

## Community Service

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The Midtown Community Court, established in 1993, is designed to re-think the judicial response to low-level offenses such as shoplifting, illegal drug use, graffiti, and prostitution. Instead of fines or short-term jail, the Midtown Community Court mandates individualized sanctions (such as social services and community service) that are restorative to the community and participants. Through this problem-solving justice approach, the court seeks to reduce crime and incarceration and improve public trust in justice. For more than two decades, the Midtown Community Court has inspired criminal justice reformers around the world and served as a hub for testing new ideas in New York City.

### Our Approach

A hallmark of the Midtown Community Court's approach to low-level offenses is creating meaningful and visible community restitution projects in partnership with local residents, businesses, and criminal justice agencies. Community service is an alternative to fines and incarceration that provides restitution and reintegrates participants back into the community. Each year, individuals sentenced to community service complete roughly 14,000 hours of community service at Midtown—the equivalent of \$150,000 of labor.

### How It Works

After sentencing, an intake counselor meets with individuals mandated to community service and screens them to identify the most appropriate community service option, factoring in the individual's work or school schedule, criminal history, and skills. If the individual needs additional services, such as drug treatment, mental health counseling, or employment services, staff can make referrals to on- and off-site social service providers.

By developing a range of community service options, the court tries to ensure that all

individuals can participate in programming. Those who require a low level of supervision complete their mandates with local partner agencies. For example, with the help of Times Square Alliance and the Lincoln Square Business Improvement District, community service participants help clean the streets and paint street furniture in the neighborhood. Individuals also assist at social service organizations such as Encore and Goddard Riverside Community Center, preparing meals for senior citizens.

Individuals requiring a medium level of supervision complete community service under the supervision of Midtown Community Court staff, maintaining the courthouse, as well as painting over graffiti, removing litter, and performing other clean-up activities in the area. Individuals in need of a higher level of supervision or those with disabilities work in a mailroom initiative in the courthouse, where they prepare mailings for local non-profit organizations.

Additionally, community service projects are tailored to specific populations. For example, youth and young adults may complete their service at organizations such as Groundswell, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating

opportunities for young people to engage in public art projects.

**Immediacy**

In an effort to improve compliance, individuals sentenced to participate in community restitution projects receive immediate assignments, allowing them to begin their mandates within 48 hours. Participants can often join community service projects at the court immediately after sentencing, promoting successful completion. Additionally, during intake, staff engage participants to build rapport and encourage compliance.

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**For More Information**

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