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COMMUNITY COURTS

AN EVOLVING MODEL

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Monograph

COMMUNITY JUSTICE SERIES

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COMMUNITY COURTS

AN EVOLVING MODEL

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From the Director

The community court movement has come a long way since the first court opened in midtown Manhattan in 1993. The concepts pioneered by that court have taken root across the country. Nearly a dozen community courts are now open in Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, Tennessee, and Texas. Another 13 communities plan to open courts in the near future.

Midtown Community Court has succeeded by asking a new set of questions about the role of the court in a community's daily life: What can a court do to solve neighborhood problems? What can courts bring to the table beyond their coercive power and symbolic presence? And what roles can community residents, businesses, and service providers play in improving justice?

The community courts that were established after Midtown are answering these questions in different ways. Most focus on one neighborhood, but others are exploring ways to serve an entire city. Still others are expanding their scope beyond low-level criminal offenses to juvenile delinquency and housing code violations.

But these pioneering courts also seek a set of common, important goals. All have implemented a new way of doing business that imposes immediate, meaningful sanctions on offenders, truly engages the community, and helps offenders address problems that are at the root of their criminal behavior.

The Bureau of Justice Assistance continues to support the efforts of judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and other local leaders who are using community courts to transform the way justice is administered in their communities.



Nancy E. Gist
Director
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I. Introduction

In recent years cities and towns across the country have embarked on an experiment to test the proposition that courts can play a role in solving complex neighborhood problems and building stronger communities. Since the 1993 opening of New York City's Midtown Community Court, the nation's first, dozens of cities have begun planning community courts. Eleven community courts are now operating in communities across the nation, and six more will open by the end of 2000. At their outset, each court must address the following set of questions:

- Can courts assume a problem-solving role in the life of a community, bringing people together and helping to craft solutions to problems that communities face?
- How can courts address the impact that chronic offending has on a community?
- Can courts improve the quality of life in a community?
- Can local voices—residents, merchants, community groups—

engage in the administration of justice?

To answer these questions, community courts have developed individual programs that differ in important ways. Although most of these new courts focus on one neighborhood, several jurisdictions are exploring ways to serve an entire city. Many community courts handle criminal cases only, but others are experimenting with a broader range of matters, including juvenile delinquency and housing code violations. Some community courts were initiated by courts, and some have been championed by a district attorney.

These differences reflect a central aspect of community courts: they focus on neighborhoods and are designed to respond to the particular concerns of individual communities. Moreover, community courts are shaped by the particular political, economic, and social landscapes in each community.

The Center for Court Innovation (CCI), with support from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), has provided technical assistance

About the Author

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to each community court and documented the emergence of this field. This monograph provides a

snapshot of these early community courts and explores emerging issues in their development.

II. Overview

In January 1998, the Midtown Community Court was the only community court in the United States. By March 2000, nearly a dozen had opened across the country in Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, Tennessee, and Texas. New York City and Portland, Oregon, each host two community courts, and organizers in both cities intend to open a third court in 2000. Another 13 jurisdictions, in California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Maryland, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Texas, plan to establish community courts in the near future.

Community courts grow out of frustration. Observers have noted that justice has become remote from communities and the people who live in them. Community residents have reported feeling out of touch with courts. They want courts to address low-level crime that is part of daily life. The Midtown Community Court offered a model for addressing these problems by emphasizing the following:

- Locating the court in the community, close to where crimes take place.
- Repaying a community damaged by low-level crime by requiring offenders to compensate

neighborhoods through community service.

- Using the leverage of the court to sentence offenders to complete social services that will help them address problems such as drug addiction or involvement in prostitution.
- Bringing the court and the community closer by making the courthouse accessible, establishing a community advisory board, and publishing a quarterly newsletter.
- Using the court as a gateway to treatment and making social services available to offenders right at the courthouse.

The Midtown model was thoroughly documented in an independent evaluation conducted by the National Center for State Courts and in publications prepared by the U.S. Department of Justice (see p. 21 for a list of publications on community justice). With a well-defined and carefully documented model in New York City, community court planners elsewhere faced questions about whether the Midtown model would meet the needs of their jurisdictions. Planners in other jurisdictions have made significant departures from the Midtown model, reflecting both the distinct needs of their communities and the practical

reality of what they believed they could accomplish given local resources and local support.

The following sections examine the questions that planners asked as they designed their community courts and how they resolved them.

How Do You Plan a Community Court?

