

State of Connecticut Judicial Branch Community Court Session At Hartford

SPRING 2007
News & Updates

Produced by Chris Pleasanton, Vol. 9, Issue 1

HPD CSO'S VISIT COMMUNITY COURT

The Community Court in Hartford deals with low-level misdemeanors and town ordinances often referred to as “quality of life” crimes. In other words, the behaviors of those charged with these crimes contribute to the deterioration of the quality of life in local neighborhoods and communities.

Local law enforcement agencies are the front-line in dealing with these matters. In Hartford, much of that responsibility rests with the Hartford Police Department’s Community Service Officers, each of whom is assigned to a specific neighborhood. The CSOs work with local residents and businesses to maintain open lines of communication and raise awareness of “hot spots” for criminal activities in the neighborhoods. In the course of their duties, the CSOs often deal directly with the low-level criminal matters which comprise a great deal of the Community Court’s caseload.

With that in mind, Judge E. Curtissa R. Cofield invited the Hartford Police CSOs to visit the court to raise the Court’s awareness of neighborhood conditions with regard to crime, to discuss programs available through the court, and to enhance the lines of communication.

“Chief Roberts has made a commitment to enforce quality of life crimes through neighborhood policing,” Judge Cofield said. “I have made a commitment that if they make an arrest, no case is too small to receive the full consideration of this court as long as the arrest is legitimate and probable cause can be found.”

“I have also invited the CSOs to suggest potential community service projects for our defendants in the neighborhoods they patrol,” Judge Cofield continued. “Combined with the input we receive from the community, I am hoping this will lead to more dynamic and beneficial community service opportunities.”

The Community Court is also pleased to mention that Chief Fallon of the State Capitol Police and Sergeant Lynwood Pollard of the Amtrak Police Department represented their departments at the meeting.

“I would like to thank Assistant Chief Jose Lopez and Deputy Chief Neil Dryfe for their hard work in arranging the CSOs’ visit to community court,” Judge Cofield added



(Pictured above) Judge Cofield with the Hartford Police Community Service Officers

COMMUNITY COURT STATISTICS

WINTER 2006 - 7

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Total New Cases	571	620	595
Community Service Hours	2214	3168	2418
Social Services Referrals	134	140	174
Referrals to Mediation	32	87	48
Rate of Compliance	90%	91%	90%
Suburban Caseload	15%	20%	15%

CASELOAD NOTES

The start of 2007 has seen a significant increase in the number of cases that come before the Community Court in Hartford, compared with the same months in prior years. In January 2007, the Community Court had 620 new cases, compared to an average of 498 cases for January in the eight prior years of the Court's existence. February 2007 saw the Community Court handle 595 new cases, compared to an average of 507 new cases in prior Februarys. January and February 2007 were also busier compared to the same months in 2006 when the Community Court handled 532 and 434 new cases in each respective month. That's 249 more cases in 2007!

Much of this increase can be attributed to new quality of life crime enforcement initiatives being piloted by Chief Roberts of the Hartford Police Department. The suburban communities in the Community Court's jurisdiction are also keeping pace accounting for approximately 15% of the court's caseload.

During this time, the Community Court has seen an array of cases from across the entire spectrum of its jurisdiction. However, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of loitering, public drinking, criminal trespass, and disorderly conduct cases.

The HPD Vice and Narcotics Team also conducted an operation targeting underage drinkers that resulted in over 30 cases related to underage drinking being sent to the Community Court in early March. The defendants wishing to handle their underage drinking cases in the Community Court are required to participate in Judge Cofield's underage drinking curriculum, which involves reading a gender-specific book on alcoholism, writing an essay on the book, submitting to drug testing, participating in a Mothers Against Drunk Driving Victim Impact Panel and then performing community service through the court.

FAREWELL TO RAMON ROJANO

The Community Court in Hartford would like to wish a fond farewell to Ramon Rojano, Director of the City of Hartford's Department of Health and Human Services, who is leaving Hartford to pursue an opportunity in North Carolina.

