

Upstate New York Overview

The Center for Court Innovation's Upstate New York office seeks to create a fairer legal system by designing and implementing new programs, performing original research, and providing reformers with the tools they need to launch new strategies. The office operates in Onondaga and neighboring counties where its team works closely with local practitioners to identify and address challenges in criminal, civil, and community settings.

The Center works to identify gaps in services, provide training and technical assistance, and help communities find strengths-based solutions to common issues of crime and safety. The Upstate New York office's activities include:

Problem-Solving Justice

The office assists with the planning, development, implementation, and enhancement of a number of court-based initiatives. The office develops problem-solving courts (including mental health courts in Syracuse, N.Y., and Ithaca, N.Y.), provides case management staffing in the Veterans Treatment Court, and performs needs assessments for other problem-solving initiatives such as the Strong Starts Court Initiative.

The Upstate office also convenes the Mental Health/Criminal Justice Multi-Disciplinary Team, which brings together criminal justice practitioners and mental health treatment providers to review cases and create action plans for justice-involved clients with mental health issues. Recently staff led the Mental Health Crisis Intervention Team planning workgroup as part of Gov. Cuomo's Executive Order #203. The workgroup's current goal is developing a 9-1-1 Mental Health Diversion program for Onondaga County.

Community Development and Crime Prevention

- **Syracuse Peacemaking Project:** The team implemented the Syracuse Peacemaking Project, a restorative justice initiative that trains community volunteers to facilitate peacemaking circles, which are inspired by Native American practices. Cases are referred by the police, courts, community agencies, and schools. Peacemaking efforts include the 315 LIFT Program for 12- to 17-year-olds who are part of the juvenile delinquency system, as well as circles at the Hillbrook Juvenile Detention Facility, and eCORE, which provides peacemaking to three low-income senior housing units on Syracuse's North Side to prevent elder abuse and address social isolation.
- **Take Back the Streets:** The initiative works with the city of Syracuse, law enforcement and human services organizations to implement crime prevention through environmental design models and address persistent public safety challenges in high-poverty Syracuse neighborhoods. Staff facilitate a service provider collaborative, offer resident leadership development,

and organize a community impact team that empowers residents to address crime and safety issues on their block. Staff use the Kitchen Table Talks model to gather information from city residents about neighborhood development and opportunities for safe, affordable housing in Syracuse.

- **Cities RISE:** Staff connect with Syracuse residents to find solutions for tenants facing housing issues, such as landlord harassment, code violations, repair issues, and experiencing unwarranted and illegal evictions.
- **Youth Impact Team:** Staff partner with SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry to engage youth ages 12- to 21-years-old on a participatory budgeting and research project that identifies crime prevention strategies and develops them into action projects in Syracuse's Westside.

Supportive Services

- **Defendant Services Program:** Staff work directly with Onondaga County Assigned Counsel Panel criminal defense attorneys to provide support and linkages for indigent defendants to services that addresses mental health, substance abuse, housing, and other issues.
- **Parent Support Program:** Staff provide employment services to noncustodial parents who are unemployed or underemployed and owe child support. This program is a collaborative effort with the Onondaga County Family Court, Probation Supervision, and the Child Support Enforcement Unit.
- **Patient Navigator Program:** A licensed clinical social worker provides survivors in the Human Trafficking Intervention Court with referrals to medical and social services, including primary care physicians, mental health and substance use treatment, and housing.
- **Jail Education Program:** In collaboration with the Onondaga County Health Department, staff provide a health education curriculum to incarcerated women. Topics focus on reproductive health issues including prenatal care, postpartum depression, breast health, chronic diseases e, and sexually transmitted infections.
- **Elder Justice Committee:** Staff support a countywide initiative to prevent, address, and assist victims of elder abuse through strategic planning, outreach, conferences, training, and the development of coordinated approaches to the issue.

Technical Assistance, Site Visits, and Trainings

The office provides training and technical assistance around justice system innovation. Staff offer training in trauma-informed lawyering and assistance planning and implementing problem-solving justice initiatives for justice system practitioners including probation, law enforcement, courts and community service providers.

For More Information

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