Community courts are complex projects that involve rethinking court operations, raising substantial resources, and building partnerships within and without the justice system. Decisions about who should lead the planning of a community court varied from state to state. Judges or local court administrators led the planning effort in 4 of the 11 operating courts. Planning for another five courts was led by elected district attorneys. Notably, all five of these courts run community prosecution programs and the district attorneys' interest in community courts was sparked by hearing how dissatisfied their constituents were with the justice system's insufficient attention to quality-of-life problems. The local mayor's office and a countywide criminal justice commission initiated the community court effort in the remaining two cities.

Many projects recognized early that a dedicated planner would be needed to move the community

court from conception to implementation. This approach reflects the complexities of raising money, building community participation, developing sanctions, establishing partnerships, and so forth. Six of the operating community courts were staffed with a full-time coordinator during the planning period; the planning of three courts was led by a staff person who dedicated a majority of his or her attention to the project. To ensure that the partnerships necessary for success were established early in the planning process, nine jurisdictions convened formal planning committees. The committees typically included representatives from the courts, district attorneys' offices, police departments, social service agencies, and communities. Public defenders were included on five of the planning teams. In the projects that did not create planning committees, lead planners worked informally with other stakeholders.

The scope of the community court project, the readiness of local players to support the concept, and the planners' success in garnering funds and in-kind support all affected the length of the planning process. Three jurisdictions opened community courts within a year of beginning the planning process. Although the average planning period was 2 years, some jurisdictions needed 3 or more years to plan a community court.

Which Community Should Be Served and Where Should the Court Be Located?

The Midtown Community Court serves the central business district of America's largest city. One challenge faced by planners outside New York City was whether the concept of a community court is applicable to smaller cities and other types of neighborhoods.

The community court approach was recognized as a promising solution to quality-of-life problems by many different communities. Today, 6 of the 11 operating community courts serve inner-city residential neighborhoods facing serious problems, including high crime rates, property abandonment, and conditions of disorder. Two community courts serve downtown areas and tackle the low-level crime and public disorder that can be barriers to social and economic revitalization of city centers. One court is located in a suburban area with pockets facing problems similar to those of its urban neighbors. Finally, two cities are testing the idea of a community court that serves an entire medium-size city. In one, the city has been divided into 17 neighborhoods, each with a committee designed to promote a close working relationship between the community and the court.

Another decision planners faced was selecting an appropriate building in which to locate the community

court. The decision involved balancing community court goals such as visibility and accessibility to the public with the need to find sufficient space for onsite partners. Expense and the logistical issues of processing defendants also were considered. The projects arrived at a variety of solutions. Three courts currently operate within centralized courthouses. One of these projects plans to relocate to a dedicated building in the near future; the other two hold open the possibility of relocating to separate space in the future. Another project holds proceedings in the central court and conducts other community court activities such as community service, social services, and community meetings in the neighborhood being served by the court.

Seven courts are located in the neighborhoods they serve. Three projects have adapted existing space in the community: two in neighborhood centers and one in a strip mall storefront. Four undertook significant renovations to create a space for their community courts.

The decision about court location is closely tied to a program's focal point. All of the planners, and many community members, describe common goals such as establishing community norms and creating an environment supporting revitalization efforts, but the focal point of the programs vary with neighborhoods and the problems confronting individual communities. Courts in

residential neighborhoods are more likely to address housing issues and young offenders as well as low-level criminal offenses, whereas those in downtown areas prioritize issues such as homelessness, illegal camping, and disorderly conduct.

How Should the Court Link Offenders to Social Services?

All planners agreed that making social services available to defendants who appear at community court is important, but they have made different decisions about whether to locate these services onsite. Of the 11 community courts now operating, 6 provide services such as drug treatment, counseling, and assistance with entitlements onsite, as well ongoing case management by project staff for defendants mandated to services such as long-term treatment. Three sites provide referral to services plus ongoing case management; two provide referral to social services only.

Can Punishment and Help Be Combined?

All of the nation's community courts are experimenting with the broad use of both community service and social service sanctions. Mandating defendants to social services is universally accepted as a legitimate sentence to curb recidivism. However, for several, the integration of social service sanctions has been gradual. Judges in some

jurisdictions have questioned the appropriateness of using social service as a sanction. How, asked one judge, could a service designed to help an individual with personal problems also serve as punishment? Community members and others on the advisory board have been emphatic about the need to address underlying problems such as drug addiction.

What Kinds of Cases Are Appropriate for Community Courts?

