency.

Programming

Social Services: The Justice Center's on-site clinic houses a range of services, including group and individual counseling sessions addressing mental health, substance use, youth justice, unemployment, healthy relationships, stress management, public benefits, and immigration. Additionally, social workers connect clients to off-site programming,

including longer term drug treatment and mental health services. The Justice Center's clinic is open on a walk-in basis to anyone who seeks assistance.

Community Engagement: The Justice Center engages the community through a variety of programming and events outside our physical space, including leading arts-based workshops for young people, working with a local public housing development to activate its community space, hosting resource fairs, and attending community meetings. After hearing community safety concerns regarding e-bike and moped driving, the Justice Center convened a symposium with local elected officials and subject-matter experts to craft solutions. The Justice Center also offers meaningful community service and civic engagement options for court-mandated participants with non-profit organizations such as Stanley Isaacs Community Center food pantry and meal delivery program. Participants may also join a four part virtual civic engagement group designed to foster community leadership.

Diversion: The Justice Center offers Project Reset, a pre-arraignment diversion opportunity for people arrested on low-level charges. Individuals who complete Project Reset avoid

standard case processing as well as criminal conviction. Created in collaboration with the New York City Police Department and the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, Project Reset creates a proportionate and restorative response to low-level crime through programming that is educational and seeks to avoid re-arrest. The Justice Center also operates a restorative justice-based diversion program in partnership with the NYC Law Department Family Court Division that offers an off-ramp from the traditional court process for teens arrested on weapons-related charges. Successful participants either avoid prosecution entirely or have their charges dismissed upon successful completion.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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