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How a Neighborhood Justice Center in Harlem is
Building Bridges and Improving Safety

Written by

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About the Author

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How a Neighborhood Justice Center in Harlem is Building Bridges and Improving Safety

Introduction

The Harlem Courthouse has towered over East 121st Street since the late 1800s—stately and elaborate, with arched windows and soaring pinnacles. Until 1961, the courthouse housed the Municipal and Magistrate's Courts; after New York City's courts were centralized, the building fell into disuse and was largely forgotten. Decades later, when court planners were looking for a location for a new community court, the courthouse—with its ornate architecture and status as a once vital community institution—seemed an ideal location.

Today, the Harlem Courthouse is again a vibrant neighborhood resource. Gone are the boarded up windows, empty courtrooms, and unused office space. Instead, the courthouse is home to an unusual experiment in neighborhood justice, the Harlem Community Justice Center. The center features a multi-jurisdictional courtroom that hears a mix of Family and Housing Court cases, along with an array of unconventional programs—including mediation, community service, and reentry initiatives—that extend the justice center's reach well beyond the courtroom doors.

While a traditional court usually has one heartbeat, as the center's director, Raye Barbieri, puts it, the Harlem court “has dozens.” This paper tells the story of this unique experiment in community justice, from planning to ongoing operations. Along the way, it highlights the key lessons of the Harlem experience, offering vivid testimony that a court and community can work together to spur neighborhood renewal.

Planning the Court

The Harlem Community Justice Center was born when Deborah Wright, then president of the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone Development Corporation, visited the Midtown Community Court, the country's first such court, in 1997. Wright was impressed by her visit, which highlighted how a renewed judicial focus on local issues could improve both street conditions and perceptions of the justice system. Wright approached the Center for Court Innovation, the non-profit group that developed the Midtown Community Court, to talk about the possibility of bringing a community-based court uptown.

Over the next five months, planners from the Center for Court Innovation studied the feasibility of a Harlem community court. They conducted individual interviews, attended community meetings, and convened focus groups of community leaders. The initial assumption was that the model of the Midtown Community Court would

simply be transplanted to Harlem. The more planners talked to people in the community, however, the more they discovered that Harlem residents weren't really talking about the kind of quality-of-life crime—graffiti, public urination, and turnstile-jumping—that animated the Midtown Community Court. It was a different community and it naturally had a different set of community problems.

Housing, planners found, was one of Harlem residents' primary concerns. As one focus group participant said, "Landlord/tenant court has a decreasing ability to serve an increasing caseload. If a community court came uptown and was charged with landlord/tenant issues, it has to walk people through the system. That would be more empowering to the community."

Statistics confirmed that the Harlem area saw a disproportionate number of eviction actions for nonpayment of rent; more than 20 percent of all housing cases in Manhattan were coming from Upper Manhattan. To help address these problems, planners envisioned a community-based housing court with an array of on-site services that could assist both tenants and landlords and get to the underlying issues in housing disputes.

Worried that the lure of drugs, gangs, and "easy money" was leading youth from petty crime to more serious offenses, local residents also stressed the importance of developing new, more meaningful interventions for youth engaged in delinquent behavior. "Get the adolescent at the first or second offense and intervene in the child's life," said one focus group participant. "Courts are dealing with [youth violence] very poorly," said another, adding, "Courts don't offer any alternatives. You have to offer social services." Responding to such comments, court planners developed the idea of a youth court in which local teens would be trained to handle actual cases involving their peers, with other services and programs to follow. The youth court would be a vehicle for peers to establish new standards for appropriate behavior among neighborhood young people.

Another major area of concern for residents was drugs. The lack of meaningful alternatives to the cycle of drugs-crime-jail was repeatedly cited as a pressing problem. In response, court planners devised a scheme for a decentralized branch of New York City Family Court that would feature on-site case management services for both adults and young people.