Five of the community courts are exploring ways to expand their mandates beyond hearing criminal cases. These experiments range from a judge in one courtroom hearing criminal, civil, and family matters, to judges with criminal court calendars working closely with the police and prosecutors on matters such as housing code violations, to two judges sitting jointly at one court of which one hears criminal cases and the other reviews environmental matters. Two jurisdictions are exploring ways to handle youthful offenders at community court.

What Role Should the Community Play?

Although all the projects recognized that community involvement was a critical goal, planners grappled with how and when to involve the community, raising the question: Who is the community? For most court planners, the answer

included residents, social service providers, beat cops, and local merchants. Community members participated in the planning of all of the courts, but in different ways and to differing degrees.

Planners used a variety of tools to establish community participation. In every community, planners attended neighborhood meetings and conducted interviews with a broad range of stakeholders. All but two courts created a community advisory panel during the planning period, and most of the projects held community meetings to determine priorities for the new court. Five projects held focus group discussions to better understand community members' concerns and recommendations. In Portland, Oregon, community members were involved in shaping sanctioning options. In Brooklyn, New York, community members chose the building in which to locate the court.

Since opening, each court has taken a different approach to involving the community. Eight courts have convened a community advisory board that meets regularly and a ninth is forming such a board. Eight community courts have mechanisms for soliciting community involvement in making community service assignments, and four have committees that devise ways to use community service to address hot spots and other neighborhood problems. Two community courts conduct

door-to-door surveys to determine public safety concerns and priorities of neighborhood residents. Three courts distribute a newsletter to give community members visible evidence that the court is accountable to the community.

Are Community Courts Creating System Change?

Community courts are changing the way court systems conduct business within the court itself and, more broadly, within the justice system. In the two cities where community courts have been open the longest, New York City and Portland, the lessons of community involvement in the administration of justice have begun to spread to the rest of the system.

In Portland, the success of the North/Northeast Community Court has convinced the district attorney, the courts, and other justice agencies to open two other community courts that together will serve every neighborhood in Portland. In New York City, the success of Midtown Community Court has led to the development of two other community courts, encouraged greater use of community service and social service sanctions throughout the court system, introduced the role of "resource coordinator" (a liaison between the court and social service agencies) to other courts, started the trend of problem-solving courts throughout the state, and led to the creation of a not-for-profit

organization to be an engine for ongoing court innovation.

In every jurisdiction, these initiatives have demonstrated new ways of doing business. Planners of 10 of the projects have brought new resources to the system to support a community court—ranging from state legislative and city council appropriations, to federal grants, to contributions from private foundations and corporations. Two downtown courts and two neighborhood courts have secured private funding for their projects.

At nine community courts, staff are testing the use of technology to provide more complete and accurate information to the judge and other decisionmakers, to raise the standard of accountability on court-ordered sanctions, and to link the numerous partners that must work

together for a community court to succeed. Six of the courts have installed information technology for the community court and three others have information systems in development.

In planning community courts, new players have been involved. Two of the courts now operating and two opening in 2000 have involved not-for-profit organizations that coordinated planning and implementation of the projects. The innovative involvement of not-for-profit organizations in project implementation—such as the success in finding new funding sources, the use of technology, the experimentation with multijurisdictional calendars, and the impact on other courts—indicates the extent to which community courts are promoting significant change in court operations.

III. Community Court Profiles

As the profiles in this section illustrate, community courts vary significantly. As varied as these projects are, the field of community courts is conspicuously young—the model is evolving as the experiences of these first courts deepen.

Midtown Community Court, New York City

Launched in 1993, the Midtown Community Court targets quality-of-life offenses such as prostitution, illegal vending, graffiti, shoplifting, fare beating, and vandalism in midtown Manhattan. Often in such cases judges are forced to choose between a few days of jail time and no sentence at all—results that fail to impress the victim, the community, or the defendant that these offenses are taken seriously. In contrast, the Midtown Community Court sentences low-level offenders to pay back the neighborhood through community service while offering them help with problems (addiction, mental illness, lack of job skills) that underlie their criminal behavior. Residents, businesses, and social service agencies collaborate with the court by supervising community service projects and by providing onsite social services, including drug treatment, health care, and job training.

Social services are available onsite at the Midtown Court, providing the

judge a range of services to include in a mandate, such as onsite drug treatment, a health education class for prostitutes and “johns,” one-on-one counseling for young offenders and mentally ill persons, and employment training. For defendants with a long criminal record and a history of substance abuse, the court offers an alternative-to-incarceration program that sentences defendants to long-term drug treatment. Many defendants return to court voluntarily to take advantage of services offered at the court, including English as a second language and General Educational Development (GED) classes.

