

# Drug Treatment: A Proven Way To Prosecute Addicts, Attorneys and Judges Unite in Rehabilitation Mission

By Samuel Newhouse  
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JAY STREET — "I am Brooklyn Treatment Court!" declared a rehabilitated drug addict before a large audience in Brooklyn Supreme Court.

Other recently rehabilitated drug addicts took the mike to make similar statements, naming rehab programs around Downtown Brooklyn and drug treatment courts across the city.

"I am one of the many successful faces of Brooklyn Treatment Court!" "I am Brooklyn Treatment Court!" "I am Bronx Treatment Court!" "I am Phoenix House!" "I am Act One!" went the line of successfully rehabilitated men and women.

The dozens of rehabilitated drug addicts attended a ceremony in honor of National Drug Treatment Court Month, held on May 7 in Kings County Supreme Court Criminal Term's central jury room, which was filled to capacity.

In attendance were jurists and lawyers from across the city and



Brooklyn Treatment Court Presiding Judge Jo Ann Ferdinand

state along with hundreds of former drug addicts, all gathered in the borough where the New York's Drug Treatment Court model was born: Brooklyn.

"We are living proof that drug courts work," said the leader of the Phoenix Choir, a group of rehabilitated addicts from DUMBO-based rehab center Phoenix House who provided music dur-

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Chief of Policy and Planning for New York State's Unified Court System Judy Harris Kluger (left) commends Bronx Treatment Court Judge Laura Safer Espinoza (right).



Kings County District Attorney Charles J. Hynes (left) was presented with the New York Association of Drug Treatment Court Professionals Leadership Award by Kings County Administrative Judge for Criminal Matters Barry Kamins (right).

Eagle photos by Samuel Newhouse

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ing the ceremony.

The ceremony, organized by the New York State Unified Court System to celebrate the "history, impact and future of drug courts in New York City," included many of the Kings County's most outspoken advocates for drug courts.

Drug court has "proved itself over and over in the benefits to participants," said Brooklyn Treatment Court Presiding Judge Jo Ann Ferdinand, who has sat in that court since it was created.

Kings County District Attorney Charles J. Hynes echoed that theme after being presented with the New York Association of Drug Treatment Court Professionals Leadership Award by Kings County Administrative Judge for Criminal Matters Barry Kamins.

"I could never understand the insanity of trying to put people in prisons because of their sickness," D.A. Hynes told the crowd. "In 1990, people were getting sentenced to life on the installment plan, and that was flat out morally wrong," he said, referring to the practice of sending drug addicts back to prison again and again for the same problems over and over.

Since then, in steps that have at times been spurred by D.A. Hynes, the treatment of drug offenders has radically changed. Other speakers recalled the changes that have swept drug

prosecutions over the past two decades.

When drug courts were first proposed, "Prosecutors were rolling their eyes, judges were skeptical, and a lot of defense attorneys were skeptical too," said Bridget Brennan, special narcotics prosecutor for New York City.

"They thought we were trying to trick their clients into taking long sentences," Brennan continued. "Defense attorneys at that time were just trying to get clients out from under the court's control — and what they did after that was their own business. But one of the main goals of the criminal justice system is rehabilitation."

"Starting my career I witnessed two decades where the primary focus of the criminal justice system was imprisonment," said Seymour W. James Jr., the Legal Aid Society's Attorney-in-charge of Criminal Practice. "Brooklyn Treatment Court was a new approach. It was a really a seismic change."

The new system was one of incentives and graduated sanctions, with court staff changing roles from the adversarial system to a system where prosecutor, defense attorney, judge, even court clerks and court officers, were "assisting the client in their full rehabilitation," James said. "The social savings have been significant."