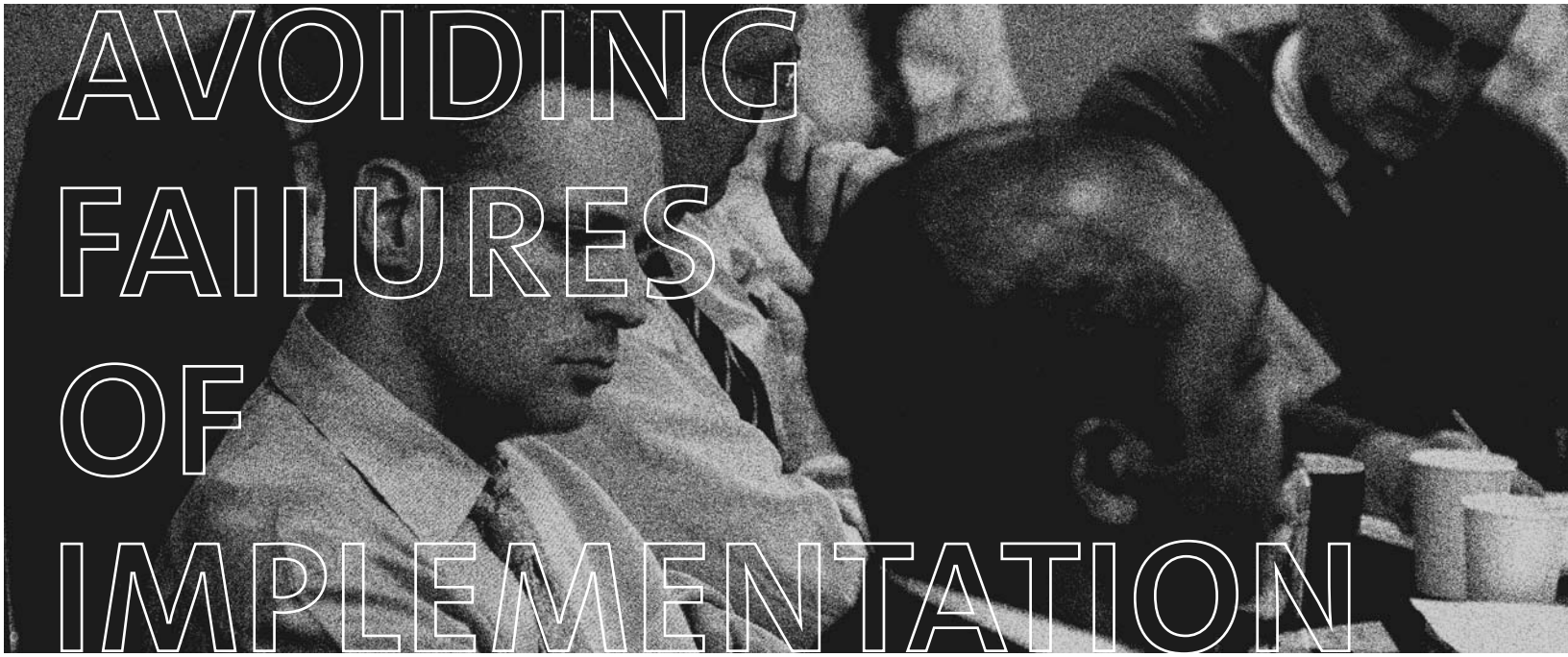


BEST PRACTICES



AVOIDING
FAILURES
OF
IMPLEMENTATION

Lessons from Process Evaluations



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AVOIDING FAILURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Failure is, in a sense, the highway to success.

—John Keats

This paper is part of a multi-faceted inquiry into failed criminal justice experiments undertaken by the Center for Court Innovation and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance. This paper primarily examines failures of implementation or, in other words, failures arising not from a fundamentally flawed theory of change, but from missteps in planning and execution. The analysis is largely based on findings and lessons from evaluations conducted by research staff at the Center for Court Innovation. Most of the programs evaluated are experiments in “problem-solving justice”—court-based efforts to address the underlying problems of defendants, victims, and communities. The center was involved in the planning of many (though not all) of the projects discussed in this report. Thus, this study is implicitly an exercise in self-reflection and an effort to be forthright about mistakes the center has made along the path to success. This paper seeks to identify common sources of failure across 13 projects and to develop a basic list of considerations that may help practitioners avoid some of the pitfalls the center experienced.