Piece by piece, what emerged from the feasibility study was a vision for a neighborhood-based court that would build on the lessons learned at the Midtown court, combining court operations and social services under one roof and taking a broad-based approach to improving local quality of life. It would be a multi-jurisdictional court, crossing the boundaries that have traditionally required citizens to go to separate courts for housing and family issues. And it would emphasize early intervention, testing the extent to which a court can both solve individual problems and address conditions of neighborhood disorder. As the justice center's director, Raye Barbieri, puts it: "Our goal is basically the same as other community courts: to help improve the local quality of life. We're just using different tools to accomplish this goal."

Working with Youth

Once the vision for the Harlem Community Justice Center had been formulated, the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone Development Corporation awarded a grant to get it up and running. The implementation phase began in earnest in 1998. From the beginning, it was clear that realizing one of the key goals of community courts, bridging the gap between communities and courts, would be vital to the Center's success. From day one, court planners were in regular conversation with the community—out in the streets, on the phone, and at community meetings—building links that would be vital to the court's success.

Though the centerpiece of the Harlem Community Justice Center was a working courtroom, it would be a year and a half before a court was up and running. In the meantime, staff began pulling together the programming that would serve as the justice center's foundation, starting with youth initiatives.

Assembled in 1999, the justice center's youth programs represent a departure from the way young people are typically treated in the justice system and are animated by several key principles:

Early intervention prevents more trouble down the road

By working intensively with young people at the first signs of delinquent behavior, the Justice Center attempts to prevent further offending. The youth court, for example, works with young people ages 10 to 16 who have been referred by police at schools for vandalism, fare evasion, fighting and truancy, all low-level offenses that might lead to larger problems if not addressed at an early stage. Each year, 30 teens are trained to become youth court members. They handle several cases each week, meeting after school on Wednesdays. Cases are presided over by a jury of peers—teenagers from the neighborhood who have been trained to perform the roles of judge, jury and advocates. The youth court's compliance rate with sanctions such as community service and letters of apology is unusually high—70 percent—especially compared to the typical 50 percent compliance rate seen in many urban courts.

Youth must be held accountable for their actions

The Justice Center is committed to the idea that all crime should have consequences and actively seeks to hold young offenders accountable for their actions. In youth court, for example, participants are sentenced to perform community service or in some way make amends for the damage they've caused. In the Justice Center's on-site Family Court, young people arrested for non-violent offenses meet regularly with the judge, who relies on graduated sanctions—such as increased court appearances and curfew checks—to promote accountability.

Accountability is also a hallmark of the Justice Center's juvenile reentry work, in which case managers work intensively with juveniles recently released from state placement in order to prevent future delinquent behavior. The young persons have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and of the consequences of noncompliance, but they also have a strong voice in their own programs. Hearing officer Karrolyn Belkis requires program participants to keep a journal; once when a partici-

pant wrote about suicide, she approached him and got him into crisis management. Another juvenile in the program, “Omar,” had been participating in all required activities but was un-engaged. He had, however, expressed interests in photography and basketball. Justice Center staff helped Omar obtain a \$750 scholarship to the International Center of Photography, and he went on to become the main photographer for his after-school program. Staff also linked Omar with the Hoop Brothers basketball team, which requires members to participate in tutoring each day before they’re allowed to play ball.

Families are integral to a young person’s success

Families are integral to the Justice Center’s juvenile reentry program. Before release, staff members meet with family members to create family-strengthening plans. Participants and their families are linked to an expansive network of services. The program recognizes that the parents often need support in the same way the child does; for this reason, parents participate in weekly talking circles in which they can discuss their problems and frustrations with their peers, the same way the juveniles do. School attendance is also emphasized: staff and partner agencies help families navigate the school system so that participants are re-enrolled promptly upon release. Parents participate in biweekly court appearances where the aftercare team and the juvenile participants appear before a hearing officer to review progress in meeting established behavioral and program goals, such as preventing youth from reoffending.

Sixteen-year-old “Nancy,” for example, attends hearings twice a month with her mother, in addition to meeting with her counselor once a week and aftercare worker two other times per month. Her mother is a key player. She says: “What I like is that the focus is on the child, rather than just ‘here is our program and this is what you have to do.’ I love it because it gets Nancy involved with different things, and there are some things she might not open up to me about on her own. The staff are there to help me, too.”