"We are very thankful to Ramon Rojano for his commitment to work with the Community Court in Hartford and wish him continued success in his new opportunity," Judge Cofield said. "He will be missed."

Mr. Rojano was one of the original architects of the Community Court's Social Services Team. Along with the Judicial Branch, Judge Noroko, and others, he realized that the Community Court would be an ideal forum in which to connect with people in need of services, many of whom would not connect with those services under normal circumstances. Working in 1997 and 1998 with the Judicial Branch and the Community Court's development team, Mr. Rojano helped make the vision of having local social services staff on-site at the Community Court a reality. Over the ensuing years, he has continued to provide staff to the Court and open doors for social services opportunities that benefited the Courts defendants.

"Ramon Rojano's drive to provide social services opportunities in Hartford for those in need has been boundless," Chris Pleasanton said. "His commitment to providing on-site social services staff from his department has led to nearly 2,000 social services referrals being made each year; referrals that likely would not have been made without his staff on-site."



(Pictured at right) Dr. Rojano with his on-site social services staff, Yanira Rodriguez, Lorraine Sullivan, Denice Bermudez

DR. ROJANO,
THANK YOU
AND BEST WISHES
from your friends
at the Community Court in Hartford

JUDGE COFIELD IN THE COMMUNITY

As 2007 begins Judge Cofield continues to maintain a very busy schedule. In addition to presiding over a full caseload at the Community Court in Hartford, she has also attended numerous school, community, and professional meetings to talk about the Community Court and other social issues.

Judge Cofield was honored to be the guest speaker at Bloomfield High School's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebrations, speaking to the students about the importance of Dr. King and how his legacy lives on. She was also instrumental in coordinating King Day ceremonies in Glastonbury.

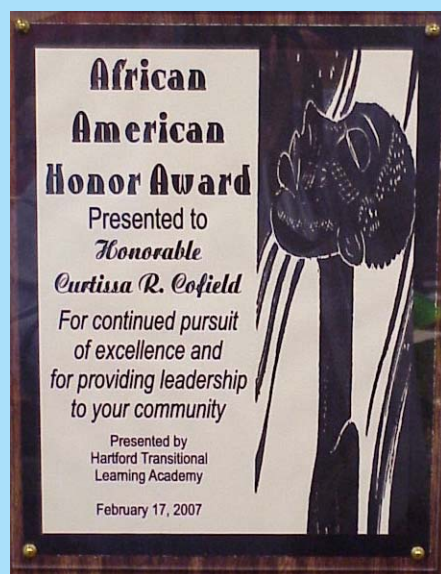
Judge Cofield was also a special panelist at a South Windsor "Conversations on Race" community meeting.



In Hartford, Judge Cofield was a featured speaker at the Hartford Transitional Learning Academy's Black History Month assembly on February 16. Judge Cofield spoke along with Principal Dwight Fleming and Sam Saylor, President of the PTO. Judge Cofield, who is the first African American female judge appointed in Connecticut, was given a special certificate of recognition for her achievements.

On February 27, Judge Cofield spoke at a dinner event held by the New Haven County Bar Association with discussions focusing on restorative justice. Judge Cofield spoke to this audience, comprised primarily of attorneys, about the Community Court in Hartford. She focused on the role restorative justice plays in the Court's efforts to restore the community by having defendants perform community service to "pay back" for their quality of life crimes while getting a chance to restore themselves through the many social services opportunities available through the court.

During the first week of March saw Judge Cofield attend the University of Maryland Law School's Community Justice Symposium where she was a featured panelist in the community court forum.



(Top left) Judge Cofield speaks at HTLA's Black History Month assembly and (below) the African American Honor Award presented to Judge Cofield at HTLA.

