

Photographs by Michael Falco
Design by Bardo Industries

The mural projects were created in collaboration with Groundswell.
The Brownsville Community Justice Center is a project of the Center for Court Innovation.



After I was arrested, my grandmother brought me and a few friends to the Justice Center.

“I did community benefit projects—painting murals and cleaning parks. I was really proud to do that work.”

Then I volunteered at the Justice Center. A full-time job opened up and they asked me to apply. I was in shock when I found out I’d gotten the job. My whole family was so excited for me.

The staff are from here, we grew up here. So we can relate to the kids so well. We know how the streets are. When you come up to the Center, you don’t have to worry about anybody coming after you, or anybody judging you. Because we’ve lived that life before.

“Somebody has to catch the teens before they get caught up into the system. Because they have potential, they have talent. They just don’t get a chance to show it.”

Dante Kearsse
Community benefit specialist at the Justice Center



“When you used to Google ‘Made in Brownsville,’ the first thing that came up was ‘More Arrests Made in Brownsville.’ Now, if you Google it, you will read about young people using their talents to make change in their neighborhood.”

That’s where our work meshes so well with the work of the Brownsville Community Justice Center. They have court-involved young people painting murals with Groundswell. The kids come because they have to, but once they pick up a roller, it becomes an art project. And they feel like artists in that moment.

Quardean Lewis-Allen
Founder and director of Made in Brownsville



A lot of people think, “Oh, these kids don’t want to do anything but smoke weed and fight.” That narrative is extremely difficult for young people to get past.

But we’re engaging them.

“They know that our staff understand the challenges they’re dealing with, and that helps open up a different side of them. It’s amazing to see what they’re capable of when they feel safe to try.”

Whether it’s documentary film classes or entrepreneurship programming or community service, they always exceed our expectations, no matter how high we set the bar. We create opportunities for that young person to be a leader and to make change. They help the old ladies on the street who before might have thought they were just a gang banger. So someone notices the humanity in them. And that empowers them.

