

Overview

For more than three decades, the Midtown Community Justice Center (formerly Midtown Community Court) has inspired criminal justice reformers around the world and served as a hub for testing new ideas in New York City. Established in 1993, the Midtown Community Justice Center re-thinks the court's response to low-level offenses such as shoplifting and illegal substance use. Instead of a traditional punitive approach, the Midtown Community Justice Center offers individualized social services that are restorative for both our participants and the communities we serve. Through this problem-solving justice approach, the court seeks to reduce crime and incarceration, promote healing, and improve public safety, quality of life, and trust in justice.

Our Work

The Midtown Community Justice Center (Justice Center) is operated by the New York State Unified Court System in collaboration with the Center for Justice Innovation. The Justice Center holds three specialized court parts: Misdemeanor Mental Health Court, the Emerging Adult Court, and an All Purpose court to hear misdemeanor charges, including but not limited to petit larceny and drug-related charges.



In response to a large influx of people in the court system with behavioral and mental health issues in New York City, the court launched the **Misdemeanor Mental Health Court** part in 2022. Every Friday, the court helps people with severe mental illness, substance use, and co-occurring disorders navigate their case in the justice system and connect to supportive services to ultimately reduce their involvement in the justice system. Social workers collaborate with participants to create individualized responses to the intersectional issues people living with mental health challenges routinely face.

The Justice Center operates a specialized docket on Thursdays: **Emerging Adult Court**. The Emerging Adult Court responds to the needs and behavioral trends of the emerging adult population, people aged 18-25. Programming is based on youth development research, including a variety of workshops for young people to reflect on their relationships to their community, unpack how trauma affects decision-making, build coping skills, support healthy relationships, and manage stress effectively. All of these workshops help young people build and develop positive socioemotional wellness strategies.

Lastly, the Justice Center is home to the borough's **All Purpose Desk Appearance Ticket** part. Operating on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, this docket sees individuals 26 years and older, arrested in the borough of Manhattan and given a desk appearance ticket for qualifying offenses such as petit larceny, criminal possession of stolen property, and criminal possession of a controlled substance. The All Purpose part gives the Justice Center an opportunity to provide critical

programs and services to address the root causes of crime and public safety and quality of life trends for those who live in, work in, and visit Manhattan.

Diversions

The Justice Center operates **Project Reset** for Manhattan, a pre-arraignment diversion opportunity for people arrested on low-level charges. Individuals who complete Project Reset avoid standard case processing as well as criminal conviction, and have their arrest record sealed. Created in collaboration with the Manhattan District Attorney's Office and the New York City Police Department, Project Reset creates a proportionate, restorative, and effective response to low-level crime. The Justice Center also operates a restorative justice-based diversion program called **Youth PACT**. In partnership with the NYC Law Department Family Court Division and the Family Court, Youth PACT offers an off-ramp from the traditional court process for teens arrested on weapons-related charges. Successful participants either avoid prosecution entirely or have their charges dismissed upon completion of programming rooted in restorative justice principles.

Social Services

The Justice Center's on-site clinic houses a range of services, including group and individual counseling sessions addressing mental health, substance use, youth justice, unemployment, healthy relationships, stress management, public benefits, and immigration. Additionally, social workers connect clients to off-site programming, including longer term drug treatment and mental

health services. **The Justice Center's clinic is open on a walk-in basis to anyone who seeks assistance.**

Engaging the Community

The justice system is stronger, fairer, and more effective when the community is invested. At the Justice Center, we invite the people who live, work, and go to school in our communities to be involved in identifying local problems and crafting solutions. The Justice Center embraces a participatory planning approach, empowering and convening local leaders, community members, participants, and stakeholders to become agents of change in their communities and collaboratively identify and solve local issues. Collaborators in this work include the Justice Center's presiding judge and program staff, New York City Police Department precinct commanders and officers, defense bar and Manhattan District Attorney's Office representatives, service providers, local elected officials, and representatives from business improvement districts, and other community organizations. Justice Center staff also attend a wide range of community meetings and events and develop community-based workshops that respond directly to community conditions. Through these activities, the Justice Center strives to respond to community needs, quality of life and public safety trends, and address issues that impact our Midtown neighborhood and the borough of Manhattan.

The Justice Center engages the community through a variety of programming and events outside our physical space, including leading arts-based workshops for young people,

working with a local public housing development to activate its community space, hosting resource fairs, presenting in schools, and attending community meetings. The Justice Center also hosts a Youth Advisory Board, a program to amplify youth voices in justice spaces while providing essential skills, training, and mentorship opportunities for participants ages 16-22. The Youth Advisory Board serves to create a feedback loop between young people in the Midtown community and the Justice Center, ensuring youth voices are heard and incorporated into policies and decisions that affect their lives.

Community First is a street outreach initiative that builds trust with people in Hell's Kitchen and the Times Square area who are facing mental health issues, housing instability, or other crises to connect them to the resources and services they need. With an approach focused on human-to-human connection, Community First offers material goods like clothes, food, hygiene supplies, and harm reduction materials, connections to critical supports and services, and help breaking down complex goals—like accessing benefits and identification or finding employment—into concrete action items. The program launched in January 2021 in partnership with the Midtown Community Justice Center; Times Square Alliance; Fountain House, a mental health organization; and Breaking Ground, a housing agency.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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