

Alternatives to Incarceration

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.

Clinical Services

Misdemeanor cases often involve individuals who have multiple stressors. A misdemeanor conviction can impact access to housing, employment, and immigration status. The Midtown Community Court aims to minimize the carceral/criminal-legal footprint by offering programming that addresses client needs and helps prevent further involvement in the justice system. Many misdemeanor defendants are struggling with issues such as substance use disorder, housing instability, mental illness, unemployment, and trauma. In response, the Midtown

Community Court's on-site clinic is open to court participants as well as the community at large. As an alternative to incarceration, the judge may mandate attendance in a range of social services designed to assist participants with their needs. Social service sessions take a trauma-informed, strengths-based approach. These services aim to address underlying problems and prevent future criminal activity. Services provided include:

■ Harm Reduction

The court's Harm Reduction services address the reasons people use substances, alternative ways to cope, and the relationship between substance use and life experiences. *Community Naloxone and Fentanyl Test Strip Training* is a psychoeducational group that provides an overview and education of the opioid epidemic, its impact on the community and provides training on harm reduction strategies. Naloxone training and fentanyl test strip training will be provided. Following completion of the group, participants have the option to receive kits by mail or pick them up on-site. The ATI staff also links clients to medication assisted treatment (MAT) in addition to detox, inpatient, and



outpatient treatment. We stay in touch with the clients and providers while they are in treatment to provide additional support.

- **Mental Health Services**

Managing Stress in our Daily Lives is an intensive, multi-session group intervention designed by the Center for Justice Innovation to reduce recidivism risk. The interactive curriculum is grounded in a unique combination of three evidence-based practices: cognitive-behavioral treatment, procedural justice, and trauma-informed care.

- **Individual Counseling Sessions**

Sessions with social work staff provide clients with mental health assessments and short-term counseling. These sessions may address issues including substance use, mental health, and trauma, and providing linkages to care.

- **Case Management Sessions**

Sessions provide linkages, tracking, and support to court involved clients to community-based and on-site providers that address issues such as substance use, mental health issues, housing, benefits, and career coaching/vocational needs.

- **Young Adult Programming**

The Court developed its programming for young adults based on research on youth development. Resource Group provides information on the legal consequences of arrest, educational opportunities, housing options, and stress management skills. Offered once a client is arrested for a second or third time, *Resource Group*, *Healthy Relationships* and *Sexual Health* are groups designed to maximize a client's potential to change. The sessions discuss the impact of trauma on decision-making and address negative coping skills, such as drug use and risky behavior, to help young adults develop positive strategies for handling difficult life experiences.

Community Service/Community Engagement

The Midtown Community Court's approach to using community service as an alternative to incarceration is designed to restore the neighborhood and to reintegrate participants into the community. Based on an in-person screening, participants may complete their mandate at local partner agencies or within the courthouse itself. Participants that have been mandated to community service have an option of completing in person at the Stanley M. Isaacs Center. Located in the Upper East Side of Manhattan, the Isaacs Center community service focuses on food service and meal preparation. Participants that choose this option assist Isaacs Center employees by preparing cold meal kits that are distributed to homebound seniors and other vulnerable populations across the borough. Additionally, participants assist with the distribution of hot meals to seniors that are eating meals on site at the Isaacs Center. The Food Service and Meal Preparation department distributes thousands of meals a day to community members across the borough.

The community engagement team leads discussions designed to create community leaders and civically engaged community members. The cycle is made up of four parts, and a voluntary 5th session, allowing participants to complete up to five sessions. Sessions 1, 2, and 3 are paired with a podcast to prep participants for each conversation. Discussion questions for each session are provided beforehand.

Educational and Employment Services

The Court's educational programming addresses the impact of low-level charges on both the community and the individual. *Know Your Rights* provides individuals with information regarding their charges and potential consequences so they know how to prevent similar situations in the future.

For More Information

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