

# Community justice court associated with lower rearrest rates

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The opening of a community court in a high-crime area of San Francisco was associated with a lower chance that offenders would be arrested for another crime within a year, according to a new RAND Corporation study.

San Francisco opened the Community Justice Center in 2009 to serve the city's Tenderloin district and adjacent neighborhoods. RAND researchers examined whether the Community Justice Center reduces the risk of rearrest when compared to more-traditional approaches for addressing arrestees.

San Francisco's Community Justice Center is a multifaceted intervention that seeks to help arrestees receive the services they need and reduce the likelihood that an arrestees ultimately end up with convictions on their permanent record.

"Our findings support the hypothesis that San Francisco's Community Justice Center reduces criminal recidivism," said Beau Kilmer, the study's lead author and a senior policy researcher at RAND, a nonprofit research organization.

Community courts such as the one in San Francisco are a novel approach to address low-level offenders. The approach began in New York City in 1991 and today there are more than 30 community courts in the United States, all sharing traditional court goals of reducing crime, ensuring safety and protecting due process rights.

The programs seek to address problems often linked to criminal behavior, like substance use disorders, [mental health issues](#) and unemployment. At community courts, the criminal case management process itself involves providing access to treatment and social services.

The San Francisco Community Justice Center opened in March 2009 and through December 2013 had heard nearly 10,000 cases involving 6,000 defendants.

Kilmer and co-author Jesse Sussell examined one-year rearrest rates among those arrested for eligible offenses—such as theft, vandalism, drug offenses, assault and disorderly conduct—inside and outside the [catchment area](#) both before and after the Community Justice Center opened.

The analysis found that the probability of rearrest for those originally arrested outside the Community Justice Center catchment area increased over time, while the probability of rearrest for those originally arrested inside the center's jurisdiction decreased over time.

After applying statistical models, researchers estimate that those arrested for an eligible offense in the Community Justice Center catchment area after it opened were 8.9 percent to 10.3 percent less likely to be rearrested within one year.

Because the intervention is multifaceted, an important question for future research is determining which elements of the community court are most beneficial. Access to services is an obvious candidate, but in San Francisco another candidate is the reduced interval between citation and first appearance in court.

Sussell said that arrestees cited to the traditional system typically were ordered to report to the court more than a month after a citation was

issued. Arrestees cited to the Community Justice Center often had to report to the court within seven business days.

"Not only do we want to learn more about how access to services affects these arrestees, we also want to know whether decreasing the number of days between arrest and going to court makes a difference," Sussell said.

**More information:** The study, "Does San Francisco's Community Justice Center Reduce Criminal Recidivism?" can be found at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)

Provided by RAND Corporation

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