CHS WORKING ON-SITE AT THE COMMUNITY COURT

The Community Court in Hartford is pleased to announce that counselor George Dillon from Community Health Services, Inc. (CHS) will be working on-site at the Community Court each Wednesday morning with the intention of providing a direct connection between community court defendants and the services available through CHS. It is hoped that Mr. Dillon's direct involvement will lead to greater compliance and more successful outcomes for defendants.

"We have worked with CHS for many years to refer defendants to the wide array of programs available through its organization," Court Coordinator Chris Pleasanton said. "CHS has done an outstanding job helping many of our defendants get their lives back on track and has always gone the extra mile to help those in need."

CHS is a local non-profit organization that provides comprehensive medical, dental, podiatry, pediatric, behavior health, and family services to Hartford residents who are in need. Formed in 1970, CHS serves over 14,000 people and has 55,000 visits annually. Most services are free or at minimal cost to clients.



George Dillon, Community Health Services AMIR Counselor

CHS's African Men In Recovery (AMIR) peer support group, which combines clinical assistance with peer-to-peer support and also recognizes the cultural factors that often influence a person's life and recovery, has benefited many Community Court clients in the past. The AMIR program has been so successful CHS has just implemented a Women's program incorporating many of the same concepts as the AMIR program, but is more focused on gender-specific rather than cultural factors.

"Meagan O'Hanlon (Director of CHS's Behavioral Health Department) and I have talked for ages trying to find an opportunity for our organizations to work together to help people in need," Chris Pleasanton said. "We are very grateful to Meagan and to CHS for their willingness to work with our defendants."

"This collaboration has already born the fruit of success," Judge Cofield added. "The first client we referred directly to CHS through George has been complying successfully for nearly a month now and remarked that he was startled the both the Court and CHS cared enough about him to work together to help him. I am very pleased and have great hopes for our future success."

For more information on CHS, please visit their center located at 500 Albany Avenue in Hartford or read its profile on the web at: <http://www.ctpca.org/HCs/chshartford.aspx>

AN INSIDE LOOK AT MEDIATION

*by Kendy Rossi, Mediator and Senior Court Liaison,
Hartford Area Mediation Program*

Why Should I Mediate?

It's a question that the Community Court's mediators hear over forty times a month. And the truth is, not all cases sent to the Hartford Area Mediation Program are right for mediation. But in cases that fit the bill, the process can create an empowering alternative to the traditional judicial process.

Cases referred to HAMP for mediation are those in which some type of interpersonal dispute has occurred, and one or both parties have pending criminal charges such as disorderly conduct, breach of peace, threatening, harassment, or criminal mischief (as well as assault 3 cases from Lafayette Street court). Some conflicts referred to us are isolated one-time affairs: an after-midnight bar fight, or a road rage case, in which the defendants do not know each other, and may never see one another again.



(Above)Kendi Rossi, HAMP

In other cases, the conflict has been brewing for months or even years. In these situations, the presenting incident (or reason for arrest) can be fairly simple, but discussion with the parties quickly reveals layers of built-up resentment and misunderstanding.

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**For more information about mediation
and mediation training,
contact HAMP
at
860-280-1184**

When HAMP staff perform intake and assessment, there are a variety of factors that we look for to determine if it's a case that might benefit from mediation.