This intensive approach responds to a very real problem. Juvenile offenders are extremely high risk—data compiled by the Office of Children and Family Services shows that 81 percent of boys and 45 percent of girls returning from placement commit new offenses within three years of their release. While it is still too early to assess Harlem’s juvenile reentry program, the good news is that 65 percent of the 42 participants thus far have completed the program—a very promising number.

A court can be a neutral convener and improve service delivery

Reaching out to the community is fundamental to the Justice Center’s mission. To that end, Harlem staff created a community advisory coalition in 1999 to combat juvenile substance abuse. In recent years, the Justice Center has taken this community engagement work to a new level, acting in partnership with drug treatment provider Phoenix House and with help from a grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s Drug-Free Communities pro-

gram. The coalition is now known as the Youth Futures Network, and meets once a month to discuss drug treatment and prevention for area youth. Linking representatives from nearly 50 community-based organizations, it provides a full array of services to young people through constant collaboration and sharing of information and resources.

Technology has been integral to the network's growth and effectiveness. In 2005, the community access database was developed to make member contact information accessible and to better track member activities. Through the database, members of the network easily reach out to each other. On the heels of the database came the online referral system, a simple, user-friendly technology through which coalition members can refer youth online to mental health and drug treatment providers within the network—cutting out a lot of time and red tape and getting participants quickly into needed services. In 2006, over 150 referrals were made through the system. Finally, the Youth Futures Network website (<http://harlemyfn.org/>), launched in 2006, has become an effective means to highlight the network's achievements and elicit additional community support.

Mediators from the Justice Center also perform community outreach. In schools, for example, parents, teachers, administrators, and counselors may not always agree on how to best meet students' needs. Justice Center mediators facilitate conversations among these groups in order to break down long-standing conflict, promote group collaboration and provide the framework for ongoing information sharing. At one local school, Justice Center staff taught a specialized conflict resolution and violence prevention class to 60 youth who had been suspended. In another, mediators trained over 50 faculty and students in the implementation of a peer mediation program, and intervened to train students in how to address the inter-racial tension between Puerto-Rican and Mexican students.

It is, of course, highly unusual for a court to lead such vigorous outreach to the community. Justice Center deputy director Ivan Deadrick finds it challenging at times to explain the court's unconventional role. "At first we have to do a lot of work to explain why a court is the lead agency here, because you'd think the court is the one that wants to lock you up," he says. "But we know we cannot solve all these problems without all these other sectors in the community coming together to do their piece."

Family Court

All of the justice center's unconventional youth programs—from the youth court to community organizing—are designed to support and enhance the work that goes on in the courtroom. Presiding Judge Ruben Martino hears both Family Court and Housing Court cases. But the Harlem Community Justice Center seeks to do far more than simply replicate conventional case processing in a new location: it seeks to re-engineer the way that courts do business.

In a conventional Family Court setting, judges often complain that they lack the resources to have assessments conducted, have limited links to service providers in the community, and lack the tools to effectively monitor compliance with court

orders. Only young people who have engaged in serious or repeated wrongdoing tend to receive significant interventions.

In contrast, the justice center relies on a broad array of programs and services to deter young people from progressing to more serious delinquency. All of the court players, including law guardians, the presentment agency, the judge, and treatment providers, work collaboratively to manage cases and respond to the needs of teenagers and their families.

In its Family Court, the justice center is guided by three key ideas:

Better information produces better outcomes

The justice center works with kids under 16 who are arrested for drug offenses and other non-violent charges. Upon arrest, these juveniles report to an on-site probation officer who conducts a detailed assessment. Armed with this assessment, Judge Martino, a case manager, the respective attorneys, and the probation officer devise an individualized plan that addresses the needs of each youth and his or her family. The plan focuses on drug/alcohol use, school problems, peer and community influences and family situation. “Lucia,” whose son “Mario” was sent to the court after being arrested for graffiti, says, “This court really works with you. They’re always on top of the kid, they talk to the parents. They call the school, speak to the counselors. They’re on top of everything. For my son, who had never been in trouble before, it was a real wake-up call before he got into more trouble.”