Innovative criminal justice programs are, by their very nature, experiments. And like experiments in any setting, some will succeed, others will fail. Researchers and practitioners naturally focus on success, with the goal of learning “what works.” But while the criminal justice community (and the public sector more generally) is often reluctant to examine failure, doing so can be a learning opportunity and can lead to future success.

It is worth noting that most of the programs discussed in this paper did not “fail.” In fact, many were able to effectively identify and respond to challenges and bumps in the road. In reality, few programs are utter failures. However, most programs do face implementation challenges, and the ability of project planners to respond to these challenges frequently marks the difference between a successful program and one that does not achieve its goals.

Our purpose in writing is to identify lessons that will help practitioners and policymakers anticipate, recognize, and resolve problems that may arise when implementing new projects or attempting to replicate existing ones in new settings. It has been said that learning from your own mistakes is smart; learning from the mistakes of others is wise. We hope that this report can help smart criminal justice innovators become wise.

METHODS

In this paper, we draw on lessons learned from process evaluations conducted by the Center for Court Innovation during the past five years. In general, process evaluations detail the development and implementation of programs through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. To identify common themes across projects, we reviewed written reports and conducted interviews with the principal authors of 13 process evaluations. The evaluated programs from which we draw lessons are briefly described in the Appendix. Five of the 13 initiatives were demonstration projects developed by the center. These include a specialized criminal court for defendants with mental illness; a domestic violence court for youthful offenders ages 16-19; an alternative-to-placement program for juveniles; a community-based parole reentry program; and a borough-wide adaptation of the community court idea. The center is committed to the concept of “action research”—it assigns researchers to all of its major operating projects to review progress and provide feedback to administrators so that they can make mid-course adjustments as needed.

The remaining eight initiatives were implemented by outside agencies. However, like the center’s demonstration projects, each of these initiatives was an experiment seeking to address the underlying problems of litigants, victims, or communities. These problems include substance abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, prisoner reentry, juvenile delinquency, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. All completed evaluations are available on the center’s website (www.courtinnovation.org).

Using lessons learned from each of these evaluations, we have identified four key issues that can make or break a new initiative: (1) engaging in comprehensive planning, (2) identifying key stakeholders, (3) responding to emerging challenges, and (4) recognizing the need for leadership.

ENGAGING IN COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

Confusion over the basic design of an initiative can create frustration and sow the seeds of failure. Failing to articulate clear and measurable goals for a project is often the first in a chain of errors that includes poor information infrastructure, a failure to measure progress, and an inability to demonstrate to funding agencies and policymakers that their money has yielded tangible results.

Lesson 1: Have a shared vision; identify program goals

A program’s goals articulate a “definition of success,” stating in general terms what the project hopes to achieve—for example, reducing recidivism, reuniting families, or promoting offender accountability. A formal

goal-setting exercise (for example, a moderated discussion, executed with the help of visual aids such as a flip chart) may help program planners identify broad goals as well as specific measures of success for their project.

Unfortunately, many planning teams neither formalize their goals in a planning document nor expressly discuss them. The failure to clearly define goals (and, in some cases, to prioritize multiple goals) can lead to confusion about what the project is designed to achieve, how to allocate resources, and how the program should evaluate results. Even in programs with relatively self-evident goals, such as adult drug courts, ambiguity can remain. For example, it is widely accepted that the two primary goals of adult drug courts are to reduce offender recidivism and drug use. There is, however, less agreement as to whether other goals—such as employment or improved family relations—ought to be part of the program as well.

The Brooklyn Youthful Offender Domestic Violence Court offers an example of the importance of goal setting. In its early days, the program did not develop goals or share them with court staff, representatives from community-based service agencies, the defense bar, or the district attorney's office. Consequently, when it came time to measure the overall success of the project, the various stakeholders were unable to agree on a uniform definition of success. Was the project a success only if it reduced recidivism among teen offenders, or was providing advocacy and specialized programming for teens sufficient to call the project successful? These kinds of questions proved difficult to answer.

