



Opportunity Youth Part New Rochelle City Court

Opportunity Youth Part is a Center for Court Innovation-supported initiative that launched in New Rochelle City Court in October 2020. The initiative is a specialized calendar of cases that serves emerging adults, ages 16 to 24, who are facing misdemeanor or felony charges and are not in school, are unemployed or under-employed, and are typically disconnected from positive services.

Judge Jared R. Rice created the Opportunity Youth Part initiative and presides over court sessions and weekly hour-long meetings with service providers, attorneys, and mentors. The court takes a community-centric approach to resolve cases and incorporates restorative justice and procedural fairness practices with the goal to support the participants' success. The Opportunity Youth Part is the first emerging adult justice initiative in the 9th Judicial District and serves as a model for other communities. On the initiative's one-year anniversary, Janet DiFiore, chief judge of the Court of Appeals of the State of New York, called the court a "nationally innovative pilot focused on the development of age-appropriate alternatives to incarceration."

Participants work with a case manager and receive a court-designed wellness plan, which may include referrals to programming related to their case. Case managers connect participants to additional providers that will offer them workforce development, job placement, educational support, mentors, or therapy for behavioral health or substance use challenges. Participants meet regularly with their case managers and appear frequently in court to provide updates on their progress.

Goals

The initiative aims to improve case outcomes and provide participants with age-appropriate

alternatives to incarceration through a connection to community resources and a network of positive relationships. Participants in compliance with their wellness plans will often receive a more favorable disposition and could graduate from the court without a criminal record. On average, participants are involved with the court for 12–18 months.

Community Partnerships

The Opportunity Youth Part brings together a team of case managers, service providers, lawyers, and mentors, who work together to provide resources and job and educational opportunities to justice-involved emerging adults. About 35 stakeholders and community partners in Westchester County meet bimonthly to support the initiative and offer resources.

Mentorship

Connecting caring mentors to participants is an important pillar of the initiative. Mentors are adult volunteers with a sincere desire to advise, support, and guide participants during their involvement in the program. Mentors are assigned to mentees based on shared backgrounds and interests. In its first year, the Opportunity Youth Part's mentor coordinator matched over 50 participants with mentors.