The court uses an award-winning computer application to craft individualized sanctions for each offender and monitor compliance. The system also provides police officers with regular feedback about the outcomes of their arrests.

Community involvement is extensive at the Midtown Community Court. The community advisory board, which reviews court operations and results, meets quarterly; the community conditions panel, which keeps the court abreast of local problems and emerging hot spots, meets monthly. Community members participate in impact panels, meeting face-to-face with offenders to discuss how their behavior harmed the community.

The court also publishes a newsletter to keep stakeholders informed about its work.

The court seeks to solve community problems through a partnership with the police known as the Street Outreach Services program. To address problems before they result in an arrest, social workers from the court join police officers on the beat. Together, they engage the homeless and other street people and encourage them to come to the court voluntarily for social services.

North/Northeast and Southeast Community Courts, Portland, Oregon

Community court planners in Portland sought to build on the success of the Neighborhood District Attorney program and had two objectives: address public safety problems as close as possible to where they occur and further involve community members in determining priorities for the justice system.

Community participation in planning Portland's community courts took the form of the Citizen Advisory Committee. The committees (one for each court) gave planners a sense of which problems were most important to the community. They shared ideas on every aspect of the project—helping form sentencing guidelines, suggesting community service projects, and determining what the courtroom would look like. In addition to the

advisory committees, Portland planners convened focus groups to further document community priorities.

Planning for the North/Northeast Community Court began when the area was designated a Weed and Seed site in 1996. The North/Northeast Community Court serves a 15-neighborhood area of Portland commonly known as Albina, a community of mostly single-family, owner-occupied homes that has the highest crime, high school dropout, and unemployment rates in the city.

Modeled after the North/Northeast Community Court, the Southeast Community Court addresses quality-of-life crime in Portland's Brentwood-Darlington and Lents communities. The Southeast Community Court serves a diverse population of more than 285,000 residents. The area has a large population of immigrants from Eastern Europe and Asia.

When Portland's community courts began operating, cases were deferred to them following a defendant's initial appearance at the downtown court. In June 2000, both courts began arraigning cases sent directly by the police, including misdemeanors and person-to-person matters such as assault of a public safety officer, child neglect, harassment, and stalking. The courts operate a full day every other week and will expand soon to a full day every week.

In addition, the two courts will soon begin hearing housing violations involving chronic offenders. The city's Office of Planning, Development, and Review, which has traditionally handled housing violations, will institute a system in which housing code violators will accrue points for the number of violations they receive. Once violators reach a determined number of points, they will be considered chronic violators. Their cases will be referred to the neighborhood district attorney, who can then prosecute the case at the appropriate community court.

Brentwood-Darlington, home of the Southeast Community Court, has the highest concentration of probationers and parolees in the city. A probation officer who sits on the Citizen Advisory Committee reviews the court docket prior to each community court session and checks defendants for probation status. Soon, a neighborhood probation office also will be located at the Southeast Community Court.

At both community courts, staff from social service agencies are available onsite to refer offenders for services. The North/Northeast court offers a mentor program, through which more than 50 defendants have developed life plans and long-term goals. A public defender is present at each court session to answer questions and give legal advice.

By the end of 2000, Portland plans to open a third community court that will serve the city's westside and downtown communities. When the Westside Community Court opens, all noncustodial misdemeanor cases in Portland will be arraigned at a community court.

Hartford Community Court, Hartford, Connecticut

The Hartford Community Court has its roots in the federally funded Comprehensive Communities Partnership program that sought to improve coordination among criminal justice agencies and Hartford communities. The program initially focused on community policing and antigang initiatives, but community participants wanted something to be done about low-level crime as well. Planning for the community court began in 1996 and included enacting state legislation to mandate alternative sentences for ordinance violations.

The Hartford Community Court is testing the idea of a community court that serves the entire city. To ensure that the court is responsive to local concerns, the court works closely with problem-solving committees in the city's 17 neighborhoods. The problem-solving committees articulate priorities for each neighborhood and send a representative to the court's advisory board. The court sends community service crews to every neighborhood

and, when possible, assigns offenders to perform community service in the neighborhood in which they were arrested.

A member of the bail commissioner's office screens defendants for arraignment. This interview serves as a criminal background check and is the first line of inquiry for social services screening.

After speaking with the state's attorney in court, if the defendant accepts a plea agreement, Judge Raymond Norko issues a sentence that includes community service and/or social service mandates. Upon completion of the service, the defendant's case is dismissed 30 days later without the defendant having to appear in court. If the defendant refuses the plea offer, the case stays in the court to prevent "forum shopping." The judge hears bench trials at the community court; cases that are eligible for jury trials are transferred to superior court.