In addition to identifying long-term goals, such as reductions in recidivism, it is important to identify mid- and short-term goals. Establishing goals that are achievable in the short-term may be necessary to illustrate program effectiveness to funders; early successes may also help keep stakeholders engaged and give the project a sense of accomplishment. Moreover, looking at only long-term goals may overlook many of the important accomplishments achieved during planning and early operations. For instance, achievements such as bringing a diverse range of practitioners together, developing a strategy to address a specific issue, and identifying and engaging local service providers may not directly impact recidivism levels, but are nonetheless important.

Lesson 2: Identify quantifiable objectives

Increasingly, funding agencies require measurable program objectives to determine if the project in which they have invested is a success. A program's objectives should support its goals and explain exactly how they will be accomplished. To do this, the objectives should be specific, quantifiable, and realistic, given the program's particular scope of operations and the results achieved by comparable programs. For example, if the goal is increased offender accountability, the objectives might include quantifiable targets for conviction rates, compliance rates with court-ordered programs, or target frequencies for post-sentence judicial monitoring (e.g., weekly or biweekly court appearances).

Several projects that the Center for Court Innovation examined identified broad goals during the planning process, but did not establish quantifiable objectives derived from these goals. For instance, the Bronx Juvenile Accountability Court included among its goals encouraging the use of alternatives to placement; engaging families of participating youth; increasing coordination among stakeholders; and promoting youth accountability.

However, the project did not specify how progress toward these goals would be measured. The Brooklyn Mental Health Court, on the other hand, identified quantifiable objectives, but did not track or record relevant measures; thus the objectives were not testable.

The process of setting objectives may also assist in program planning. For example, the Brooklyn Youthful Offender Domestic Violence Court identified a goal of increasing educational involvement, but program staff were unable to identify specific objectives and eventually decided that educational involvement was not, in fact, a focal point of the program's operations. By cutting this goal, the Youthful Offender Domestic Violence Court team was able to concentrate its resources on its real priorities.

Lesson 3: Plan to collect data

Clear goals and realistic, quantifiable objectives will be valuable only if a program has the capacity to measure performance. Ideally, data collection should be addressed in the planning process. Relevant issues include what data should be collected; how it will be collected; and who will be responsible. For example, will participant demographic information, results of psycho-social assessments, program attendance, or official criminal justice data be collected? Program planners should not only consider what information will be collected and by whom, but should also take steps to ensure that data is collected in a form that can be easily accessed by program staff for reporting purposes. Addressing these issues as early as possible can prevent setbacks. Research staff, if involved in the planning process, can help program planners think through these issues.

Many of the projects we evaluated failed to consider data tracking during project planning. The Bronx Juvenile Accountability Court, for instance, implemented data collection early during program operations, but the systems put in place were manual (i.e., not automated) and thus cumbersome and labor-intensive. Ultimately, the systems proved untenable as the volume of program participants increased, reflecting the lack of discussion of data collection during the program planning period.

Most of the programs (perhaps understandably) prioritized getting the program up and running over establishing data collection systems. For some projects, the lack of established objectives made it unclear what data should be tracked. Others were unable to obtain the buy-in from key partner agencies needed to ensure that the data was collected on a consistent basis.

The Suffolk County Juvenile Treatment Court proved to be a model of success. Planners discussed what information needed to be collected and how project staff would collect and store that information. They realized that much of the needed information—such as participant baseline characteristics, drug test results, court appearances, sanctions, rewards, and final program status—was available in the court system's statewide drug court database. To collect additional information, planners developed a computerized spreadsheet and assigned maintenance responsibility to one staff member. While such foresight is rare, it demonstrates the benefit of thinking about data collection early in the process, anticipating potential problems, and putting in place durable systems.

Lesson 4: Formalize the program model

A common mistake that start-up projects make is failing to formalize their operational model. Setting down on paper the major elements of the program and the specific roles and responsibilities of each team member can seem like a distraction in the midst of more pressing business, but projects that fail to do so often suffer. Formalization is especially important for new demonstration projects that seek to be evaluated and replicated by others.