- § ***Is there a need for or likelihood of contact in the future?*** Neighbors, school peers, family members (or shared co-parents), co-workers, church members, or any other individuals that will inevitably see one another in the future are generally strong candidates for mediation. Although it can be most difficult to face someone within personal or professional circles, it is also most important – otherwise, there is a high chance of recurrence or escalation. On the other hand, if parties are not likely to see one another again, the need for and motivation to mediate is limited, and HAMP will typically offer a different type of service (such as phone conciliation, or the monitoring of mutual no contact).
- § ***Are there third parties involved?*** Whenever there are additional or “secondary” parties to a conflict within a small, defined community, the chance for misinformation or misunderstanding increases (remember the old whispering game of “telephone” where the message mutates along the way?). Mediation is an effective forum for clearing up what each other *really* said, *really* did or *really* meant – as opposed to what other people have said or done.
- § ***Has there been more than one incident of conflict between the parties?*** Often we interview defendants who say that they have no issue with the other person, that they have no idea what is fueling the tension, that there is simply nothing wrong. But if more than one incident has occurred, we beg to differ: *something* is going on. And a face-to-face meeting is the best way to find out.
- § ***Are the defendants (or defendant/complainant) capable of participating in the process?*** Individuals with certain life challenges such as substance abuse, pervasive anger issues, mental health problems, etc. may not be able to participate in a mediation process. Sometimes, the dispute itself has become so toxic or abusive, the parties can't or won't sit in a room together. And by policy, HAMP doesn't mediate cases that involve actual use of weapons, confirmed bullying or domestic violence. These situations are more appropriately dealt with in other court support programs or through the traditional court process.
- § ***How much energy is left in the conflict? Do one or more of the individuals need a chance to ask questions, express themselves, or make a request in order to put the incident to rest?*** A natural and expected part of the intake process is the opportunity for defendants and/or complainants to vent. In fact, it may be one of the only chances people have to fully express their side of things. However, if people *continue* to vent – to fixate, stress, defend, question or obsess – they may need an opportunity to meet with the other(s) involved before they will be able to put the incident behind them and move on.

When the answer is “yes” to two or more of the above questions, mediation is in order.

Continued on next page

But before we proceed, we still have to get the parties to agree – because mediation is a *voluntary* process, and both sides have to sign on voluntarily. This is no small task, especially if there is a complainant in the mix. “After all,” we hear, “it’s the defendant that’s the problem, and the arrest proves it.” Complainants do not readily see why they should agree to mediate. Defendants, on the other hand, have the incentive of possible nolle or dismissal of charges, and this may be enough to overcome the discomfort of meeting with the person who instigated their arrest. But while it may be reason enough for a defendant to come to the table, it’s often not enough to keep them there when the going gets rough.

So why else would two (or more) parties that are in conflict agree to sit down in the same room and try to work things out together? We truly believe that a meeting is in everyone’s best interest, and we try to help them see why, based on reasons implied above. For instance:

- § If people are going to have ongoing contact, it’s best to get the issues on the table (with the help of trained neutrals) so that the disruptions and stress of the conflict can be addressed and resolved once and for all;
- § It gives people a chance to get questions answered, air their grievances, and clear up any misinformation;
- § Even if the parties don’t reach agreement on what happened in the past, they can make mutually acceptable decisions about what will happen in the future.

This last point suggests a way in which mediation is fundamentally different than what people expect when they walk into a courthouse – and why it can be an effective and empowering alternative to the judicial system. In the mediation process, we don’t try to prove the facts of a situation, and we don’t try to determine who is right and who is wrong. We *do* make sure that everyone has a chance to tell his/her side of the story, and we *do* give everyone the chance to be heard. Sometimes, this is enough in and of itself: when people have a chance to speak and listen in a safe, structured environment, often confusion is cleared up, understanding is created, and some level of agreement is reached about what actually occurred.

But not always. There are situations in which the individuals never reach agreement about past history, or about the specific incident leading to their arrest. And yet mediation can still provide a satisfactory outcome for everyone involved, because *even if the parties never agree on what happened in the past, they can still decide what will happen from this moment forward*. In these situations, the process requires a courageous leap of faith: faith that the future can, in fact, be different from the past. But for those who are willing to take this leap, mediation allows them the opportunity to maintain control of their situation and their decisions. And that may be the best reason of all to give it a try.

