

Future Lawyers Get Close-up View of Problem-Solving Courts

A group of Fordham University School of Law students spent a morning last February touring Brooklyn Treatment Court for a new course on nontraditional courts being offered by the school. Taught by New York state court system judges and lawyers, Problem-Solving Justice: Courts as Agents of Social Change examines drug, mental health and other specialized courts that take a problem-solving tack to nonviolent crime, with students required to visit several such tribunals over the course of the semester.

Instructor Valerie Raine, director of drug projects for the Center of Court Innovation—the courts' research arm—and a former Brooklyn Treatment Court director, gave students an overview of the court, where nonviolent offenders with a drug history can opt for judicially monitored treatment in lieu of incarceration. Defendants must admit to their crimes, then sign a contract promising to comply with treatment, job training and other court requirements in having the charges reduced or dismissed.

"We deal with the entire panoply of problems that addicts have—health, housing, child care and other issues," Ms. Raine informed the students, describing the range of on-site services available to offenders. Looking to initiate a dialogue, she added, "Traditional courts are concerned with the adjudication of past occurrences, while problem-solving courts focus on future behavior. What are your thoughts on the notion of the court being in the business of changing people's lives?"

Several students felt that the criminal justice system, via jail and other sentences, has always had a hand in behavioral issues, whether

realized or not. "What matters is that the offender has a choice," added classmate Audra Beerman.

Students Hear from Court's Various Players

The students also met with Clinical Director Joseph Madonia, who discussed the court's nontraditional approach. "We have case managers, educational, vocational and other services, all unusual for a court. We view the courtroom as a therapeutic environment," he explained, later on showing students around the court facilities, which include an office where Mr. Madonia's staff conducts educational assessments to help drug offenders prepare for their GED exams or apply to college.

Ms. Raine introduced the Fordham students to Brooklyn Treatment Court Judge Jo Ann Ferdinand, who's been with the court since its opening a decade ago. Elucidating the court's guiding philosophy, Judge Ferdinand told them, "It's clear that traditional criminal justice sanctions don't work well with addicts. Putting people with a history of drug abuse in jail doesn't cure their addiction. They just get arrested again and keep repeating that cycle . . . It turns out that having a single, authority figure to whom the addict is accountable works because the truth is, these offenders don't really want to be addicts. They don't want to stop getting high, but they don't want the negative consequences attached to drug addiction."

After further talk on how the court works, Judge Ferdinand rushed off to the courtroom, where a short while later the students heard as she dispensed words of encouragement to several offenders who had made strides in their treatment, a big motivator for these defendants.

By the end of the semester, the students will hear from a drug court graduate and other guest speakers, also visiting Brooklyn's Domestic Violence Court. Center for Court Innovation Director Greg Berman reports that the center is planning to disseminate the course materials to professors and judges around the country, encouraging them to replicate the Fordham class, adding, "The goal is to get future lawyers to look at these nontraditional approaches to justice and start thinking of themselves as problem-solvers." ■



Brooklyn Treatment Court Judge Jo Ann Ferdinand and Clinical Director Joseph Madonia talk with Audra Beerman and other Fordham students enrolled in the school's new course on problem-solving justice.

Brooklyn Drug Court Graduates Celebrate Living Free & Clean

JAY STREET — Tonight, more than 50 successful graduates of the Brooklyn Drug Treatment Court will commemorate the official dismissal of their cases.

Dr. Edison O. Jackson, president of Medgar Evers University, is the keynote speaker.

The defendants, all non-violent drug offenders, have been drug-free for at least 12 months. They committed to mandatory drug treatment as a condition of their plea.

Only non-violent, felony drug offenders are eligible for the Brooklyn Drug Treatment Court. Treatment Court requires offenders to plead guilty to the charges against them. The charges are then held in abeyance while defendants enter court-mandated drug treatment programs.

The court's onsite staff conducts a "full bio-psycho-social assessment" to determine appropriate placement with a substance abuse treatment



**Administrative Judge
Neil J. Firetog, 2nd
Judicial District.**



**Hon. Jo Ann
Ferdinand, Brooklyn
Treatment Court.**

provider in the community.

The court supervises defendants' progress through bi-weekly hearings before presiding Justice Jo Ann Ferdinand. As defendants progress, court supervision may be reduced, but regular drug tests continue throughout the treatment program, which lasts from 12 to 18 months.

"Getting them clean is really just

the first step," said Dennis Reilly, project director at Brooklyn Drug Treatment Court. As treatment progresses, the court offers educational and vocational assistance to help defendants gain a GED and/or necessary employment skills, so they can stay drug-free.

The educational/vocational program is available once defendants become clinically stable, and graduates may return for additional assistance and referrals. While some come back for services due to a relapse, others return as speakers who address state and national audiences about how

the treatment court changed their lives.