The Bronx Juvenile Accountability Court illustrates this lesson. For a variety of reasons, the project neither created an operations manual nor developed a clearly defined program model when it opened. Accordingly, different judges and probation officers picked and chose which program elements they would participate in (e.g., judicial monitoring or not; sanctions or not; regular team meetings or not). Of course, the benefit of not formally articulating a model is that it provides planners with more flexibility. While this approach is defensible, particularly in the early trial-and-error stage of a new initiative, the consequences over the long haul can be significant. Without an agreed upon and consistently implemented model, determining whether a project is a success is impossible, and replicating the program in other sites means starting over from scratch.

Without a formal operational model, projects will often have specific problems establishing eligibility criteria. For example, in the Brooklyn Mental Health Court, the lack of an automatic, formal screening process meant that some, but not all, eligible defendants actually entered the program—admission often rested on the efforts of a defense attorney or judge with personal knowledge and interest in the mental health court intervention.

IDENTIFYING KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Given the interdependent nature of the criminal justice system, reform often requires the participation and support of many players, including traditional adversaries, bureaucracies that are not accustomed to change, and disengaged citizens. The programs we evaluated all rely on interagency collaboration to one degree or another. Despite this, identifying relevant stakeholders and involving them early in the planning process was a challenge in many instances. True collaboration requires the development of working relationships among agencies that often have different interests and organizational cultures. For example, it is natural for prosecutors to focus on ensuring offender accountability and public safety, while defense attorneys tend to concentrate on due process and securing the least burdensome outcome for their clients. To move any new idea forward, a certain level of trust must be established. This takes time and strategic thinking.

Lesson 5: Be strategic about when and how to engage stakeholders in the planning process.

There is a calculus involved in deciding how and when to bring people to the table; there are likely to be consequences from either under- or over-inclusion.

The defense bar was excluded from the early planning of the Brooklyn Youthful Offender Domestic Violence Court, based on the belief that most defense attorneys would oppose the program. While this exclusion resulted

in a less contentious planning process, it came with a heavy cost: once the project was operational, defense attorneys were reluctant to advise their clients to enter the program, greatly reducing the number of participants.

Over-inclusiveness is also a potential challenge; making decisions that involve a large number of parties may complicate the likelihood of achieving concrete action. Such was the case in Baltimore, where a community justice task force included a large number of organizations—and multiple representatives from each organization. Within a short period of time, it became clear that the group was too large to support concrete planning activities.

Bronx Community Solutions developed an effective “middle” strategy for coping with the question of whom to include in the planning process. During the initial stages of the project, a limited group of players—including representatives from the Center for Court Innovation, the Bronx District Attorney’s office, and the state court system—came together to explore the idea of a borough-wide community justice project. This small group drafted a concept paper, laying out the general ideas behind the project, but not developing a firm model. The group then distributed the concept paper to a larger group of stakeholders, including the defense bar and local service providers. The initial paper defined the playing field, providing something for the larger group of stakeholders to respond to and allowing for meaningful discussion once all the players were at the table. By staggering the timing of inclusion, Bronx Community Solutions involved the key players at a point when each could be engaged in the process and when their involvement would result in necessary action.

Lesson 6: Think about how to facilitate buy-in from line staff

A top-down approach to reform, in which agency administrators but not line staff are included in the planning process can lead to resentment—and perhaps more importantly, can lead line staff to deviate from the planned operational model. Of course, it is not always feasible (or desirable) to have all parties at the table throughout a planning process; and given the nature of organizational hierarchies, it is often counterproductive for line staff to participate before their supervisors have weighed in. Once a project is underway, however, administrators need to communicate clearly with line staff regarding any new roles and responsibilities that they will be expected to assume. Administrators would also be wise to provide a forum for line staff to voice their own insights regarding the planned initiative.

In planning the Bronx Juvenile Accountability Court, for example, administrators from the New York City Department of Probation were supportive of the program’s goals, objectives, and operational plan. However, line staff (i.e., probation officers) were assigned only after planning was complete, which left them feeling slighted; they reported that they did not have a proper understanding of their intended role in the program. Moreover, they felt that project planners would have gained greater insight into the problems the program was designed to address had they been consulted earlier. This resentment contributed to a lack of buy-in and inconsistent implementation of their intended role during early program operations.