Better information also allows the judge to resolve issues more quickly. “Before I came to the justice center,” Judge Martino says, “a big part of what I did in Family Court was adjourn cases. A case worker wouldn’t show up, a report wouldn’t be ready, someone wouldn’t call back—and the case would be adjourned for months until I could get the information I needed. I don’t have that problem here. I get regularly updated reports, and always have a whole picture of what’s going on.”

Courts have a better chance of changing behavior if they respond swiftly

The swiftness of the court’s response not only makes the juvenile accountable for his or her actions in a concrete way, but allows the court to intervene at a moment of crisis in a child’s life. Once a plan is in place, juveniles and their parents/guardians appear regularly in front of the judge to report on their progress. Judge Martino closely monitors compliance, adapting a “best practice juvenile delinquency court” model and using incentives and graduated sanctions in response to progress and misconduct. Incentives might include tickets to cultural events, reduced court appearances, courtroom acknowledgement and a graduation ceremony, while sanctions include increased court appearances, earlier curfew checks, and essays. “We really keep a hands-on approach during the process,” Judge Martino says. “And we try to be service-intensive, performing assessments to find out what is leading this young person to engage in delinquent behavior, and then trying to provide services either in-house or in the community.”

In keeping with the justice center’s overall approach, the court strives to solve the underlying problems a family might be facing. “By recognizing and addressing the whole network of influences and pressures that can contribute to a young person’s use of drugs, the Court increases the chances that the solution will be a long-term, lasting one,” said New York State Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye at the court’s opening.

Mediation can resolve problems that might otherwise result in court cases

The idea behind mediation is to “help community members resolve their own problems,” says Ivan Deadrick, deputy director. Without effective communication, small problems between community members can escalate into major conflicts and time-consuming court cases. Neutral, third-party mediators help participants discuss their current problems and offer tools for approaching conflict in less aggressive ways in the future.

For example, a teenage boy and his mother were referred to mediation at the Harlem Community Justice Center by the police, after the mother called the police and said that her son had assaulted her. The police quickly uncovered issues of delinquency and truancy. During mediation, the mother expressed that she felt overwhelmed trying to balance work and raising a family, while the son admitted he had not been attending school and resented his mother for always being away from home. Mediation allowed the mother and son to more clearly understand the stresses they were experiencing, and helped them develop a plan that included a set curfew for the son and the mother setting aside time to spend with her son. A probation officer and judge approved the action plan, and the youth avoided foster care as well as any delinquency charges.

Housing

Housing poses a significant problem for many East Harlem residents, a large number of whom either live in public housing or qualify for government subsidies. The justice center seeks to resolve underlying issues that cause people to come to Housing Court in the first place.

According to Judge Martino, “if you can deal with the underlying issues you won’t see litigants back in Housing Court or in any other court—that’s part of the basic philosophy behind problem-solving courts in general. So if there is a drug problem, can we put the defendant into drug treatment? If there’s a financial problem, can we get them alternative housing? Can we find subsidies or emergency grants? Jobs?”

This emphasis on services is one of four key principles driving the justice center’s housing initiatives:

Many housing disputes can be effectively resolved before they get to court

The justice center seeks to home in on a client’s needs in a way that is difficult, if not impossible, to do in conventional Housing Court. When a client comes to the justice center, for example, an intake specialist at the project’s on-site Housing Resource Center performs a comprehensive assessment to determine the root of their problem. Each year, 1,500 litigants and neighborhood residents receive services through the

resource center such as mediation, benefit assistance, and classes about the rights and obligations of tenants and landlords.

“We often get people who haven’t had a case brought against them but know they’re behind in rent,” says Michael Bournas-Ney, who helps oversee the justice center’s housing work. “Or maybe their landlord hasn’t made repairs; they may want to have the Department of Housing Preservation and Development perform an inspection, and we help them do that.”

Staff can help solve a multitude of problems. If nonpayment of rent is the problem, staff can help eligible tenants access public assistance or other financial help. They can also facilitate communication to straighten out rent records or get rents reduced when tenants are being overcharged. The justice center has also hosted trainings for landlords to learn about financial institutions offering low-interest loans to make repairs and bring their buildings up to code.

