



Innovations in Criminal Justice Summit
September 28-30, 2011
Chicago, IL

The Bronx Defenders (Center for Holistic Defense)

Program Start Date: Office established in 1997, Center for Holistic Defense started in 2010.

Website: <http://www.bronxdefenders.org/>
<http://www.bronxdefenders.org/our-work/holistic-defense>

Evaluation/Research: No evaluation done at this time, program does have promising statistics.

Information: The Bronx Defenders is an innovative holistic public defender office located in the heart of the South Bronx in New York City. As holistic defenders we are committed to providing our clients with seamless access to services to meet those needs. Our interdisciplinary teams of criminal, civil, and family defense lawyers, social workers, parent advocates, investigators, and community organizers work with clients and their families to identify and overcome the challenges they face. Whether addressing the root causes of their involvement in the criminal justice system such as addiction, mental illness, and joblessness or the collateral consequences of their criminal case, our goal is not just to succeed in court but to make a long-term difference in our clients' lives.

Holistic defense combines aggressive legal advocacy with a broader recognition that for most poor people arrested and charged with a crime, the criminal case is not the only issue with which they struggle. The key insight of holistic defense is that to be truly effective advocates for our clients, we as defenders must broaden the scope of our work to include both the collateral consequences of criminal justice involvement as well as the underlying issues, both legal and non-legal, that have played a part in driving our clients into the criminal justice system in the first place. Realizing this vision means working to create public defender offices that not only have in-house civil advocates but also social workers and others who all work as equal members of the defense team.

Practicing holistic defense leads to better legal outcomes for our clients. Simply put, case dispositions are better where defense lawyers who have a more comprehensive understanding of their clients. Similarly, clients who are in the process of addressing some of their underlying life issues generally fare better either when plea-bargaining or at trial. Case outcomes are also better (and defense counsel more likely to render effective assistance of counsel) when clients are fully informed of the collateral consequences of their criminal case and therefore are in a better position to make a truly informed choice about how to proceed. Clients of holistic defenders tend to come away from their experience with increased confidence in their representation in the criminal justice system. Finally, by stabilizing lives the practice of holistic defense reduces the likelihood of future criminal justice contact.