For more information about mediation and mediation training, contact HAMP at 860-280-1184

FARMINGTON SOCIAL SERVICES NOW ON-SITE AT THE COMMUNITY COURT

The availability of on-site social service opportunities at the Community Court in Hartford increased this past January when Farmington Social Services began sending intake social worker Laurie Mucciacciaro to work at the Court on Wednesday mornings (the Community Court handles most suburban cases on Wednesdays in addition to cases generated from Hartford). Laurie will assess persons arrested in Farmington for social services needs and make appropriate referrals. Previously, the Community Court had to send these individuals to Farmington to be assessed, which lessened the impact an immediate on-site referral has on compliance and the overall success of the defendant's court experience.



“We have developed a strong and productive relationship with Farmington over the past few months,” Judge Cofield said. “The Farmington Police Department has been very supportive of the Community Court and now, by working with the Social Services staff, we are able to provide improved and continuous response to Farmington cases.”

(At Left) Laurie Mucciacciaro, Farmington Social Services

NCCC STUDENTS VISIT COURT



(Above) NCCC Criminal Justice Professor Barry D'Onofrio

The Community Court in Hartford was pleased to host its seventh annual visit by students in the Criminal Justice Program at the Northwestern Connecticut Community-Technical College (NCCC) on March 13. Led by NCCC Criminal Justice Program Manager/ Assistant Professor Barry D'Onofrio, the students met with Court Coordinator Chris Pleasanton to learn about the Community Court's processes and programs, observed a court session, and then had a question and answer session with Judge Cofield.

“We were very pleased to host the NCCC students,” Chris Pleasanton said. “NCCC has an outstanding criminal justice program which is illustrated by the high quality of students who have come through their program.”

CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION VISITS HARTFORD

On February 6th, the Community Court in Hartford was pleased to host a visit by representatives from New York's Center for Court Innovation Upstate Office in Syracuse. Director Aaron Arnold and Associate Director Norma Feldman met with Judge Cofield, Court Coordinator Chris Pleasanton, and many others from the Hartford team. They also observed the Community Court in session and took a tour of the court's facilities.

Syracuse, New York was one of the first communities to develop a community court, opening its facility in 2001. The Syracuse Community Court is in session each Thursday and takes cases from the entire city of Syracuse, however, Mr. Arnold and Ms. Feldman are currently working to expand both the court's hours of operation and area of jurisdiction.

"Syracuse and Hartford are very similar in the size of population and the issues affecting each community," Chris Pleasanton said. "It was an honor for us to have the folks from the Center for Court Innovation visit with us and talk shop. I hope they learned as much from us as we did from their visit."

(Pictured at right) Aaron Arnold, Judge Cofield, Norma Feldman, Chris Pleasanton



COMMUNITY COURT CONTACT INFO

Please feel free to email the court at:

Hartford.Commcourt@jud.ct.gov

and visit the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch website at:

www.jud.ct.gov

Winter 2007 COMMUNITY SERVICE

**WORK
SITES**

DECEMBER

December 1 FOODSHARE, Colt Park
 December 4 Wadsworth St., Russ St., Grand St.
 December 5 Orange Street Park, Rowe Ave.
 December 6 Kenneth St., White St., Montford St., Eastview St.
 December 7 FOODSHARE, Ebony Horse Ranch, Evergreen St., Vine St., Capen St., Barbour St., West Blvd.
 December 8 FOODSHARE, Hudson Park, Barnard Park
 December 11 Capitol Ave., Affleck St., Ward St., Putnam St., Hazel St., Orange St.
 December 12 Ebony Horse Ranch, Vine St.
 December 13 Ebony Horse Ranch, Vine St.
 December 14 Enfield St., Mansfield St., South St., Ebony Horse Ranch
 December 15 FOODSHARE
 December 18 FOODSHARE, Jennings Rd., Weston St.
 December 19 FOODSHARE, Nelton Court
 December 20 FOODSHARE, Madison Ave., Zion St., Bedford St.
 December 21 FOODSHARE, Sherbrooke Ave., Benton St.
 December 22 FOODSHARE
 December 26 Babcock St., Affleck St, Park St., Allen Pl., Capitol Ave. & Laurel St. underpasses
 December 27 Bushnell Park, Westbourne Pkwy.
 December 28 Ebony Horse Ranch, Vine St.
 December 29 FOODSHARE, Albany Ave, Center St.