An on-site pro se attorney answers legal questions. Two specialists from New York City’s Human Resources Administration are on-site to assess people who might need rental assistance.

As Bournas-Ney says, “We’re really trying to prevent cases from either being filed or resulting in eviction. Housing Court is a complex institution for someone to negotiate on their own, but with help, a lasting resolution that’s beneficial to both the tenant and landlord can be achieved.”

In one recent example, a tenant was being sued for \$23,000 in back rent. During the client’s assessment, justice center staff learned the story behind his case: the man was illiterate and his wife, who was the tenant of record, had always taken care of their housing paperwork and kept their federal Section 8 housing subsidies current. She died, leaving behind her husband, a young son, and a mentally disabled 25-year-old daughter. No one did the paperwork, the family lost their Section 8, and \$23,000 in back rent accumulated before a court case was initiated.

In conventional Housing Court, eviction would almost certainly have been the result. At the justice center, Bournas-Ney was able to make a series of phone calls over a two-week stretch, navigating red tape between the housing management company and government agencies and eventually yielding a surprising and happy result: the entire \$23,000 was paid retroactively, the man and his children were able to keep their home, and the landlord was paid all monies owed.

Another client mentioned several suicide attempts while describing how she and her son had been living in a homeless shelter for over two years, despite having been promised an apartment with a Section 8 subsidy. This tenant was immediately referred to the justice center’s clinical team, who were able, over several hours of phone calls, to cut through the bureaucratic logjam and secure the promised apartment and simultaneously arrange for an emergency referral to psychiatric services.

In another example, “Madeline” found herself needing public assistance after losing her job of 14 years. She began to fall behind in rent but when she went to the welfare office, she felt mistreated by the worker assigned to her and was unable to resolve her case. “I had heard of the Housing Resource Center from another woman

who went there.,” she says. “I wanted to get my welfare taken care of before I fell too behind on rent and the landlord started threatening eviction.” At the Housing Resource Center, Madeline met with a case worker who resolved her welfare issue speedily. Her rent was paid up a week later.

Better information can lead to better resolutions

When cases do make it to court, justice center staff can help litigants prepare for their cases by ascertaining if they have necessary documentation and information. If tenants need to go to two government agencies to fill out an application, for example, or make a complaint for violations, they are given information about what they need to do. Information gathered by the intake counselor is entered into a computer application that the judge can access at any time. Two resource associates are located in the courtroom, supplying the judge with relevant background details on each case and responding to issues that might arise in court. As Judge Martino explains, “If there’s an issue that might be resolved by a phone call, like a tenant having a problem with Section 8, I can just call up a resource associate, right in the middle of a case, and say can you please call Section 8 and find out what’s going on. And that’s done immediately.”

Housing problems can be reduced by taking a proactive approach

The justice center uses its database to identify tenants who’ve had numerous cases and might need more intensive case management. For example, some senior citizens have difficulty managing their money. In these cases, a social worker might work with the senior to set up direct payment and direct deposit of his or her Social Security check. Such interventions have been effective: staff members have worked with some tenants who had 10 or more nonpayment cases in their history and haven’t been back since. It is safe to say that this kind of proactive activity doesn’t often happen in overcrowded, centralized housing courts.

Parole Reentry Court

Another significant challenge that the justice center confronts is the high number of men and women returning from confinement to the East and Central Harlem community. Returning offenders face steep odds in their efforts to readjust to life “on the outside.” While reentry is a national problem, research shows that formerly incarcerated individuals are concentrated in a small number of urban neighborhoods. Harlem is one such neighborhood.

In 2000, justice center staff began planning a reentry initiative with the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services and the Division of Parole to address the increasing number of parolees in the community. While incarcerated, inmates are told what to do and when to do it. Upon their release, parolees often find their situations to be overwhelming. “It’s not always a smooth sail,” says the justice center’s other deputy project director John Megaw. “People can return to the patterns of behavior that got them into trouble in the first place.” For those returning to society from long prison sentences—one recent participant in the program served 17 years—

the world can be completely different from when they went in and require a daunting number of adjustments. It is no surprise, then, that a large number of parolees return to prison, especially given the strict set of guidelines they need to follow as conditions of release.