Once defendants successfully complete the court-mandated drug treatment, Justice Ferdinand dismisses the charges against them, and program graduates leave court free and clean.

— *Elizabeth Stull*
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

Brooklyn Treatment Court Hails Clean & Sober Grads

Conquerors of substance abuse were rewarded for their fortitude with awards of distinction at a graduation presented by the Brooklyn Treatment Court.

More than 50 boroughites were presented diplomas for successfully completing one year of treatment during a ceremony at the State Supreme Court, 320 Jay Street.

The tribute featured testimonies from graduates, who relayed their own experiences on the rocky road to recovery.

The Treatment Court, a division of the Supreme Court in Brooklyn, handles drug offenders with no history of violence and makes mandatory treatment a condition of a defendant's guilty plea.

The court provides judicially-supervised substance abuse treatment, drug testing and supportive services to reduce recidivism among offenders and increase the likelihood of successful rehabilitation.

The commemoration marked the official dismissal of the clients' cases.



Graduates recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Photos by Jennifer MacFarlane



Supreme Court Judge Jo Ann Ferdinand (center) is flanked by past graduates.



Austera Bolden speaks about how she battled substance abuse and emerged a winner.



Presiding justice Judge Jo Ann Ferdinand congratulates conquerors of substance abuse during a ceremony at Brooklyn Treatment Court.

Affordable, Quality FAMILY DENTISTRY

- Cosmetic Dentistry-Bonding, Crowns, Bridges & Implants
- Painless Non-Surgical Treatment of Gum Disease
- Bleaching • Root Canal
- Dentures
- Tooth Colored Fillings
- Gum Treatments
- Extractions
- Preventive Dentistry
- Sweet Air Available

EMERGENCIES TREATED PROMPTLY

We Now Accept Oxford Dental Plan & Other Insurance Plans

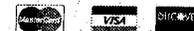
Special Attention To Nervous & Anxious Patients

Children Treated With Tender Loving Care

AUTOClave STATE-OF-THE-ART STERILIZATION



Dr. Jeffrey M. Kramer
544 Court Street
 Corner W. 9th St., Carroll Gardens
 Evening & Saturday Hours Available
624-5554 • 624-7055



Brooklyn Courier

Page 17 BROOKLYN HEIGHTS COURIER DECEMBER 1, 2006

Addicts come clean with court's help

AUSTERIA Bolden is all psyched for the holidays.

She's looking forward to cooking, cleaning, shopping, wrapping gifts — the whole nine yards.

"My entire family depends on me," said Bolden, 46, an East Flatbush mother of five. "My mother tells me I'm her angel child, and my kids, they all love me. I get kisses every day."

But four years ago, Bolden's life was a different story.

After the death of her brother, Bolden turned to drugs and became addicted.

"My mother always stood by me, but there were times when I just didn't want to face my family," said Bolden. "You feel like everybody's going to put you down."

Bolden turned her life around through a treatment program run by Brooklyn Supreme Court.

Last Thursday, she was among more than 70 Brooklyn Treatment Court participants to receive certificates and medals, celebrating a year or more of drug-free living.

Established in January 1997, the special court provides man-

BY JOYCE SHELBY
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

datory testing and treatment for drug offenders with no history of violence. The court also oversees support services, ranging from a health clinic to aid with housing and further schooling.

More than 2,500 people have entered the program, Presiding Judge Jo Ann Ferdinand said. About 1,200 have graduated and another 400 are in treatment now.

"In terms of how many people stay in treatment, we do better than the national average," Ferdinand said. "The national average is 60%. We are closer to 70%."

"We are so proud of all our graduates," Ferdinand told a standing-room-only crowd during ceremonies in the new Brooklyn Supreme Court building.

The graduates were young, old, from numerous racial, ethnic, social, educational and economic backgrounds.

Talbot Johnson, a 54-year-old accountant and ordained minister from Long Island, offered the opening prayer.

"Crack is a vicious drug," Johnson said after the ceremony.



KEN GOLDFIELD

Brooklyn Treatment Court graduates (from l.) Willie Booze, Austeria Bolden and Talbot Johnson, with Presiding Judge Jo Ann Ferdinand (2nd from l.), show off certificates that say they're drug-free.

"I come from good stock . . . I succeeded in life immensely," said Johnson, now 54.

"But at the age of 35, I got tired of trying to be the best of the best. I threw in the towel. I tried drugs. The problem was, I liked them.

"Crack doesn't care who you are. If you get around it and touch it, it will hurt you."

"I've battled drugs all my life," said Willie Booze, 57, a cook from Bedford-Stuyvesant.

"It's been a good experience," he said. "I learned that I've been

my own worst enemy. Now, I've got a different mindset. I realized I was getting older, but I never grew up. That's not the legacy I wanted. I want to live and I'm looking forward to getting on with my life."

jshelby@nydailynews.com