

## Overview

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Bronx Community Solutions seeks to improve the quality of criminal justice in the Bronx. By providing pre-trial diversion, community-based sentencing options, and links to meaningful services and community-led justice interventions, our programming reduces the use of short-term jail, restores community relationships, builds local leadership, and helps participants avoid further criminal justice involvement.

Headquartered within the centralized criminal courthouse on 161st Street, Bronx Community Solutions is a team of social service providers, compliance monitors, community service supervisors, and others who seek to improve the quality of justice in the Bronx. This includes offering judges and attorneys meaningful alternatives to bail, fines, jail sentences, and court appearances. Bronx Community Solutions provides system actors with more information so that they can make better decisions. At the same time, we strive to treat each individual participant with dignity and respect in an effort to promote compliance and restore public trust in justice. Each year, Bronx Community Solutions works with more than seven thousand cases.

### **Engaging the Community**

Working with a community advisory board of local residents, Bronx Community Solutions creates community service projects that target local needs. Each year, defendants at Bronx Community Solutions complete more than 40,000 hours of service—the equivalent of over \$440,000 of labor. This includes painting over graffiti, shoveling snow, cleaning parks, and assisting with community events.

Bronx Community Solutions also brings together local residents and criminal justice system players for special events designed to raise awareness and promote discussion.

### **Restorative Justice**

Bronx Community Solutions along with the New York City Police Department and the Bronx District Attorney's Office has created a restorative justice pre-arraignment diversion program for people charged with low-level misdemeanor offenses. Participants have the opportunity to take part in restorative circle discussions rather than going to court. The circles bring together individuals charged with misdemeanor offenses and community members to discuss the impact on the community and reflect on individual and group accountability. This initiative empowers community members to be part of the solution and shows participants that their community is eager to help them avoid future involvement with the criminal justice system.

### **Reducing the Use of Jail**

After Bronx Community Solutions began offering alternative sentences, the percentage of convicted misdemeanor defendants sentenced to jail in the Bronx was reduced by 43 percent. Each year, three out of four defendants at Bronx Community Solutions completes their social or community service mandates.

### **Supervised Release**

The Supervised Release Program provides pretrial supervision and voluntary social service referrals to people charged with non-violent felony and

misdemeanor offenses and who are otherwise likely to be detained pretrial. From its launch in March 2016 to the end of 2017, the Supervised Release Program served 1,290 cases, 829 for felony and 461 for misdemeanor charges. Seventy-seven percent of cases were successfully closed; most participants were released from supervision or reached a conclusion in their case after attending all court dates and supervision requirements.

### **Helping Adolescents**

Each year, Bronx Community Solutions handles hundreds of cases involving young people as part of the New York court system's Adolescent Diversion Program. The goal is to address the unique needs of young defendants by offering social services and alternative dispositions that eliminate the consequences of adult criminal convictions. More than eight out of 10 of young defendants successfully complete their social or community service mandates.

### **Addressing Human Trafficking**

Bronx Community Solutions seeks to break the cycle of exploitation and arrest for victims of trafficking. The goal is to link participants with services, including mental health counseling and drug treatment. Typically, charges will be dismissed following completion of services. Each year, Bronx Community Solutions handles more than 100 cases involving victims of trafficking.

### **Improving Mental Health**

With support from the New York City Mayor's Office, 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 those who received no intervention. For women, the impact of the intervention was especially pronounced, with rearrest rates that were 21 percent lower. The evaluation is available for download at: [courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/BCSMHI.pdf](http://courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/BCSMHI.pdf).

### **Building Local Leadership**

Through its Community Advisory Board, Youth Court and Restorative Justice initiatives, Bronx Community Solutions provides opportunities to empower and develop local leaders of all ages. Youth Court trains Bronx teens to provide a range of interventions, including hearings, restorative circles, peer-led educational workshops, and community benefit projects. Youth Court members are trained in traditional and restorative justice practices, attend educational trainings throughout the year and spearhead projects that give back to their local community.

Bronx Community Solutions' restorative justice program trains local residents in restorative practices and provides them an opportunity to play a key role in restorative circles. Through this process, community members are empowered to address harm in constructive ways and rebuild community relationships.

### **Addressing Substance Abuse**

In 2016, New York experienced an alarming number of opioid overdose fatalities with Bronx County experiencing the second highest rate of opioid overdose deaths in New York State. New York courts are seeing thousands of individuals who are suffering from an opioid use disorder, many of whom are at risk of a fatal overdose.

The Bronx Criminal Court, in partnership with Bronx Community Solutions and the Bronx District Attorney is addressing this crisis with a specialized track, the Overdose Avoidance and Recovery Track (OAR) for misdemeanor offenders. The OAR track diverts defendants who are at high risk of overdose into treatment with a legal incentive of dismissal and sealing of the case. Bronx Heroin Overdose Prevention (HOPE) and Education is an innovative new pre-arraignment diversionary program that engages individuals at the precinct-level and redirects substance users to community-based health and treatment services, instead of prosecution.

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### **For More Information**

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