Each defendant is required to meet with the court's social service team, which includes staff from the city's Department of Human Services, the state's Department of Social Services and Department of Mental Health and Addiction, and the Capitol Region Mental Health Center. The interview covers issues such as substance abuse treatment, education services, health care, and housing options. Defendants are then linked with necessary social services.

The Hartford Community Court regularly employs mediation in resolving criminal cases. Mediation is voluntary, requiring the willing participation of both the victim and the offender. If an agreement is reached between the parties and restitution is required, the judge will make the mediation agreement part of the court's order and continue the case until the restitution and other terms of the agreement are fulfilled.

Hennepin County Community Court Calendar, Minneapolis, Minnesota

The Hennepin County Community Court Calendar serves two dozen neighborhoods and 100,000 residents in South Minneapolis using a downtown courtroom located in the Hennepin County Government Center. Planners targeted South Minneapolis, including the Phillips and Powderhorn neighborhoods, because the area had significant crime problems and a highly organized community leadership, and because it is home to two major corporations, Honeywell and Allina.

Although the court is not located in the neighborhood it serves, it is building ties to the neighborhood by coordinating social services and community service programs through a community-based partner. Administered by a collaborative of county social service departments known as the Hennepin/

Powderhorn Partners, offenders appear at the Hennepin/Powderhorn Center to fulfill their community service or social service sanctions and take advantage of a broad range of services on a voluntary basis. A probation officer in the courtroom acts as a resource coordinator for the judge, making recommendations for social service sanctions and linking the defendant to the appropriate social service provider. Staff at the Hennepin/Powderhorn Center monitor compliance and report the results to the court-based probation officer.

“We located the court downtown and located everything else in the catchment area—social services, community service, all of our community meetings,” said Judge Richard Hopper.

The court tackles a multijurisdictional calendar including felony and misdemeanor property offenses from the Third Police Precinct in South Minneapolis and nuisance abatement cases from the entire city. The Community Court Calendar handles cases of varying levels of severity. The judge and court planners devised a broad range of community service and social service sanctions that are appropriate for misdemeanor and felony charges. Applying sanctions in these different cases involves a careful assessment of the risk involved in returning an offender to the community. Moreover, the judge reports that working with chronic offenders, whose behaviors

are harder to change with short-term social service interventions, is more difficult than working with first-time offenders. Nonetheless, the broad range of cases reflects the priorities of the South Minneapolis community, which leads the city in arrests for quality-of-life crimes, including drug sales, prostitution, and gang-related offenses.

In addition to these criminal matters, the court hears civil nuisance actions that typically involve properties that are used for criminal activities such as prostitution and drug dealing. The court uses traditional sanctions as well as mediation with community members as remedies and ensures a high level of scrutiny. If the property owner fails to comply with the court’s order, the property can be boarded up.

Hempstead Community Court, Hempstead, New York

Although the first community courts appeared in urban areas, many suburban communities face similar challenges. On suburban Long Island, Hempstead and surrounding towns are testing the community court model to address quality-of-life problems such as prostitution, drug use and low-level sales, public drinking, vandalism, and graffiti.

The Hempstead Community Court initially handled quality-of-life offenses committed within the

village of Hempstead. Recently, it expanded its catchment area to the four neighboring communities of New Cassel/Westbury, Freeport Village, Uniondale, and Roosevelt.

The first year of operations has been a learning period. The court has been hearing cases adjourned following arraignment from the traditional court, including prostitution, drug possession, and disorderly conduct cases. The judge imposes sentences of community service or crafts a social service mandate, typically involving drug or alcohol treatment. Planners are reviewing which crimes are best prosecuted in the court, which treatment programs and services are most effective in addressing defendants' underlying problems, and which types of community service are appropriate for suburban areas. Planners also are exploring ways to work collaboratively with Nassau County's many village courts.

A grant from BJA's Byrne Program was recently secured by the Nassau County Department of Drug and Alcohol Services to help expand the court's programs and coordinate its work with the local village courts. Planners hope to extend the availability of services to address the special problems faced by prostitutes and substance-abusing youth. The court is in session 3 days a week and plans to continue to expand to other areas of the county.