Administrators should bear in mind, however, that even when line staff are included in planning, problems may still arise. Line staff from the New York City Division of Parole, for instance, were involved in monthly plan-

ning meetings during the implementation of the Harlem Parole Reentry Court. However, staff did not believe the meetings were an appropriate forum in which to raise concerns, noting that the broad array of community partners who also attended restricted their candor. In this case, being included in the planning process did not make line staff feel heard.

The common thread here is the lack of effective communication between management and line staff. Reformers typically need buy-in at both levels if a program is to be successfully implemented.

RESPONDING TO EMERGING CHALLENGES

No planning process can take account of every scenario; flexibility on the ground during implementation is essential. Although programs should be implemented with fidelity to their original intent and design, program staff must be able to recognize and respond to unanticipated challenges as they arise.

Lesson 7: Be realistic

In some programs evaluated, ambitious planners underestimated the task at hand. For example, planners of the Baltimore Community Justice Initiative sought to build a new program from scratch—identifying a diverse and inclusive group of stakeholders, bringing them to the table, and planning the program—in a fraction of the time that other jurisdictions had spent on comparable initiatives. Arguably, this timeline was doomed from the beginning. Although planners had done their research and knew how long implementation of similar initiatives had taken in other sites, their excitement about getting the project up and running overshadowed these realities. As the group began to lag behind the proposed schedule, planners recognized their mistake and adopted a more realistic timeline.

Unrealistic goals and objectives are common. The most successful projects were those that were able to recognize their limitations and adapt. For example, planners of the Brooklyn Screening and Treatment Enhancement Project initially sought to reduce the time from a defendant's arrest to program intake to under 24 hours. When this proved unattainable, project planners revised the program objective to incorporate lengthier intake periods (48 hours, on average). While not as immediate as 24 hours, this represented a vast improvement on standard operating procedure.

Funding pressures, of course, often motivate program planners to set unrealistic goals that set a program up for failure. Some funders, moreover, require objectives that project staff recognize as inappropriate or unrealistic. For instance, the Syracuse Partnership for Violence Prevention, an anti-dating abuse initiative, was required by funders to show a five-percent reduction in overall crime. In almost any scenario this is a highly optimistic goal. For this program, it was virtually impossible, since it targeted only about 10 percent of the Syracuse University population.

Lesson 8: Beware the temptation to overestimate caseload volume

A pervasive problem faced by new projects—perhaps the most prevalent of all of those discussed here—is lower-than-anticipated case volume, especially early in program implementation. Many of the programs evaluated failed to estimate case volume accurately. Planners of the Brooklyn Mental Health Court, for instance, relied on off-the-top-of-the-head estimates to set target volume for the first year of operations. Perhaps predictably, the court ended up falling short of expectations. This highlights the importance of a data-driven planning process; a rigorous examination of the data during the planning process enables projects to set more realistic volume estimates.

Of course, other factors can come into play. At the Brooklyn Mental Health Court, the referral process was informal, relying heavily on individual judges and attorneys to identify and refer cases; without the benefit of a systematic, universal screening process, many potentially eligible participants never had contact with the program. Program policies can also affect volume. For example, programs must be thoughtful about eligibility criteria: too narrow a definition severely limits volume (and, conversely, too broad hampers effectiveness).

Lesson 9: Adapt the program in response to early implementation experience

Reality has a way of challenging even the best-laid plans. For example, Bronx Community Solutions faced challenges when fewer defendants successfully completed court mandates than anticipated. After examining program data, staff determined that many defendants who made it to the first few days of community service failed to attend the last few sessions. This prompted discussion about the benefits of requiring more community service if it meant failing more defendants (and subsequently bringing them back to court). The lesson here is to use data to evaluate program performance—and respond based on the findings. This is the heart of the action research model.

The populations served by the Brooklyn Mental Health Court, Bronx Community Solutions, the Queens Misdemeanor Treatment Court, the Staten Island Treatment Court, and the Suffolk Juvenile Treatment Court also exemplify the importance of flexibility. For some participants, substance abuse treatment may be the overriding issue. For others, employment or improved family functioning are key. Still others may have a history of violence, making strict oversight crucial. Faced with such diverse needs of target populations, several projects acknowledged the need to make exceptions to program criteria or requirements; even projects with strict eligibility criteria reported using some case-by-case, discretionary decision-making, often informed by a team of attorneys, court staff, and clinicians.