Erica Mateo
Director of community initiatives at the Justice Center

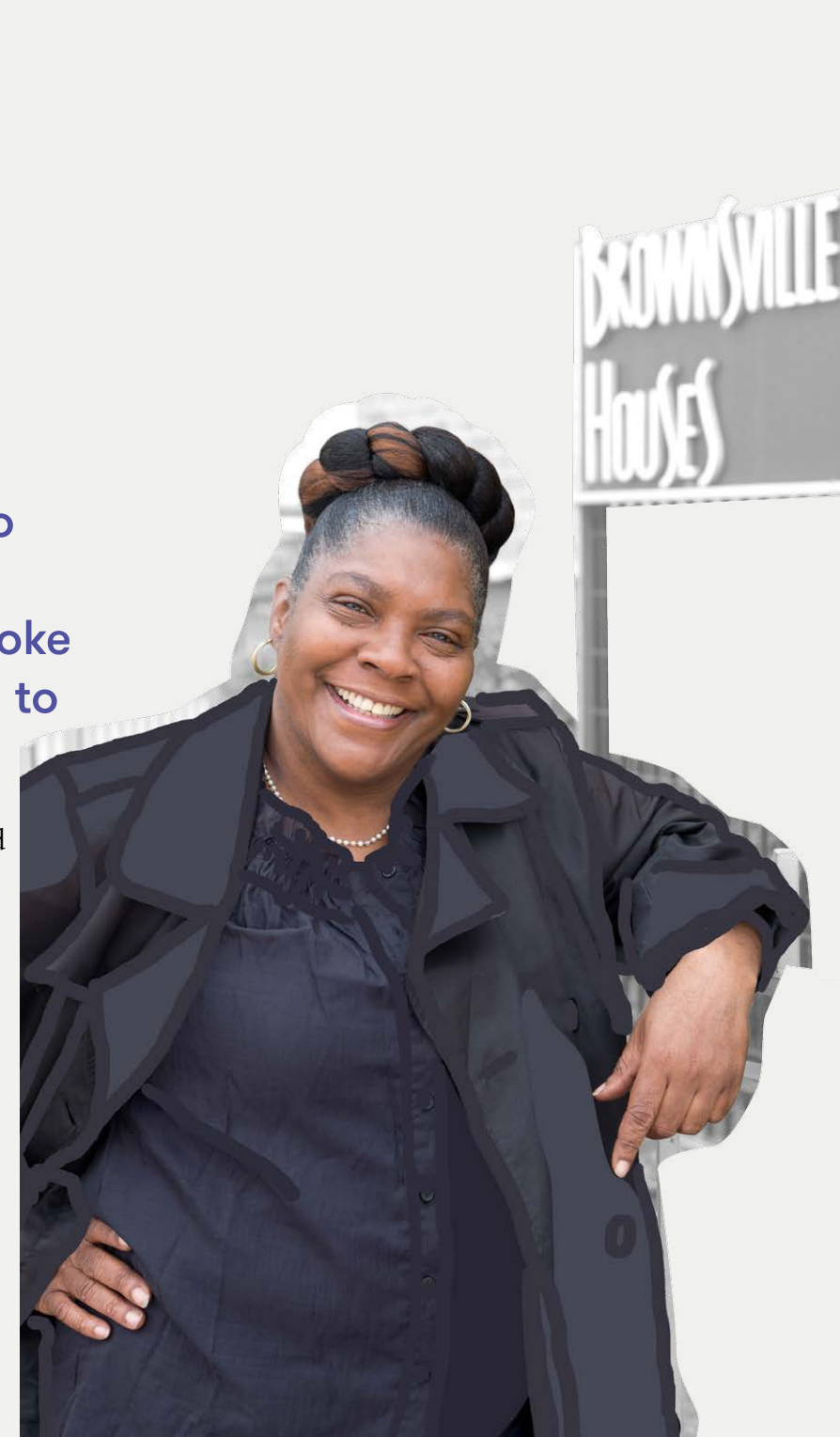


I’d been going through what every kid in this neighborhood goes through: peer pressure, drugs, that kind of thing.

“At the Justice Center, I started to meet people and started hearing different perspectives on life. I broke out of old habits. I realized I need to be around something positive.”

People see me on Facebook with my purple shirt and say, “Willie’s doing such good things.” I always try to strive for better.

Willie Minter
Justice Center Youth Advisory Board graduate



I love what the Brownsville Community Justice Center has done.

My son came through the Justice Center, started his own little clothing line. He went to college and holds down a job. The ones who walk through the Justice Center’s door, they’re not out there doing that negative stuff anymore. You see them walking past the same corners in those purple shirts. That purple shirt is pride to them.

“They’re teaching kids to own themselves and not worry about everything else. They show them that you can still be cool doing something positive.”