West Palm Beach Community Court, West Palm Beach, Florida

The West Palm Beach Community Court serves the West Palm Beach Weed and Seed area, a residential neighborhood on the outskirts of downtown struggling with a high crime rate. Although West Palm Beach is less than 1 mile from Palm Beach, one of the most affluent cities in the country, 41 percent of the neighborhood's 5,360 residents live in poverty and the unemployment rate stands at 20 percent. The physical characteristics of the community are striking: deteriorated houses and businesses, vacant lots with discarded mattresses and piles of trash, and litter strewn throughout the streets, sidewalks, yards, and parks. No new businesses have opened in the area, and few new houses have been built in recent years.

Police were frustrated with the epidemic of quality-of-life offenses in the area and the limited consequences imposed following an arrest. Seeking a community-based approach, the Palm Beach County Criminal Justice Commission, the chief of police, and the local prosecutor began planning a community court.

The West Palm Beach Community Court handles nonviolent misdemeanors. Defendants are scheduled to appear before Judge Barry M. Cohen 4 to 10 days after receiving a police citation. Cases of

defendants pleading guilty stay in community court; cases headed to trial are adjourned to the downtown court.

Court planners surveyed area residents and created a community advisory panel to set priorities for community service. “We found that the community wanted to get cleaned up first—that trash and litter were by the far the top concern—so we focused on that,” said Tom Becht, coordinator of the court.

The community court offers social services onsite, including employment counseling, education programs, and case management. Because so many of its clients are indigent, the court provides transportation services to and from job interviews and social service appointments for defendants and resident nonoffenders alike.

The court coordinates closely with community policing efforts. Local police allocated Local Law Enforcement Block Grants funds to increase bike patrol officers in the court’s catchment area. These community-focused officers often bring residents in need of services to the court, sometimes as an alternative to arresting them.

The court is also developing a community service project in partnership with the police department that enforces the housing code. Soon, community service crews from the court will be available to

restore and repair the property of property owners who are not in compliance with the housing code.

Downtown Austin Community Court, Austin, Texas

In 1997, Travis County District Attorney Ronnie Earle called for the creation of a community court to help clean up downtown Austin. With a high concentration of restaurants, nightclubs, and bars, the 7-square-mile area was a magnet for disorder, public drinking, underage drinking, and homelessness.

Demonstrating that the traditional municipal court was in many ways a revolving door, a survey conducted by court planners found that 55 percent of those arrested for disorderly conduct had been arrested before. The planners also found that more than 56 percent of those committing quality-of-life offenses reported suffering from chemical dependency. Community court planners sought to do something different: use community service as a sanction for low-level offenses, respond to repeat offenses with graduated sanctions, and use social services sanctions to address underlying problems such as drug addiction.

Mayor Kirk Watson and Austin’s well-organized business community rallied around the idea of a community court, and the project gained support from community residents, service providers, and the city

council. Supporters believed that the court would help enforce standards of behavior and ensure that the downtown area remained safe, clean, and inviting. They also thought the court would promote confidence in the justice system.

Since opening, the court has operated in a room in the Austin Municipal Court complex, with staff setting up offices in the gallery of the court. The court has adjudicated more than 4,000 cases in its first 7 months.

Judge Elisabeth Earle says the goals of the court are to stop the revolving door for low-level offenders and to resolve cases quickly. A sentence of “time served” is never a punishment option. Sentences in most cases are carried out immediately and warrants are served within hours, not days, of their issuance.

The judge can craft a sentence using a variety of tools. She can require the defendant to pay back the neighborhood by performing community service. Also, working with the resource coordinator, she can craft rehabilitative plans that include a range of social services such as acupuncture detoxification, peer counseling, day and residential treatment for substance abuse, and mental health counseling. The community court helps offenders reenter the work force in collaboration with partnering agencies. Social services are coordinated by court-based social workers.

Frayser Community Court, Memphis, Tennessee

The Frayser Community Court catchment area, the West Frayser neighborhood of Memphis, was once home to two large manufacturing plants and an active blue-collar work force. When these plants closed in the mid-1980s, many workers left and the neighborhood declined. Housing prices dropped, small businesses closed, and the unemployment rate surged. The area became a magnet for gangs and drugs.

Leaders of the Memphis community formed the Memphis/Shelby County Crime Commission, which recommended creating a community court as a way to integrate active enforcement practices of the Memphis Police Department’s community policing initiatives, community prosecution, and the court. The multijurisdictional community court, which opened in February 2000, operates out of a storefront in a local shopping mall, and the two judges handle both criminal misdemeanors and environmental ordinance violations.

Misdemeanor cases in the Frayser catchment area, such as low-level drug possession, disorderly conduct, reckless driving, criminal trespass, public intoxication, and other alcohol-related violations, are referred to community court.

