

Overview

Project Reset diverts people out of the justice system with a proportionate, restorative, and effective response to low-level arrests. Through Project Reset, participants avoid a criminal record by completing community-based programming. The program's approach to minor crime promotes healing, encourages conversations on accountability, and strengthens public trust in the justice system by emphasizing procedural justice.

Concept

Every year, tens of thousands of people in New York City are arrested for low-level offenses. In the past, police and prosecutors have had only two responses to choose from: prosecution—and, in some cases, jail—or releasing people without a meaningful response from the justice system. Project Reset offers a third option: a community-based program that is restorative for participants and communities and avoids the potential harms of standard case processing.

Eligibility

Project Reset serves people 18 years and older who are issued Desk Appearance Tickets for certain low-level, non-violent crimes, including shoplifting, trespassing, and criminal mischief. Project Reset is currently available in Manhattan, Staten Island and the Bronx.

How It Works

Following an arrest, the prosecutor's office refers eligible cases to a non-profit organization that offers people the opportunity to engage in programming rather than go to court. Those eligible may consult with a defense attorney before deciding to participate, or at any point in the process.

Participants complete an intake interview with program staff and engage in two-to-four hours of programming. In Manhattan participants

complete educational group workshops, arts-oriented programming, and/or individual counseling sessions. In the Bronx, programming consists of a circle that incorporates restorative practices and involves community volunteers. Participants discuss their arrest and any underlying issues that led to their contact with the justice system. They are also encouraged to reflect on their own accountability and discuss ways to avoid future arrests.

Individual counseling sessions are also available in the Bronx as needed. In Staten Island, participants are offered interactive groups grounded in the tenets of procedural justice and cognitive behavioral therapy, as well as individual sessions focused on connecting individuals with appropriate community-based services. All participants are offered voluntary referrals to community-based social services such as counseling, job training, and treatment for substance use disorders.

Everyone who successfully completes Project Reset never sets foot in a courtroom. Instead, the district attorney declines to prosecute their cases. Participants do not get a criminal record for the case and their arrest record is sealed.

Impact

An evaluation of Project Reset in Manhattan found that participants were significantly less likely than defendants in a comparison group

to be convicted of a new crime within one year. The study also documented improved case processing times, case outcomes, and positive perceptions of the program. More than 95 percent of participants said they had made the right decision by entering the program and that they would recommend Project Reset to someone in a similar situation.

Partnership

Project Reset is a collaboration between the District Attorney's Offices in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Staten Island and Queens, the Center for Court Innovation, Young New Yorkers, The Osborne Association, and the New York Police Department.

For More Information

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