Karrie Scarboro
Resource specialist at Community Solutions

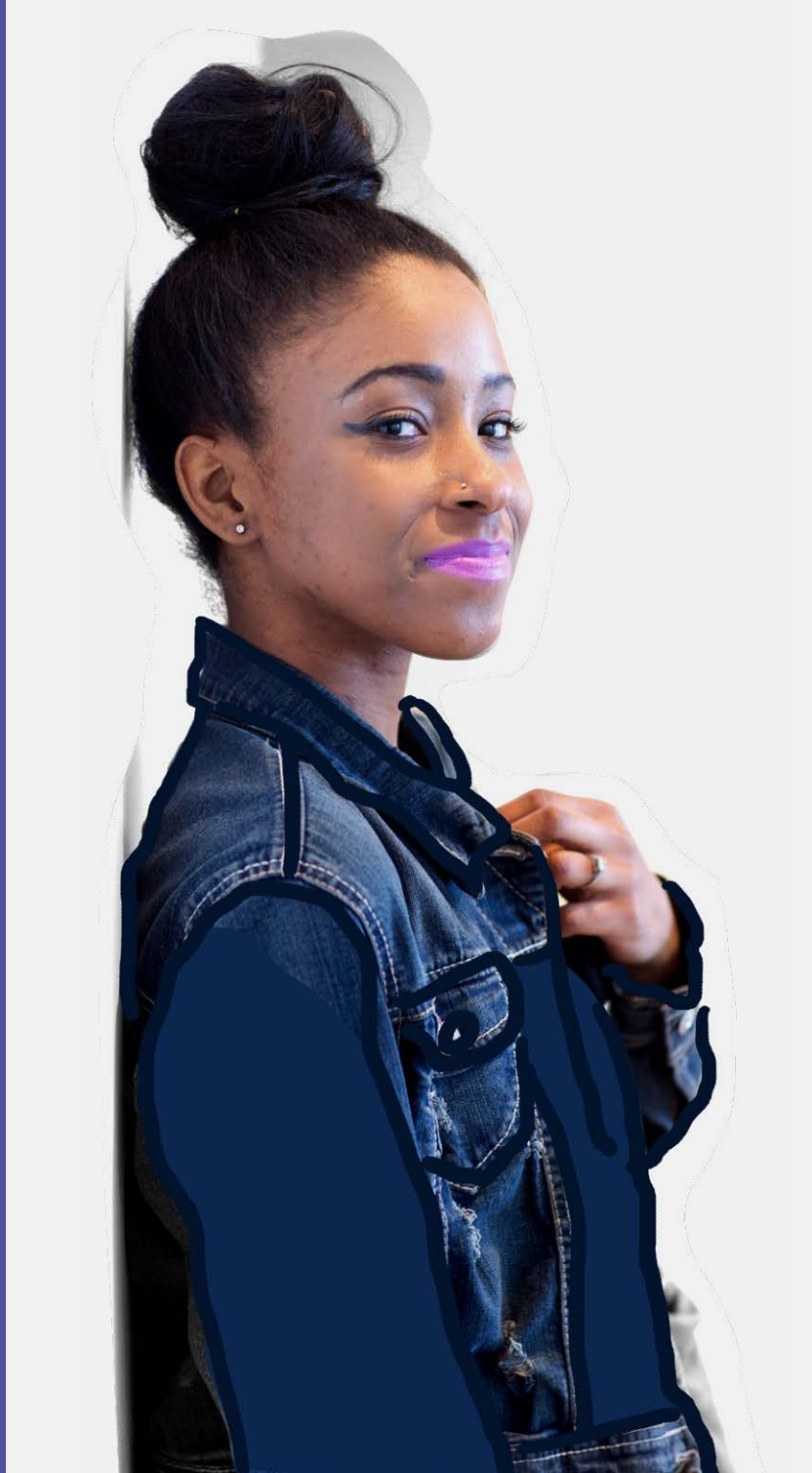


My goal is to stop the behavior that brings people to Probation.

“These young people feel like no one has listened to them their whole lives. That’s why we listen to them. ‘What are your troubles? What do you think?’”

It’s going to get better. Because we’re here. And we’re not going anywhere.

Jacqueline Simmons
Supervising probation officer at the Department of Probation



When I first moved to Brownsville five years ago, I was frightened. It felt like everywhere I turned, people were arguing, someone was getting jumped or being followed.

Things got better for me when I came to the Justice Center. I wasn’t required to come, but I wanted to try something new and help out my community.

“To see everything they were doing—the gardens, the murals on Pitkin Avenue—was so impressive. They really brought color and beauty to this neighborhood.”

I want to run a non-profit for women. Women’s empowerment and counseling. I want to change the mindset of young females. Give them courage, bravery, self-sufficiency.

Ciara Richardson
Member of Young Adult Entrepreneurship Program at the Justice Center

courtinnovation.org/brownsville | Instagram: [@the_brownsville_justice_center](https://www.instagram.com/the_brownsville_justice_center)

Things are getting better because we are getting more programs like the Justice Center, the Brownsville Partnership, the Brownsville Recreation Center. I’m proud to see that all of us are working together.

My project works with high-risk youth. But we cannot tell them to stop doing what they’re doing if we don’t have anything to give them.

“The Justice Center is key to our model because it offers them a safe haven to go and get resources—arts programming, job training, resume writing. And they get a chance to change Brownsville and take pride in what they’re doing and in this neighborhood.”

