

SMART PROSECUTION

Kings County District Attorney's Office Smart Prosecution Initiative Brooklyn Young Adult Justice Initiative

Statement of the Problem

In New York State, 16-17-year-old adolescents alleged to have committed crimes are charged as adults. The Kings County District Attorney's Office (KCDA) in Brooklyn handles approximately 100,000 criminal cases each year. In 2013, more than 30,000 cases involved defendants up to 24 years old. Young adults are overrepresented throughout the justice system and are more likely to be sent to prison for violence and property crimes than any other age group.

There is strong evidence that the use of jail does not deter re-offending, while the latest science suggests that adult decision-making skills and other psychosocial skills may not fully develop until well into adulthood.

In 2012, The Adolescent Diversion Part was created in Kings County, Brooklyn for 16-17-year-old individuals charged with low-level misdemeanor offenses. The program was designed to reduce a young person's exposure to a criminal conviction and to use developmentally appropriate services in lieu of jail. Despite the success of the program, there remained a need to design a specialized approach for young adults, up to 24 years old, charged with misdemeanor offenses.

Strategies and Tactics

KCDA has built upon the existing, specialized program, The Adolescent Diversion Part to create a comprehensive program, the "Brooklyn Young Adult Justice Initiative". The district attorney's office established a dedicated unit to handle cases involving individuals up to 24 years old charged with a misdemeanor offense. A risk needs assessment, the Criminal Court Assessment (CCAT) developed by the Center for Court Innovation, is conducted for individuals admitted to the specialized court. Services for young adults include: onsite short-term group and individual

SMART PROSECUTION

counseling, developmentally appropriate community service, educational and vocational services, substance abuse treatment, mental health and trauma counseling, and cognitive behavioral therapy sessions.

Partnerships and Collaborations

KCDA and The Center for Court Innovation (The Center) have collaborated for several years to address the exposure and harm a young person charged with misdemeanor offenses faces in the Criminal Justice System. The Center has provided training to KCDA and other stakeholders in the following areas: (1) risk needs assessment, (2) procedural justice, and (3) adolescent brain development. KCDA is collaborating with the New York State Unified Court System, Brooklyn's public counsel agencies, (The Legal Aid Society and Brooklyn Defender Services), police, probation, and service providers for young adults.

Research Methodology

The Center will conduct a formal impact evaluation comparing program participants to a matched comparison sample composed of similar individuals up to age 24 years, arrested one year before program implementation. The Center would also analyze the risk-need characteristics of program participants. Based on results from administering CCAT to program participants, a report will detail the distribution of risk levels, as well as prevalence of needs in areas including employment, education, housing, drug abuse, criminal thinking, trauma, and other mental health problems.