Programs risk failure if they do not allow for the flexibility needed to meet the unique needs of each site. In other words, what works in one place may not work in another. An inability to recognize site-specific constraints or play to a site's strengths can lead to failure as a program is brought to scale. An obvious example is the need to work within a locality's resource constraints. Communities that lack drug treatment programs, for example, cannot be expected to make long-term residential treatment a centerpiece of alternative to incarceration programs. To imagine otherwise is to court disaster.

Our call for flexibility, however, should not obscure the importance of establishing a formal program model from the outset. Rather, the lesson is that within the program model, there must be room to respond to challenges and, most importantly, to adapt the model based on lessons learned during implementation. Early data collection and review can help, and data-driven changes should be documented in the operations manual.

RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR LEADERSHIP

Many new projects, particularly those that seek to promote cross-agency collaboration, struggle to establish clear lines of authority and to find powerful allies.

Lesson 10: Designate a project director

Strong leadership is imperative to project operations. A project director can serve as a “program champion,” guiding day-to-day operations, fostering communication, taking the lead in responding to implementation challenges, providing support for staff, and motivating the team. An effective project leader, in short, can pull parties together and spur action.

The need for leadership may seem obvious, but our evaluations suggest that ineffective or (in some cases) nonexistent leadership is a common source of failure. Leadership is a thorny issue in interagency collaborations—choosing a leader can give rise to turf battles. In addition, even if a project director is chosen, staff often continue to perceive themselves as reporting primarily to others within their own agency rather than to the program director. Another complicating factor is the understandable desire to innovate on the cheap—to use existing staff rather than making new hires.

The lack of a single, dedicated project director with the ability to make decisions slowed program implementation for the Harlem Parole Reentry Court. The Bronx Juvenile Accountability Court, on the other hand, had a director, but that individual was not on site every day during the program’s first year. This resulted in both operational inefficiency and a sense that nobody had ownership of the project. A dedicated, full-time project director hired in the second year facilitated communications among organizations that were not accustomed to working together and was able to respond promptly to daily operational challenges. In other programs where an empowered project director was in place from early in the planning process, stakeholders reported fewer problems and less frustration in the group decision-making process.

Lesson 11: Find political champions

Without the buy-in of local political leaders—court administrators, legislators, religious leaders, and the like—reform efforts are unlikely to get off the ground, let alone sustain themselves. The Baltimore Community Justice Initiative illustrates this lesson. While the project had an effective convener, key political leaders—including the mayor, the legislature, and the judiciary—were not involved early in the process. Without the support of such high-level decision makers, concrete action toward the creation of a community court stalled.

CONCLUSION

Planning and implementing innovative criminal justice programs is no easy task. The process is fraught with potential pitfalls. The programs evaluated by the Center for Court Innovation identify some potential causes of failure—and offer some lessons for would-be innovators.

We hope that our exercise in identifying challenges that our projects have faced will encourage other innovators to engage in similar self-reflection. It is never easy to admit mistakes, but by recognizing where a program's results have not met expectations, innovators can create an environment where learning flourishes—and help themselves and others turn failure into success.

APPENDIX: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATED PROGRAMS

The Baltimore Community Justice Initiative seeks to incorporate a broad array of justice system agencies and community-based organizations, focusing on three key components: community justice in the criminal justice system; school conflict resolution; and youth advocacy. Ultimately, this collaboration is intended to result in a local community court.

Bronx Community Solutions is an initiative that seeks to apply a problem-solving approach to non-violent misdemeanor cases throughout the Bronx. Its goals are to provide judges with increased sentencing options for these cases and to engage the community in the justice process. By combining punishment and help, Bronx Community Solutions seeks to reduce the Bronx's reliance on short-term jail sentences, and build public confidence in justice.

The Bronx Juvenile Accountability Court works with young people between the ages of 10 and 15 who have committed delinquent acts and are placed on intensive probation supervision as an alternative to placement in a state-run juvenile facility. The program offers a middle ground: participants avoid incarceration, but also receive the structure they need to meet their probation requirements, including mandates to attend school, perform community service, obtain counseling and stay away from drugs and alcohol.