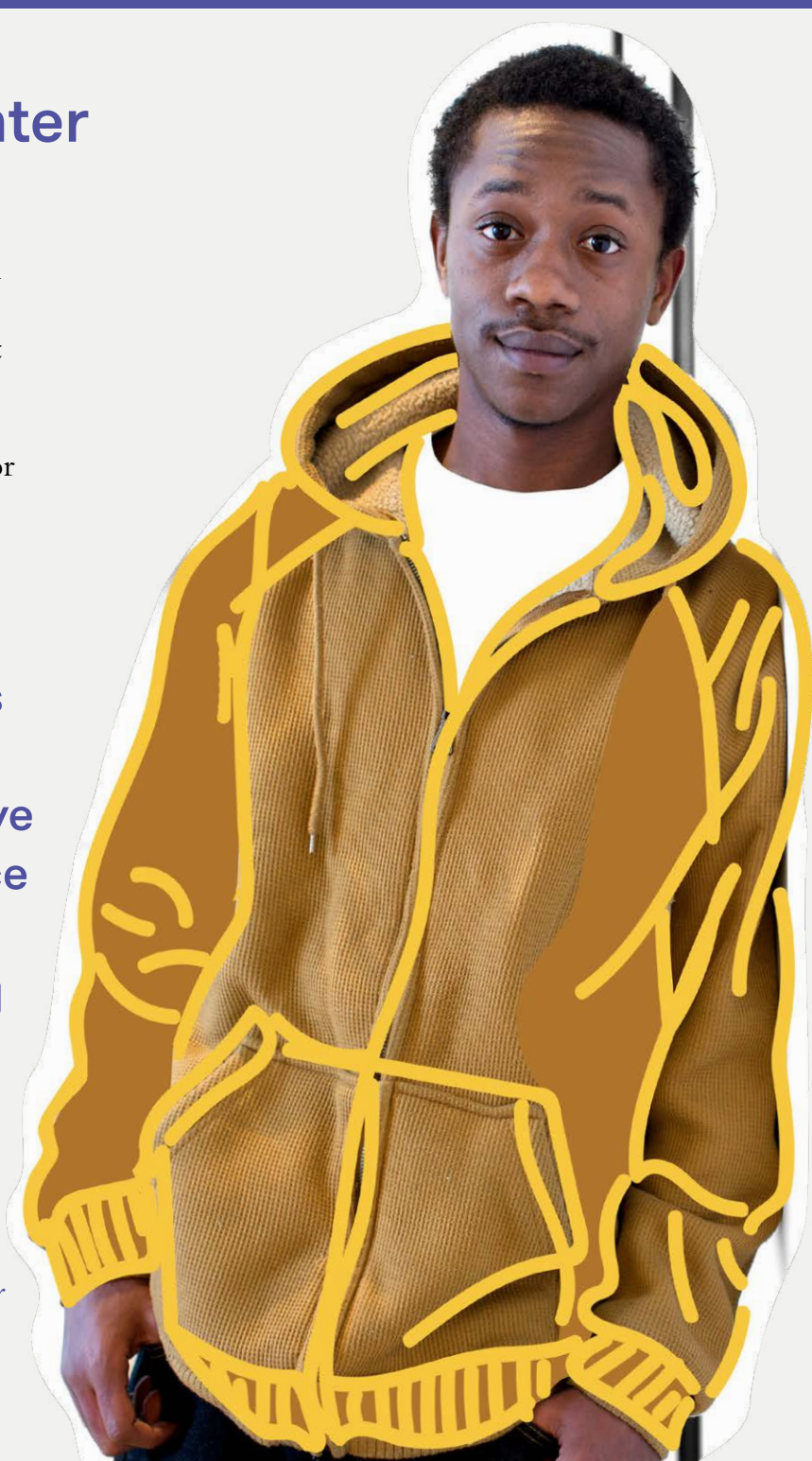
Anthony Newerls
Program manager at CAMBA and founder of Brooklyn Blizzards Youth



I came to the Justice Center after I got in trouble with the law. When I started here, I was doing the Young Adult Entrepreneurship Program. They asked me what I wanted to do and I said I wanted to be a graphic designer. They hooked me up with Made in Brownsville. I did a couple of internships and now I’m a junior graphic designer.

“I like what the Justice Center is doing and I like to help people out. I work on community benefits projects, cleaning up Belmont Avenue, throwing events to improve the relationship between the police and the community. I have a little brother. I want a good community for him.”

Quaming Boatwright
Junior designer at Made in Brownsville and graduate of Young Adult Entrepreneurship Program at the Justice Center



The Business Improvement District is focused on revitalizing Pitkin Avenue and developing the community of Brownsville. We help bring in new businesses and work with the community to keep the surrounding area clean and ensure that services are operating properly.

“Within the last five to 10 years, we’ve seen a huge number of improvements. Business owners are feeling more comfortable opening new stores.”

Crime is dropping, and the Justice Center deserves some credit for that.

Francilla Wilkins
Consultant at Urban Strategies, Inc. and board member at Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District