Three main principles guide the justice center's work with ex-offenders:

Intensive supervision gives parolees a better chance of success

Direct relationships—constant contact and face-to-face meetings—are crucial for keeping a parolee on track. Intense supervision allows the justice center to intervene as soon as problems appear. One of the basic ideas behind the program is that all actors in the criminal justice system (police, courts, institutional and community corrections) have a role to play in long-term behavioral change among offenders. The more eyes that watch the parolee, the thinking goes, the more likely he or she will succeed. And criminal justice agencies can't do it alone—they must engage families, community-based service providers, churches, and other sources of formal and informal support when reintegrating offenders.

The process in the Harlem Parole Reentry Court looks like this: a parole officer and case manager usually meet with the parolee before he or she leaves prison. The parole officer explains what the conditions of release will be while the case manager performs a complete psychosocial assessment. “The parolees very often fear all these responsibilities,” according to Megaw, “because it's a lot more intensive supervision. And the parole officers don't dress that up, but at the same time they advertise the help the case manager can provide for them.” The case manager also makes contact with the family, schedules when the parolee is going to start his or her work assignment, drug treatment and other appointments.

On the day of release, the parolee appears in court. Often, this appearance is a family reunion. “We've had guys who've come here to see a child they conceived but never met. That's a very exciting time,” says Megaw. The parolee sits down with the parole officer, who has them sign a supervision plan that includes clearly articulated rules they must follow. The judge then reviews the supervision plan, laying out all the parolee's responsibilities. The beauty of this, says Megaw, is that it “gives everybody, in an open public forum, a clear understanding of exactly what's expected.”

Individualized plans make a difference

While the justice center calls its program a reentry “court,” it is in fact an administrative tribunal presided over by an administrative law judge who oversees about 60 parolees a year. It is a difficult population: only 41 percent of participants have a high school diploma; 74 percent list cocaine, crack, or heroin as their primary drug; and, on average, the parolees have 5 prior felonies, 7.9 prior misdemeanors, and had spent 79 months in prison. Judge Brigitte Fortune, who formerly presided over the Harlem Parole Reentry Court, talks about the importance of personalized, concentrated attention. As Judge Fortune puts it: “The idea is to set up a program that best suits each participant and that's going to give him or her the best chance of succeeding. So

it's intensive, it's more personalized, it's flexible, and that to me is the best part of the reentry program. We can make adjustments at any time during your supervision while you're in the program, to give people that chance to succeed."

Changing behavior takes time; challenges are inevitable

The life of a parolee is challenging, even with this concentrated support. "Debra," for example, completed the program in six months and was flourishing. The constant supervision, a rigid schedule, job training, and a group of people intent on seeing her progress provided her with a strong web of support. "Putting me in the parole reentry program was the best thing they ever could have done for me and my life," she said. She was drug- and alcohol-free and found a job at a city agency. "The program gave me a good start in life, it really did," she said.

Despite her strong performance at her job, however, she was fired when her employer decided to enforce a policy barring employees with prior convictions. Because of ongoing support available to her, she was able to cope with this challenge—typical for someone reentering the community after a prison term. "She called me to get some advice on whether she could do anything about her criminal record," Megaw says. "I hooked her up with an agency that gives advice to ex-offenders on how to make sure their criminal records are accurate, and whether it's possible to get a certificate of rehabilitation."

Through this referral, Debra has a better understanding of how to confront the challenges she faces. While she was disappointed to learn that at least a few more years need to go by before she has a shot at clearing her record, "this information is power and frames it for her," Megaw says. And the longer she remains law-abiding and stays out of the criminal justice system, the more desirable she will appear to potential employers.

In another example, court participant "Leonard" transferred to the Harlem Parole Reentry Court after having already served eight months of traditional parole. At the time of the transfer, he was unemployed and had just tested positive for marijuana. He was 28, had four children, and had never held a regular job. He had been in prison twice before. Once in the reentry program, Leonard was put into an intensive drug treatment program, which he graduated from in six months without any problems. He got off of drugs, got a job in a clothing store, is taking care of his children, and has moved into a new apartment. "Leonard had a lot of challenges," says his case manager, Nigel Jackson, "but he responded well to everything we asked of him, and has become a real role model for the other participants."

