

Driver Accountability Program

The Driver Accountability Program is an innovative response to driving-related offenses that seeks to improve traffic safety and increase accountability among dangerous drivers. The program is rooted in principles of restorative justice, self-reflection, and self-empowerment. Piloted at the Red Hook Community Justice Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., the program has expanded, with the support of the New York City Council, to the Bronx, Manhattan, Staten Island, and the rest of Brooklyn.

The Driver Accountability Program is available to individuals who are charged with driving-related offenses in criminal court. It serves as an alternative to fines or jail, or as a pre-condition of dismissal or reduction in charges for vehicular offenses such as reckless driving, driving while intoxicated, driving with a suspended license, and failure to yield to a pedestrian. The program curriculum was developed by the Center for Court Innovation with input from a working group that included New York City Councilmember Brad Lander, the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, the New York Police Department, Families for Safe Streets, and Transportation Alternatives.

Groups are offered in English and Spanish at the Center for Court Innovation's operating programs throughout the city: Brooklyn Justice Initiatives, Bronx Community Solutions, Manhattan Justice Opportunities, Staten Island Justice Center, and the Red Hook Community Justice Center. By the end of 2019, the program served over 2,000 participants.

The Curriculum

The 90-minute session takes a restorative approach. Rather than sitting passively through a lecture, participants actively engage in exercises and discussions guided by a trained facilitator. After a brief introduction, participants complete a questionnaire that requires them to rate and describe their driving

beliefs and behaviors, forcing them to engage in meaningful self-reflection. Participants are then asked to share their answers, which are used as a framework for a broader discussion about what constitutes dangerous driving and why.

A critical component of the program is incorporation of the victims' voice. Participants watch "Drive Like Your Family Lives Here," a video that includes testimonials from those who have lost loved ones to traffic violence. Facilitators then lead a discussion about the video and the importance of thinking more broadly about one's place on the roads and in their broader community.

In the latter part of the session, participants are required to identify two to three driving behaviors that they are committed to changing. Participants identify concrete steps they can take to effectuate those changes. The goal is to empower the participants to become agents of their own change, making it more likely that they will follow through and hold themselves accountable in the future.

Impact

A preliminary evaluation found that participants who completed the program were 40 percent less likely to be rearrested for traffic-related offenses than drivers who had been arrested on similar traffic-related offenses and had not gone through the program.

In addition to examining recidivism, the program measures its impact through surveys that participants are asked to submit 30 days after program completion. Based on feedback from those who completed the follow-up survey, 86 percent reported that their driving behavior had changed.

When asked to share what they found most useful about the program, participants have cited the dialogue and open conversations about their driving behaviors, identifying steps they can take to change, and hearing from those who have been victims of dangerous driving. Below are some comments from participants:

- « *I always thought, 'I know what I'm doing,' but you don't really know what you're doing if you're not thinking of the consequences.*
- « *I will remember to think of the other people and that we have significant responsibility in handling the vehicle safely as part of a community.*
- « *I commit to just being more mindful of my actions and how they can affect me and others.*
- « *The course impacted the way I think and the way I view driving. Learning from my peers' experience and the reasons why they were in the class was eye opening. I realized how often I didn't think of the more serious consequences of driving, and I will try to be more careful in the future because I don't want to hurt anyone and wouldn't want anyone hurting my kids while driving.*

For More Information

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