

Overview

The Midtown Community Court, established in 1993, is designed to re-think the judicial response to low-level offenses such as shoplifting, illegal drug use, graffiti, and prostitution. Instead of fines or short-term jail, the Midtown Community Court mandates individualized sanctions (such as social services and community service) that are restorative to the community and participants. Through this problem-solving justice approach, the court seeks to reduce crime and incarceration and improve public trust in justice. For more than two decades, the Midtown Community Court has inspired criminal justice reformers around the world and served as a hub for testing new ideas in New York City.

Our Approach

The Midtown Community Court is operated by the New York State Unified Court System in collaboration with the Center for Court Innovation. Arraignments are held daily for arrests that occur in four police precincts in Midtown, Manhattan involving low-level, non-violent cases. Each year, the Midtown Community Court typically hears around 15,000 cases, including misdemeanors and summonses. The most frequent misdemeanor charges are trespassing, stolen property, and drug-related charges.

In response to a national opioid crisis, the court also launched the Overdose Avoidance and Recovery (OAR) part. The OAR part seeks to connect individuals who are at risk of overdose to substance use treatment and supportive services. This is a pre-plea program. While the individual engages in treatment, the prosecution of the case is suspended.

The Midtown Community Court also operates two special dockets that serve the entire borough of Manhattan: the Adolescent Diversion Program and Human Trafficking Intervention Court. The Adolescent Diversion Program seeks to address the unique needs of adolescents and young

adults (up to age 20), emphasizing outcomes that help young people avoid the legal and collateral consequences of a conviction. In a typical year, the court serves around 600 adolescents and young adults, with a 94 percent compliance rate, through the Adolescent Diversion Program. The services offered through the Human Trafficking Intervention Court seek to introduce participants to resources, including housing, health services, and safety planning. Those who complete social service programming avoid a criminal conviction. In a typical year, the court serves around 150 clients, with a 100 percent compliance rate.

Engaging the Community

The justice system is stronger, fairer, and more effective when the community is invested in what happens inside its doors. At Midtown, we invite the people who live and work in the neighborhood to be involved in identifying local problems and crafting solutions. The Midtown Community Court holds a monthly community conditions panel meeting. This meeting serves to bring together local stakeholders to identify and solve local issues. Led by the Midtown Community Court judge and program staff,

the meetings include New York City Police Department precinct commanders and officers, defense bar and New York County 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 and participate in community service projects. Through these activities, the court strives to respond to community needs and address issues that impact the neighborhood.

Programming

Social Services

The Midtown Community Court's on-site clinic houses a range of services, including group and individual counseling sessions addressing mental health, drug treatment, human trafficking, youth justice, unemployment, and veterans' issues. Additionally, social workers connect clients to off-site programming, including longer term drug treatment and mental health services. Midtown's clinic is open on a walk-in basis to anyone who seeks assistance.

Community Service

A hallmark of the Midtown Community Court's approach to low-level offenses is creating meaningful and visible community service opportunities. These restitution initiatives are developed in partnership with local residents, businesses, and police. For example, youth and young adults may complete their service with non-profit organizations such as Groundswell, which involves young people in public art projects. Other examples of community service projects include sweeping streets, painting over graffiti, planting tree pits, and cleaning parks. These types of visible projects offer local residents the opportunity to see the impact of the Midtown Community Court's work and are designed to re-integrate participants back into the community.

Diversion

The Midtown Community Court offers diversion opportunities for individuals arrested for the first time through Project Reset. Individuals who complete Project Reset may avoid standard case processing as well as criminal conviction. Created in collaboration with the New York City Police Department and the New York County 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.

Working with Fathers

UpNext is the court's fatherhood engagement and workforce development program for noncustodial fathers looking to secure sustainable employment and engage emotionally and financially with their children. UpNext provides tools and resources for participants to successfully compete in today's job market and connect with their families. These include educational and career coaching, peer support groups, child support assistance, and family activities. UpNext graduates can apply for an on-site fellowship or a transitional employment program with Times Square Alliance, a local business improvement district.

Compliance and Accountability

Each year, more than three out of four defendants complete their mandates. Individuals sentenced to community service complete approximately 14,000 hours of community service each year—the equivalent of \$150,000 of labor. In an effort to improve compliance, individuals sentenced to community service frequently start their mandates within 48 hours of sentencing.

For More Information

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