Conclusion

Although the Harlem Community Justice Center is in a building that is more than 100 years old, the ideas propelling the project are anything but antiquated. They reflect criminal justice innovations developed over the past 15 years, particularly the concepts first honed at the Midtown Community Court and now reflected in community justice projects around the country and, increasingly, the world.

One of the things that makes the Harlem Community Justice Center unique is its focus on Housing and Family Court cases rather than criminal matters. As Director Raye Barbieri puts it: “Though some problem-solving practices don’t translate easily to the civil court setting, many key problem-solving principles—increased accountability, improved information, an emphasis on prevention and early intervention as well as vigorous and mutually beneficial partnerships with community-based organizations—shape our daily work. Every day, we test new ways that the court can help to spur community stability and renewal.”

Over the long term, Barbieri hopes to “expand the Center’s role in the community as a coalition-builder and to emphasize prevention work.”

“We not only want to strengthen existing programs and enhance services,” she says, “but to become as robust a community resource as possible.” In the months ahead, plans call for the justice center’s Family Court to tackle other challenging community concerns like domestic violence, child custody and visitation. The justice center will be adapting problem-solving and community-based approaches to these new areas, looking to work in close partnership with government and local service providers to test practices and make a difference for the residents of Harlem.

**Appendix:
Programs at the
Harlem Community
Justice Center**

Housing Resource Center

Provides assessments, links to services, mediation, benefit assistance, and other services to Housing Court litigants and neighborhood residents in an effort to solve problems before they get to court.

Juvenile Reentry Network

Serves juveniles recently released from state placement. Participants and their families are linked to an expansive network of services and monitored by an aftercare counselor and partner agencies under a hearing officer's supervision. Innovative elements include a high level of family engagement, a strength-based approach to case management, youth development programming, access to mental health and drug treatment services, and intensive court monitoring.

Mediation

Provides mediation services for youths, families, and adults who come to the justice center, offering a non-adversarial way to solve conflicts affecting community members before they get to court.

Parole Reentry Court

Helps parolees from the Harlem community who have been imprisoned for both non-violent and violent offenses make the transition from life in prison to responsible citizenship. To promote accountability, participants are required to return to the court frequently to meet with case managers and parole officers and appear before a judge who closely monitors their compliance with court orders. An executive branch tribunal, it is not part of the judiciary.

Youth Court

Trains local teenagers to serve as jurors, judges and attorneys, handling real-life cases involving their peers. The goal of Youth Court is to use positive peer pressure to ensure that young people who have committed minor offenses pay back the community and receive the help they need to avoid further involvement in the justice system.

Youth Futures Network

A referral network of more than 46 community-based organizations and over 125 individuals that meet once a month to discuss drug treatment and prevention for area

Notes

Center for Court Innovation

The winner of an Innovations in American Government Award from the Ford Foundation and Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, the Center for Court Innovation is a unique public-private partnership that promotes new thinking about how courts and criminal justice agencies can aid victims, change the behavior of offenders and strengthen communities.

In New York, the Center functions as the state court system's independent research and development arm, creating demonstration projects that test new approaches to problems that have resisted conventional solutions. The Center's problem-solving courts include the nation's first community court (Midtown Community Court), as well as drug courts, domestic violence courts, youth courts, mental health courts and others.

Beyond New York, the Center disseminates the lessons learned from its experiments, helping courts across the country and the world launch their own problem-solving innovations. The Center contributes to the international conversation about justice through a variety of written products, including books, journal articles and white papers like this one. The Center also provides hands-on technical assistance, advising court and criminal justice planners across the globe. Current areas of interest include problem-solving justice, community prosecution, court technology, drug treatment courts, domestic violence courts, mental health courts and research/evaluation.

For more information, call 212 397 3050 or e-mail info@courtinnovation.org.

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A Public/Private Partnership with the
New York State Unified Court System