

Overview

Brooklyn Justice Initiatives offers people an opportunity to change the direction of their lives. The program transforms how people navigate the legal process of criminal court in Brooklyn, NY, and helps them avoid the harmful effects of incarceration. It provides meaningful early diversion, supervised release for people awaiting trial, and alternative sentencing options.

The team is made up of social workers, case managers, resource coordinators, community engagement specialists, and other practitioners working in Brooklyn Criminal and Supreme Court, as well as in community-based offices in downtown Brooklyn. In recent years, Brooklyn Justice Initiatives has grown to serve more than 7,500 participants annually, working to keep people in their communities while their cases are being resolved.

Staff offer participants meaningful connections to both mandated and voluntary services, including mental health services, job training, and substance abuse treatment. Staff treat each participant with dignity and respect in an effort to promote better outcomes for all and restore public trust in the justice system.

Supervised Release Program

Brooklyn Justice Initiatives provides community supervision and supportive services for people awaiting trial in approximately 5,000 cases in Brooklyn Criminal and Supreme Court each year through its Supervised Release Program, an alternative to pre-trial detention.

The Supervised Release Program (SRP) in Brooklyn began as a pilot project in 2013. The pilot was followed by the launch of a citywide supervised release program model after the pilot demonstrated reductions in both pre-trial and post-conviction incarceration while ensuring people make their court appearances. While the purpose of supervised release is to help ensure

that people return to court, Brooklyn SRP provides individuals with so much more. The supervised release model employs social workers and case managers who check in regularly with supervised release participants to not only help plan for upcoming court dates and address needs and barriers to court attendance, but also to connect them to community-based resources and services that can provide lasting support beyond the duration of a court case. According to an independent evaluation, the SRP is as effective as cash bail at ensuring return to court without increasing risk of rearrest.

Since 2016, the SRP has been safely and effectively keeping those awaiting trial in their communities, contributing to historic declines in the NYC jail population and laying the groundwork for New York State's landmark bail reforms, which eliminated cash bail for all but the most serious crimes beginning in January 2020. Following these reforms, the SRP now serves individuals charged with all types and severity of criminal offenses, including violent felony offenses.

Resolving Cases Before Court

Project Reset is a pre-arraignment diversion program that has been offering proportionate and effective responses to low-level charges in Brooklyn since 2019, giving people the opportunity to avoid the potential harms of justice involvement. Project Reset participants avoid prosecution and a criminal record by completing community-based programming, including collaborative group discussions, activities that facilitate learning and behavioral change, or art-based work-

shops at Brooklyn Justice Initiatives or the Brooklyn Museum to explore questions of meaning, identity, and social justice through art. Graduates from the program (nearly 400 per year) never have to set foot in a courtroom. The program's unique approach to responding to misdemeanor charges holds people accountable for their actions while promoting well-being and strengthening public trust in the justice system.

Alternatives to Incarceration

Brooklyn Justice Initiatives provides a range of alternatives to incarceration (ATI) for individuals arraigned on misdemeanor or felony offenses. BJI staff help determine appropriate programming based on individuals' unique needs and circumstances, including on-site social service groups, community service, individual counseling, and connections 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 incarceration, and promote swift case resolutions. When the ATI program started in 2013, it served young adults, ages 16 to 24, charged with misdemeanor offenses. Since then, it has expanded to serve participants of all ages, on both misdemeanor and felony charges, reaching more than 2,000 participants a year.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Dana Rivera, *ATI and Project Reset*
riverad@innovatingjustice.org

Amanda Berman, *Supervised Release*
bermana@innovatingjustice.org