The Brooklyn Mental Health Court is a specialized court that seeks to craft a meaningful response to the problems posed by defendants with mental illness in the criminal justice system. Addressing both the treatment needs of defendants with mental illness and the public safety concerns of the community, the court uses its authority to link defendants with serious and persistent mental illnesses who would ordinarily be jail- or prison-bound to long-term treatment instead.

The Brooklyn Screening and Treatment Enhancement Project is a centralized screening program through which every person arrested in King's County (Brooklyn), New York is assessed for drug treatment court. Both felons and misdemeanants are screened first for legal criteria (e.g., current charge, criminal history); legally eligible offenders are then given a clinical assessment. The project seeks to reduce the time that eligible offenders spend from initial arrest to engagement in treatment.

The Brooklyn Youthful Offender Domestic Violence Court was launched in 2003 and is the first court in New York State to address exclusively misdemeanor domestic violence cases among teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19. Offenders are linked to specialized teen programming, while victims are contacted by an advocate who is trained to deal with issues specific to teen victims.

The Coalition Against Sexual Exploitation of Children is a consortium of New York City agencies, headed by the Mayor's Office, convened to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The consortium focuses on child prostitution and concentrates on three primary areas for intervention: the prosecution of traffickers, the enhancement of available programming for prostituted youth (primarily housing), and prevention.

The Harlem Parole Reentry Court is a demonstration project designed to test the feasibility and effectiveness of a collaborative, community-based approach to managing offender reentry, with the ultimate goal of reducing recidivism and prison return rates. The program helps parolees returning to the Harlem community make the transition from life in prison to responsible citizenship, linking them to a wide range of social services including drug treatment, vocational services, and mental health treatment.

The Queens Misdemeanor Treatment Court is a drug treatment court targeting persistent misdemeanor offenders in Queens County, New York, since 2002. Eligible defendants are drug-addicted, face misdemeanor charges and have at least three prior nonviolent misdemeanor convictions. The court offers treatment in lieu of incarceration, with criminal charges dismissed upon successful program completion.

Specialized Sex Offense Courts are designed to enhance community safety by increasing defendant accountability, improving the provision of services to victims and enhancing coordinated community supervision. Among the first of these courts in New York State are the courts in Suffolk and Nassau counties, which are the focus of the Center for Court Innovation's evaluation.

The Staten Island Treatment Court is a drug treatment court operating in Richmond County (Staten Island), New York, since 2002. The Staten Island Treatment Court provides an alternative to incarceration for drug-addicted, non-violent felony offenders.

The Suffolk Juvenile Treatment Court is a drug treatment court for offenders through 16 years of age at the time of entry with a substance abuse pattern. The court is housed in the Suffolk County Family Court and has been operating since 2002. Unlike most adult drug courts, this court seeks to intervene with a population that may not yet be drug-addicted, but that has drug behavior that has interfered in the participating juveniles' lives.

The Syracuse Partnership for Violence Prevention is a peer-education program expanding the research-based Mentors in Violence Prevention curriculum to a college population. The program is designed to raise awareness of gender-based violence in the Greek (i.e. fraternity and sorority) community through an empowered bystander model.

Center for Court Innovation

Winner of the Innovations in American Government Award from the Ford Foundation and Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, the Center for Court Innovation is a unique public-private partnership that promotes new thinking about how courts can solve difficult problems like addiction, quality-of-life crime, domestic violence and child neglect. The Center functions as the New York State court system's independent research and development arm, creating demonstration projects that test new approaches to problems that have resisted conventional solutions. The Center's problem-solving courts include the nation's first community court (Midtown Community Court), as well as drug courts, domestic violence courts, youth courts, mental health courts and others.

The Center disseminates the lessons learned from its experiments in New York, helping courts across the country and around the world launch their own problem-solving innovations. The Center contributes to the conversation about justice by performing original research, by convening roundtable conversations that bring together leading academics and practitioners and by contributing to policy and professional journals. The Center also provides hands-on technical assistance, advising criminal justice reformers in the United States and abroad about program and technology design.

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