The court also has jurisdiction over city and county ordinance

violations, reflecting community residents' concerns about neglected and abandoned property. Eight police officers assigned to the Todd's Creek CO-ACT Unit (a sub-precinct within the catchment area) look for code violations, especially those involving properties with junk cars, tires, and other debris. Usually, the judge orders the property cleaned up by a certain date. If violators fail to comply with the order, the judge may apply "injunctive relief," including jail sentences and fines. If owners clean up the property and sign a court order stating that they agree to remain in compliance, charges are dismissed. To date, approximately 100 derelict and neglected properties have been cleaned up, according to Prosecutor Bart Dickinson.

Dickinson, who prosecutes both misdemeanors and code violations, reports that the juvenile court delinquency cases from the area are processed in conjunction with juvenile court, and eviction actions are adjudicated under the district attorney's Drug Dealer Eviction Program.

Chris Kirby of Shelby County Pretrial Services coordinates all community service projects at the court and serves as a liaison with service providers.

Atlanta Community Court, Atlanta, Georgia

The Atlanta business community, worried that quality-of-life crimes were scaring away shoppers and

tourists, pushed for the creation of the Atlanta Community Court. The city's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, composed of criminal justice leaders, elected officials, and government agencies, worked with the downtown improvement district, Central Atlanta Progress, to develop the Atlanta Community Court as a separate calendar that operates within Municipal Court Judge Bill Riley's general session.

Although the court serves the entire city, which has a population of approximately 440,000, Judge Riley is working to make justice more visible and more relevant to Atlanta's neighborhoods through the use of community service. The judge keeps abreast of community concerns and neighborhood hot spots by attending community meetings and building relationships with community members. The deployment of community court defendants performing community service to neighborhoods suffering from quality-of-life crime strengthens the link between the court and Atlanta's neighborhoods.

Defendants are eligible for community court if they have been arrested or received a summons for a selected misdemeanor or violation in the city of Atlanta. Prior to arraignment, staff from the corrections department assess a defendant's social service needs and make a sentencing recommendation to the judge. The court uses mandated long-term drug treatment

to address a defendant's underlying substance abuse issues.

The court is working with the Pardon and Parole Board to create reparative boards in the neighborhoods of Mechanicsville, a Weed and Seed site, and Old Fourth Ward, an Empowerment Zone. Judge Riley refers defendants who live in those neighborhoods to the boards as a sanction.

Red Hook Community Justice Center, Brooklyn, New York

Operating in the heart of a low-income Brooklyn neighborhood, the Red Hook Community Justice Center has allowed judges to transform their responses to the people who appear before the court. At Red Hook, a single judge hears neighborhood cases that ordinarily are heard in three different courts—civil, family, and criminal. This model did not emerge by accident. Justice center planners felt that the problems faced by families and individuals do not conform to jurisdictional boundaries. By having a single judge handle matters traditionally heard by different decision-makers at different locations, the justice center offers a swift and coordinated judicial response.

The Red Hook judge has an array of sanctions and services available, including community restitution projects, onsite job training, drug treatment, and health counseling—all of which are rigorously monitored

to ensure accountability and to encourage individual responsibility. Court staff supervise offenders performing community service, and state-of-the-art technology helps the judge monitor compliance.

In addition, the courthouse is the hub of programs that engage local residents in “doing justice.” These programs include mediation, community service projects that put local volunteers to work repairing conditions of disorder, and a youth court where teenagers resolve actual cases involving their peers. Through these initiatives, Red Hook seeks to engage the community in aggressive crime prevention. Planners see this strategy working in two ways: by solving local problems before they become a court problem and by helping knit together the fabric of the neighborhood.

By using its coercive power to link defendants to drug treatment and by providing onsite services like domestic violence counseling, health care, and job training, Red Hook seeks to strengthen families and help individuals avoid further involvement with the court system. Services are not limited to court users but are available to anyone in the community who needs help.

The Red Hook Community Justice Center is housed in a former parochial high school, a site selected by community members. New York City financed the cost of renovating the long-vacant building.

IV. Conclusion

Community court planners across the country are motivated by different concerns. In Portland, the community court program was a natural outgrowth of the neighborhood prosecutor program. Having succeeded in bringing the justice system closer to the problem, Multnomah County District Attorney Michael Shrunk concluded that the best extension of this effort involved the courts.

Portland is pursuing a model in which community prosecution and community courts will serve the entire city. In this model, neighborhood district attorneys and community courts will focus on the low-level matters that shape the quality of life of all city residents.

