

Social Services at the Midtown Community Court

The Midtown Community Court, established in 1993, is designed to re-think the judicial response to misdemeanor offenses such as prostitution, illegal vending, graffiti, and shoplifting. The goal is to reduce both crime and incarceration. To achieve this goal, 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.

Youth and Young Adult Justice Services

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: These onsite 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 and negative coping skills like drug use and risky behavior, and help adolescents develop strategies for coping with difficult life experiences.

SOAR (Strengthening Our Awareness and Responses): A psychoeducational group that explores the roots of interpersonal and community violence. Participants discuss the ways in which violence impacts their lives and the role of the community and the individual in creating safer spaces.

Counseling

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.

Adolescent 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.

Drug Treatment Services

Gateways to Prevention

A one-session psychoeducational group, 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 and helps them build capacity for making positive decisions and understand 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. The 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.

The Treatment Readiness Program also includes one individual case management session prior to the group cycle in which clients complete a screening 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 on progress to the court. 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 sessions with staff.

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 (TWE): 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, this program 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 (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.

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

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.

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 Veterans 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 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 résumé, 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.

UPNEXT: 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 résumé assistance, interview preparation, rap sheet repair, parenting skills training, and assistance lowering child support arrears.

Groups for Summons Cases

Quality of Life: A 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 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 informational guides that educate 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 providing 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 the city's cycling laws.

For more information

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

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