



South of Market and Tenderloin HELP

40 pages of neighborhood resources

THIS issue of Central City Extra comes with a bonus insert — a guide, produced by the paper's staff, to resources in our South of Market and Tenderloin neighborhoods. HELP was inspired and funded by the Koshland Program of The San Francisco Foundation.

The guide includes address, phone, hours, Websites and concise annotations for 184 service providers, organized by type of service — Arts, Behavioral Health, Children and Youth, and more — 11 categories in all.

Almost all are private, nonhousing organizations, though we've included a handful of public programs that offer unique or essential services.

HELP also includes 10 feature stories, in-depth coverage of selected organizations and what they offer the neighborhood. The features focus on the back-story — the clients who use the services and the professionals who provide them.

HELP also is online at studycenter.org. ■

Voters say no, mayor says open Justice Center

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supposed to give police an alternative by addressing the underlying causes of crime. If it does, it could change the Tenderloin dramatically.

The Justice Center, which opens for business March 15, will process all misdemeanors and nonviolent felonies committed in the greater Tenderloin, western SoMa and Union Square neighborhoods, an area bounded by Gough, Bush, Kearny, Third and Harrison streets. Except for vehicle-related offenses, this area accounts for a quarter to a third of San Francisco's crime. Roughly 80% of the crimes committed here would be eligible to be addressed at the center, according to a 2008 controller's report, which notes that 55% are drug- and property-related; the rest involve disorderly conduct and miscellaneous offenses. The report also cites a citywide study of arrests showing that, of cases that are charged, arrests in the CJC jurisdiction comprise 28% of all violations.

The Justice Center's overarching mission is to shut the revolving door on repeat offenders by hooking them up with substance abuse treatment, mental health and medical care, shelter, education and job training. The Tenderloin has long been ground zero for such resources, but coordination among those who need the services, the providers and public agencies that mandate them was lacking, says Tomiquia Moss, who oversees logistics and operations for the Justice Center. With its opening, she says, "We have the power of the court to influence people positively."

In other words, opt for help or go to the Hall of Justice.

The center at 555 and 575 Polk St. will be a one-stop shop, with courtrooms on the ground floor and service staff above, accessed by separate entrances. Police will steer eligible offenders — those popped for drug sales or possession or crimes such as theft, prostitution or disorderly conduct — directly to the facility.

San Franciscans who are arrested will be eligible for CJC services.

Nonresidents won't be eligible for services, but will be tried by the court.

Those who opt out will get their traditional day in court at the Hall of Justice.

Statistics aren't kept on the number of drug

offenders from other cities. An informal survey conducted by members of the center's advisory board concluded that roughly 25% are outsiders, and Jimenez says they're a big influence in the Tenderloin. But CJC stakeholders believe there are enough San Franciscans, including plenty who live within the new court's jurisdiction, to keep it hopping. The CJC is expected to handle up to 180 cases a month, more when it gets into full swing.

Working with a district attorney and public defender on site, San Francisco Superior Court Commissioner Ron Albers will tailor intensive treatment and supervision plans for offenders who agree to participate.

CJC participants will have immediate access to city services, as well as referrals to health, support and education services offered by Glide Memorial United Methodist Church and St. Anthony Foundation. They'll be hooked up by five Department of Public Health staffers and two from the Human Services Agency who will be transferred to the Justice Center. Moss says the move is not expected to affect the workload in either department. "The reality is that a quarter to a half of the work that they're (currently) handling is in the CJC region," she says. "It's not like they'll be getting new work."

The Health Department backs Moss up. Despite two years of planning, and with less than a month to go before the doors open, DPH is still trying to figure out how to realign staff, says Craig Murdock, a point man with the department's Community Behavioral Health Services. But, he adds, "We expect a significant number of (CJC) defendants already have a history with the Department of Public Health. Some may need to be reconnected with DPH services, but we suspect a high percentage of them are people we already know."

Participants will return to court frequently, ranging from daily to monthly, undergo regular and random drug testing and participate in programs designed to address their underlying problems, including trauma recovery, anger management, employment assistance, literacy support and other types of counseling.

Those who relapse, neglect to appear in court or fail to participate in treatment will be required to go to court more often, write essays, attend extra 12-step meetings and perform community service. Albers also has the option of tossing recalcitrants back to the traditional court system.

Offenders who go with the program will be rewarded with gift certificates, less frequent court appearances and more flexible treatment programming. Those who are drug-free for six months will graduate from the program. Along with a new way of living, they'll have another big carrot: The crimes that landed them at the CJC in the first place will never appear on their records.

In addition to \$500,000 in start-up costs, the Justice Center will cost from \$1.7 million to \$2.8 million a year to operate, according to a 2008 controller's report.

Mayor Newsom has been resolute in backing the Justice Center. He convinced the Board of



PHOTOS BY HEIDI SWILLINGER

Tomiquia Moss oversees logistics and operations for the Justice Center. "We have the power of the court to influence people positively."

Supervisors to spend \$2.6 million — including roughly \$1 million in federal grants — for start-up costs and operations. To seal the deal, Newsom set it before the voters in November as Measure L. It was a gamble that failed, defeated by 57% of the voters. The election results, coupled with a collapsing economy, prompted the supervisors to propose defunding the center in January, a move Newsom vetoed.

At this point, the CJC is going full speed ahead, although how far it will get is up for debate. How will it be funded in the future when the city is already drowning in red ink? Will it duplicate existing city services, or worse, overtax services in departments already facing cuts? Who will police CJC participants who don't make the grade? What will ensure that those who graduate stay on track?

Jimenez has been on the force since 1970 and Tenderloin captain since 2006. He reflects on his freshly minted 2008 crime stats report, noting with frustration that many of those arrested last year were repeat offenders. "I think (the CJC) will give a motivation and an opportunity to many (offenders) to address the cause for their behavior. We do not presently do that effectively in the system we have now."

Albers' office at the Hall of Justice overlooks I-80, which funnels a never-ending flow of traffic onto the Bay Bridge. It's an in-your-face metaphor for the endless stream of drug offenders he's seen cycle out and back in to the court system over the years.

Albers got an opportunity to staunch the flow five years ago, when he began presiding over the city's drug court. He now has binders full of statistics showing that his tactics reduce recidivism, save money and, most importantly to him, change lives. He calls the work "my passion."

He'll bring all his experience to bear when he moves to his new quarters on Polk Street, and he's clear on how he'll measure its success: In addition to reducing the rate of repeat offenses, he expects to see a big change in the dismal perception of public safety in the area.

Opponents may be right: The Community Justice Center may turn out to be Newsom's Folly.

On the other hand, by this time next year, Capt. Jimenez's Tenderloin crime stats report may really be something to crow about. ■



Superior Court Commissioner Ron Albers, presiding judge of Community Justice Center, achieved similar goals as drug court judge.