In West Palm Beach, Florida, the initiative for a community court grew out of justice system practitioners' frustration with the traditional model. Looking for new approaches, the local crime commission embraced the community

court concept as a way to focus their efforts in a neighborhood with chronic public safety concerns.

In Hartford, Connecticut, the community court emerged from a process designed to solicit greater community involvement in setting law enforcement priorities. Law enforcement and the courts had focused on major crimes for several years, and community members wanted to focus attention on less serious, and far more frequent, quality-of-life crimes.

These differences in focus highlight that while our nation's first generation of community courts seek common goals—imposing immediate, meaningful sanctions on offenders and forming genuine problem-solving partnerships with the neighborhoods they serve—they are most effective when responding to the unique concerns of individual communities.

V. Resources on Community Justice

Publications discussing innovative community justice initiatives, including those listed below, are available from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS). Call 1-800-851-3420 or e-mail NCJRS at askncjrs@ncjrs.org. Many NCJRS publications also may be viewed online at the Justice Information Center World Wide Web site at www.ncjrs.org.

Beyond Community Policing: Community Justice. Issue Paper. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice. 1997. NCJ 165529.

“Community Courts: Prospects and Limits.” *National Institute of Justice Journal.* August 1996. NCJ 175939.

Improving State and Local Criminal Justice Systems: A Report on How Public Defenders, Prosecutors, and Other Criminal Justice System Practitioners Are Collaborating Across the Country. Monograph. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance. 1998. NCJ 173391.

In New York City, a “Community Court” and a New Legal Culture: Program Description. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice. 1996. NCJ 158613.

Innovative Court Programs: Results From State and Local Program Workshops. Washington, DC: Justice Research and Statistics Association (JRSA). 1995. Available from JRSA by calling 202-842-9330.

Key Elements of Successful Adjudication Partnerships. Bulletin. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance. 1999. NCJ 173949.

Opening the Courts to the Community: Volunteers in Wisconsin’s Courts. Bulletin. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance. 2000. NCJ 178935.

Overcoming Obstacles to Community Courts: A Summary of Workshop Proceedings. Monograph. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance. 1998. NCJ 173400.

Responding to the Community: Principles for Planning and Creating a Community Court. Bulletin. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance. 1997. NCJ 166821.

VI. For More Information

The Center for Court Innovation functions as the New York State Unified Court System's independent research and development arm, creating demonstration projects that test new approaches to problems like addiction, family dysfunction, juvenile delinquency, and domestic violence.

CCI's community justice projects include the Midtown Community Court, the Red Hook Community Justice Center, and the Harlem Community Justice Center. With the support of the U.S. Department of Justice, CCI encourages courts across the country to solve problems locally and to build stronger links with communities. CCI also provides hands-on assistance to jurisdictions that are exploring topics of court and justice system reform, including community justice and drug court technology.

For more information about community court initiatives, contact:

Center for Court Innovation

Bridget Regan
520 Eighth Avenue
18th Floor
New York, NY 10018
212-397-3050
E-mail: info@courttinnovation.org.
World Wide Web:
www.courttinnovation.org

For more information about BJA programs, contact:

Bureau of Justice Assistance

810 Seventh Street NW.
Washington, DC 20531
202-514-6278
World Wide Web:
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA

Bureau of Justice Assistance Clearinghouse

P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
1-800-688-4252
World Wide Web: www.ncjrs.org

Clearinghouse staff are available Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. eastern time. Ask to be placed on the BJA mailing list.

U.S. Department of Justice Response Center

1-800-421-6770 or 202-307-1480

Response Center staff are available Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. eastern time.

Bureau of Justice Assistance Information

General Information

Callers may contact the U.S. Department of Justice Response Center for general information or specific needs, such as assistance in submitting grant applications and information on training. To contact the Response Center, call 1-800-421-6770 or write to 1100 Vermont Avenue NW., Washington, DC 20005.

Indepth Information

For more indepth information about BJA, its programs, and its funding opportunities, requesters can call the BJA Clearinghouse. The BJA Clearinghouse, a component of the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), shares BJA program information with state and local agencies and community groups across the country. Information specialists are available to provide reference and referral services, publication distribution, participation and support for conferences, and other networking and outreach activities. The Clearinghouse can be reached by

- Mail**
P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
- Visit**
2277 Research Boulevard
Rockville, MD 20850
- Telephone**
1-800-688-4252
Monday through Friday
8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.
eastern time
- Fax**
301-519-5212
- Fax on Demand**
1-800-688-4252
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