

The Red Hook Community Justice Center: Research Findings

Located in southwest Brooklyn, the Red Hook Community Justice Center is a community court that seeks to reduce local crime and incarceration while improving public confidence in justice. An official branch of the New York State Court System, the Justice Center features a multi-jurisdictional courtroom where a single judge handles low-level criminal, housing, and juvenile delinquency cases. The Justice Center also houses an array of onsite social services, youth programs, and community outreach initiatives. The Justice Center is the product of a public-private partnership that includes the New York State Court System, the City of New York, the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, and dozens of city agencies and non-profit groups.

With funding from the National Institute of Justice, the National Center for State Courts completed an independent evaluation of the Justice Center in 2013. This fact sheet summarizes major findings of the report, "A Comprehensive Evaluation of the Red Hook Community Justice Center."¹

Increased Use of Alternative Sanctions

The Justice Center increased the use of alternative sentences: 78 percent of offenders received community service or social service sanctions, compared with 22 percent among comparable cases processed at the regular criminal courthouse in Brooklyn.

Reduced Use of Jail

The Justice Center reduced the number of offenders receiving jail sentences by 35 percent. In addition, there were significant differences in how the Justice Center used jail compared

to the downtown courthouse. At Red Hook, almost no defendants (1 percent) received jail at arraignment. Instead, jail was reserved as a "secondary" sanction, for offenders who were noncompliant with their initial community or social service sentences.

Reduced Recidivism

Adult defendants handled at the Justice Center were 10 percent less likely to commit new crimes than offenders who were processed in a traditional courthouse; juvenile defendants were 20 percent less likely to re-offend. Further analysis indicated that these differences were sustained well beyond the primary two-year follow-up period.

Impact on Local Crime

There was a sustained decrease in both felony and misdemeanor arrests in the police precincts served by the Justice Center. Similar phenomena

1. Lee, C.G., F. Cheesman, D. Rottman, R. Swaner, S. Lambson, M. Rempel & R. Curtis (2013). A Comprehensive Evaluation of the Red Hook Community Justice Center. Williamsburg VA: National Center for State Courts.

were not apparent in adjacent precincts, where arrest patterns remained highly variable throughout the observation period. Although precise causality cannot be established, crime (as measured by arrests) went down in Red Hook in a way that it did not in surrounding areas.

Improved Procedural Justice

Evaluators concluded that the Justice Center had improved perceptions of procedural justice, reflected in the fair treatment of defendants throughout the courthouse; the “respectful two-way interaction” between judge and defendant in the courtroom; and efforts at building citizen trust through community outreach.

Cost-Efficiency

For each of the 3,210 adult misdemeanor defendants arraigned at the Justice Center in 2008, taxpayers realized an estimated savings of \$4,756 per defendant in avoided victimization costs relative to similar cases processed in a traditional misdemeanor court – a total of \$15

million in avoided victimization costs. After factoring the upfront costs of operating the Justice Center, total resource savings in 2008 were \$6,852,477; savings outweighed program costs by a factor of nearly 2 to 1.

Project Implementation

The Justice Center’s efforts to achieve a close and meaningful engagement with the local community were successful. Based on interviews with residents, community leaders, and offenders, the public perceives the Justice Center not as an outpost of city government, but as a homegrown community institution.

For more information

The report is available for download at:

<http://bit.ly/RHeval2013>

To listen to an interview with two of the authors, visit:

<http://bit.ly/RHpodcast>