

# Manhattan Misdemeanor Mental Health Court

The Manhattan Misdemeanor Mental Health Court /AP18 (MMHC) helps people with mental health issues and co-occurring disorders engage meaningfully in social services that seek to reduce their involvement in the justice system. Launched in March 2022, the Midtown Community Justice Center team works with participants to craft meaningful and individualized responses to the myriad intersectional issues that people living with serious mental illness face. Simultaneously the team addresses treatment needs while considering the quality of life and public safety concerns of the community. Participation in MMHC is voluntary and requires a referral into the Part upon the consent of the legal parties.

## Process

A licensed social worker conducts a clinical assessment with each client referred to Manhattan Misdemeanor Mental Health Court that establishes the basis for treatment recommendations. Following the clinical assessment, the Midtown clinic team, the defense agency, the District Attorney's office, and court attorney case conference to discuss treatment and mandate recommendations, provide client updates, and discuss

dispositions. These weekly case conferences build trust among court parties and allow the case to move quickly from assessment to disposition. The average MMHC case reaches resolution in 33-44 days from the participant's first appearance in the Court Part, and takes place at Midtown Community Justice Center (Justice Center) every Friday.

Manhattan Misdemeanor Mental Health Court centers the tenets of procedural justice and rapid engagement throughout the Court process. Clients are more likely

to return and complete their mandate when they feel their process is clear, fair, and respectful. The Justice Center engages clients as soon as they enter the courtroom to build trust and ensure that everyone with a matter before the Court understands the process and has an opportunity to ask questions and get answers. Upon successful completion of the program, the participant is presented with a certificate of completion by the judge. Representatives from the social work team and the legal parties speak about the participant's achievement, and the audience in the courtroom applauds.

## Impact

Participants who successfully meet with one of our social workers, just once, have a higher rate of program completion than clients who never begin the engagement process. Of the 89 cases seen in the Part during its first year, only four participants failed to complete their mandate. In its first two years of operation, the MMHC has graduated 245 people. Additionally, Manhattan Misdemeanor Mental Health Court's expedited case resolutions allow clients to move forward with their lives. This saves the criminal justice system and its actors valuable resources while centering a positive, restorative outcome for the client. The Justice Center team aims to make the most of the short time participants have in the program by linking them to ongoing mental health and substance use services, benefits, housing support, and helping their relationships with family, friends and supportive networks. Many participants elect to continue with voluntary services following the completion of a mandate.

## Client Highlight

Max is a 35-year-old Black man who grew up in foster care and has been living in the shelter system for over three years. During assessment, Max reported mental health diagnoses of Bipolar Disorder, Depression, and PTSD, as well as experiences of childhood neglect. As a result of these multiple challenges, Max's survival needs have brought him into repeated contact with the justice system. Max came to Manhattan Misdemeanor Mental Health Court in May and began working with a social worker and Community First Navigator to fulfill his court mandate and work on personal goals. Since then, Max has become an inspiration around the Justice Center due to his story, program participation, and kindness. Working with our team, Max has applied for membership at Fountain House, continued working on an employment application for Parks and Recreation, received a CityFHEPS voucher, and has not been re-arrested. Max continues to engage in the Justice Center's services voluntarily.

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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