

Overview

Brooklyn Justice Initiatives seeks to reengineer the experience of criminal court in Brooklyn. Brooklyn Justice Initiatives serves as a launching pad for an array of reform initiatives that seek to fundamentally transform the bail system, sentencing, and the way justice-involved individuals are treated. By providing meaningful pre-trial supervised release and post-plea sentencing options, Brooklyn Justice Initiatives seeks to use an arrest as a window of opportunity to change the direction of a participant's life and avoid the harmful effects of incarceration.

Located in the centralized criminal courthouse on Schermerhorn Street and in the supreme court on Jay Street, Brooklyn Justice Initiatives is a team of social service providers, court-based resource coordinators, and others who seek to improve the quality of justice in Brooklyn. This includes providing judges and attorneys meaningful alternatives to bail, fines, and jail sentences. Brooklyn Justice Initiatives offers justice system actors information and opportunities to reach restorative and just case resolutions. Brooklyn Justice Initiatives strives to treat each participant with dignity and respect in an effort to promote compliance and restore public trust in justice. Each year, Brooklyn Justice Initiatives handles over 4,000 cases with social workers making over 1,000 referrals to voluntary services, including mental health services, job training, and substance abuse treatment.

Bail Reform

Brooklyn Justice Initiatives seeks to reduce judges' reliance on bail and pre-trial detention by offering meaningful supervised release options for eligible individuals. The supervised release program is designed to ensure public safety while minimizing the harmful impacts of Rikers Island. Participants receive rigorous monitoring and reminders to ensure that they attend their court appearances.

An evaluation found that Brooklyn Justice Initiatives significantly reduced pre-trial detention. Program participants were far more likely than a comparison group to remain in the community before trial (77 percent compared to 12 percent). Participants were almost twice as likely to avoid a criminal conviction and three times as likely to avoid jail time.

The supervised release program at Brooklyn Justice Initiatives was launched in 2013 as a pilot program for individuals charged with misdemeanor(s). With support from the New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, Brooklyn Justice Initiatives in March 2016 expanded the program to include eligible nonviolent felony charges. The program works with over 1,500 cases each year.

Helping Young Adults

Brooklyn Justice Initiatives provides special alternatives to incarceration for youth up to age 24 facing misdemeanor charges. Participants receive on-site counseling and referrals to community-based services such as drug treatment, GED classes, and job training. The goal is to improve case outcomes and reduce the use of incarceration for young adults.

In 2016, the Kings County District Attorney's Office and the Center for Court Innovation

received a grant through the U.S. Department of Justice to create and operate the first Young Adult Court in New York State. This partnership and the resulting grant has allowed Brooklyn Justice Initiatives to provide alternative to incarceration services to young people up to 24-years-old throughout the entire borough of Brooklyn. The program handles more than 2,100 cases each year and overall compliance is 95 percent.

Alternatives to Incarceration

Brooklyn Justice Initiatives provides alternatives to incarceration for eligible individuals who plead guilty to selected misdemeanor offences. Individuals are assessed to determine appropriate programming, which could include community supervision, on-site social service groups, community service, individual counseling, and linkages to outside providers. The goal is to connect individuals to services that help them avoid future contact with the justice system, reduce the use of unnecessary jail, and promote swift case resolutions.

Addressing Human Trafficking

Brooklyn Justice Initiatives seeks to break the cycle of exploitation and arrest for victims of trafficking by providing trauma-informed interventions and linkages to benefits. The goal is to connect participants with services, including mental health counseling and drug treatment. Typically, charges will be dismissed following completion of services. Each year, Brooklyn Justice Initiatives handles about 100 cases involving victims of trafficking.

Improving Mental Health

Brooklyn Justice Initiatives offers judges a range of alternatives for individuals with mental illness, both pre- and post-plea. The program seeks to divert participants from jail by providing them with on-site services such as mental health and substance use assessment, treatment plan development, case management, and psychiatric care, as well as referrals to community-based mental health programs for long-term treatment. Program participants receive community supervision while awaiting trial or as an alternative sentence.

Further Reading

Hahn, Josephine. 2016. *An Experiment in Bail Reform: Examining the Impact of the Brooklyn Supervised Release Program*. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation.

Available at: www.courtinnovation.org/publications/experiment-bail-reform-examining-impact-brooklyn-supervised-release-program

For More Information

Contact Jonathan Monsalve at 347.404.9973 or monsalvej@courtinnovation.org.