JANUARY

January 2 FOODSHARE, Nelton Court
 January 3 FOODSHARE, Lawrence St., Russ St., Melrose St, Grand St.
 January 4 FOODSHARE, Rosemont St., Addison St., Ashford St., Montville St.
 January 5 FOODSHARE
 January 8 FOODSHARE, Ebony Horse Ranch, Vine St., Affleck St., Ward St.
 January 9 FOODSHARE, Enfield St., Garden St., Mansfield St., Montville St., Benton St., Wethersfield Ave., Maple Ave.
 January 10 Rowe Ave., Chadwick St., Capitol Ave.
 January 11 South Marshall St., Laurel St., Hawthorne St.
 January 12 FOODSHARE, Park Terr., Pope Park
 January 16 FOODSHARE, Westland St., Garden St., Barker St, Elliot St. Bond St.
 January 17 FOODSHARE, Jefferson St. Washington St.
 January 18 Ebony Horse Ranch, Vine St., Annawan St., Congress St.
 January 19 FOODSHARE, Canturbury St. Colebrook Ave.
 January 22 Blue Hills Ave., Capen St., Mansfield St., Acton St., Nelson St.
 January 23 FOODSHARE, Jefferson St., Broad St., Stonington St.
 January 24 Pliney St., Mather St.
 January 25 FOODSHARE, Ebony Horse Ranch, Vine St., Broad St., Ledyard St., Madison St.
 January 26 FOODSHARE, Morningside Dr., Boothbay St., Burnham St., Harold St
 January 29 Ledyard St., Wawarme Ave., Enfield St., Magnolia St., Garden St.
 January 30 Elliot St., Sherbrooke Ave., Westland St.
 January 31 FOODSHARE, Sanford St., Wawarme Ave., Benton St.

FEBRUARY

February 1 FOODSHARE, Madison St., Lincoln St., Affleck St.
 February 2 FOODSHARE
 February 5 FOODSHARE, Ebony Horse Ranch, Ashford St., Rosemont St.
 February 6 FOODSHARE, Ebony Horse Ranch, Brook St., Battles St., Benton St.
 February 7 FOODSHARE, Ebony Horse Ranch, Nelton Court, Nelson St.
 February 8 FOODSHARE, Ebony Horse Ranch, Mahl Ave.
 February 9 FOODSHARE, Sigourney St., Garden St.
 February 12 FOODSHARE, Ebony Horse Ranch, Blue Hills Ave., Bartholomew Ave.
 February 13 FOODSHARE, Ebony Horse Ranch, Enfield St., Willington St., Mahl Ave., Bartholomew Ave., Hillside Ave.
 February 15 FOODSHARE, Ebony Horse Ranch, Washington St., Wadsworth St.
 February 16 FOODSHARE
 February 20 FOODSHARE, Terry St., Scarborough St., Propspect Ave., Jefferson St., Washington St., Westbourne Pkwy.
 February 21 Brook St., Green St., Bond St.
 February 22 Martin St., Westland St., Garden St.
 February 23 FOODSHARE
 February 26 FOODSHARE, Ebony Horse Ranch
 February 27 FOODSHARE, Brook St., Garden St., Mather St., Pliney St.
 February 28 FOODSHARE, Mahl Ave.



**COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT HOTLINE
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PLEASE CALL WITH YOUR PROJECT**

STATE OF CONNECTICUT JUDICIAL BRANCH

COMMUNITY COURT SESSION IN HARTFORD

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SPRING 2007 NEWSLETTER

IN THIS EDITION...

HPD & Center for Court Innovation visits, Mediation,
Community Health Services, Dr. Rojano, stats & more

State of Connecticut Superior Court
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80 Washington Street
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