

Overview

Bronx Community Solutions seeks to improve the quality of criminal justice in the Bronx by reducing the use of incarceration, promoting equity, and creating safe and healthy communities. By providing alternatives to incarceration, community-based sentencing options, links to meaningful services, and community-led justice interventions, our programming keeps individuals out of jail, restores community relationships, builds local leadership, and helps participants avoid further criminal justice involvement.

With offices in the central criminal courthouse on 161st Street and in the nearby Morissania neighborhood, Bronx Community Solutions is a team of social service providers, compliance monitors, community improvement supervisors, restorative justice facilitators, and others who seek to improve the quality of justice in the Bronx. We offer judges and attorneys meaningful alternatives to fines, jail sentences, and court appearances. We treat participants with dignity and respect, foster successful case completion, and help restore public trust in the justice system. Bronx Community Solutions works with thousands of cases annually.



Engaging the Community

Bronx Community Solutions works collaboratively with local residents, community leaders, and criminal justice system practitioners to inform programming, promote discussion, and raise awareness around issues affecting the community. Bronx Community Solutions creates community improvement projects that address local needs. Projects include painting over graffiti, packing food and care kits, and conducting community events.

Using Principles of Restorative Justice

Project Reset provides an opportunity for participants charged with low-level offenses to resolve cases without going to court. Using the principles of restorative justice, participants take part in “circle” discussions with local community members. The circles explore questions of accountability, community impact, healing, and future goals. Project Reset empowers community members to be part of the solution and shows participants that their community is committed to helping them. In 2019, nearly 500 people resolved their cases through Project Reset.

This work has led to the creation of a larger restorative justice initiative that helps resolve cases in the Bronx utilizing the principles of restorative justice. Community building circles, interpersonal harm circles, and Circles for Safe Streets are meaningful interventions that provide reflection and connection for participants.

Youth Impact offers a range of peer-facilitated options designed to create off-ramps from justice involvement for youth. Restorative Circles are facilitated by Youth Impact members (ages 14 to 18) to resolve cases diverted from Family Court, the New York City Police Department, and schools.

Reducing the Use of Jail

Research has shown that providing alternative sentencing options to judges reduces reliance on jail. In the case of Bronx Community Solutions, less than one percent of convicted clients received jail sentences compared to 16 percent of a comparison group. Cases mandated to Bronx Community Solutions were processed more quickly than comparable cases and were more likely to be disposed of as violation-level offenses, which do not contribute to a person’s permanent criminal record.^[1]

Empowering Youth and Young Adults

Each year, Bronx Community Solutions handles cases involving young adults ages 18 to 24. The goal is to address the unique needs of young people by offering referrals to social services, mentoring sessions, and educational outings.

In 2019, 80 percent of the young men who participated in one-on-one mentorship sessions went on to complete their social service mandates.

Addressing Human Trafficking

Bronx Community Solutions seeks to break the cycle of exploitation and reduce the harms experienced by survivors of trafficking. The goal is to link participants with services, including mental health counseling and drug treatment. Voluntary services are offered via Project HEAL. Bronx Project HEAL (Helping to Empower through Advocacy and Leadership) is a peer-support initiative for justice-involved human trafficking survivors. It is based on the curriculum of National Project HEAL, a leadership program driven by an advisory council comprised of survivors and national experts that centers the unique needs and diverse experiences of survivors.

Improving Mental Health

Bronx Community Solutions seeks to ensure that those with mental health needs receive counseling and referrals to voluntary community-based services. An evaluation found that clients who received a mental health intervention from Bronx Community Solutions were significantly less likely to be rearrested than similar defendants who received no intervention. For women, the impact of the intervention was especially pronounced, with re-arrest rates that were 21 percent lower.^[2]

Building Local Leadership

Through its ties with the community and restorative justice initiatives, Bronx Community Solutions provides opportunities to empower and develop local leaders of all ages.

Youth Impact members are trained in restorative justice practices, attend educational and professional development trainings throughout the year, and spearhead projects that give back to their local community.

Addressing Substance Use

With the rise of fentanyl, overdose fatalities in New York City rose sharply beginning in 2016, a trend that is especially concerning in the Bronx.

The Bronx Criminal Court, in partnership with Bronx Community Solutions and the Bronx District Attorney's Office, is addressing this crisis with the Bronx Heroin Overdose Prevention and Education (HOPE) initiative. Bronx HOPE is an innovative pre-arraignment diversion program that engages individuals at the precinct level and redirects substance users to community-based health and treatment services, instead of prosecution. HOPE successfully diverted 144 cases in 2019.

- [1] Cadoff, Becca, and Tia Pooler. Forthcoming. "Evaluating the Impacts of Alternative-to-Incarceration Sentencing Options: A Quantitative Case Study of the Bronx County Criminal Court." For the complete study, email hauslikd@innovatingjustice.org.
- [2] Pooler, Tia. "Targeting the Mental Health Needs of Misdemeanor Defendants: An Impact Evaluation of the Bronx Mental Health Initiative." The evaluation is available for download at rb.gy/jtehxc.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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