

Community Court as a way to address homelessness

City of Boulder

04/23/2025



Agenda

"
FROM THE COMFORT OF OUR OWN
HOMES IT'S HARD TO
UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITIES
OF SOMETHING LIKE POVERTY
AND HOMELESSNESS.

- TERENCE LESTER

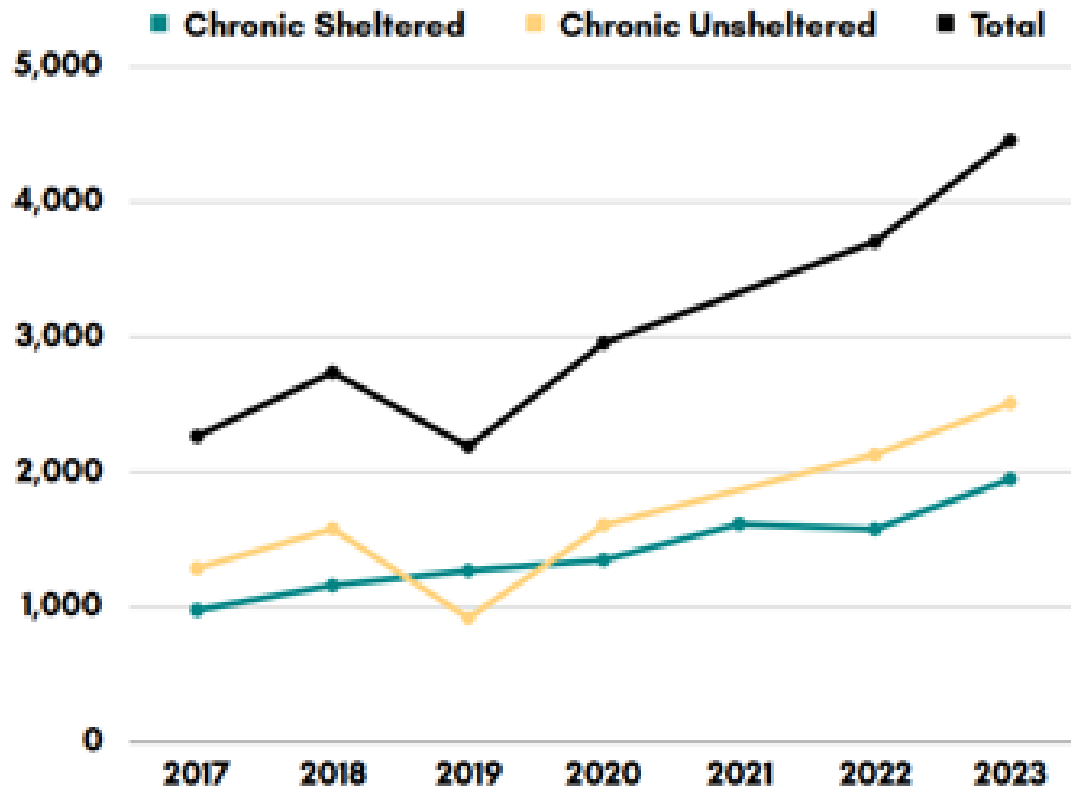
- Defining the Problem
- The Community Court Approach
- Effectiveness



The Problem

Chronic and Unsheltered homelessness and the Criminal Justice System

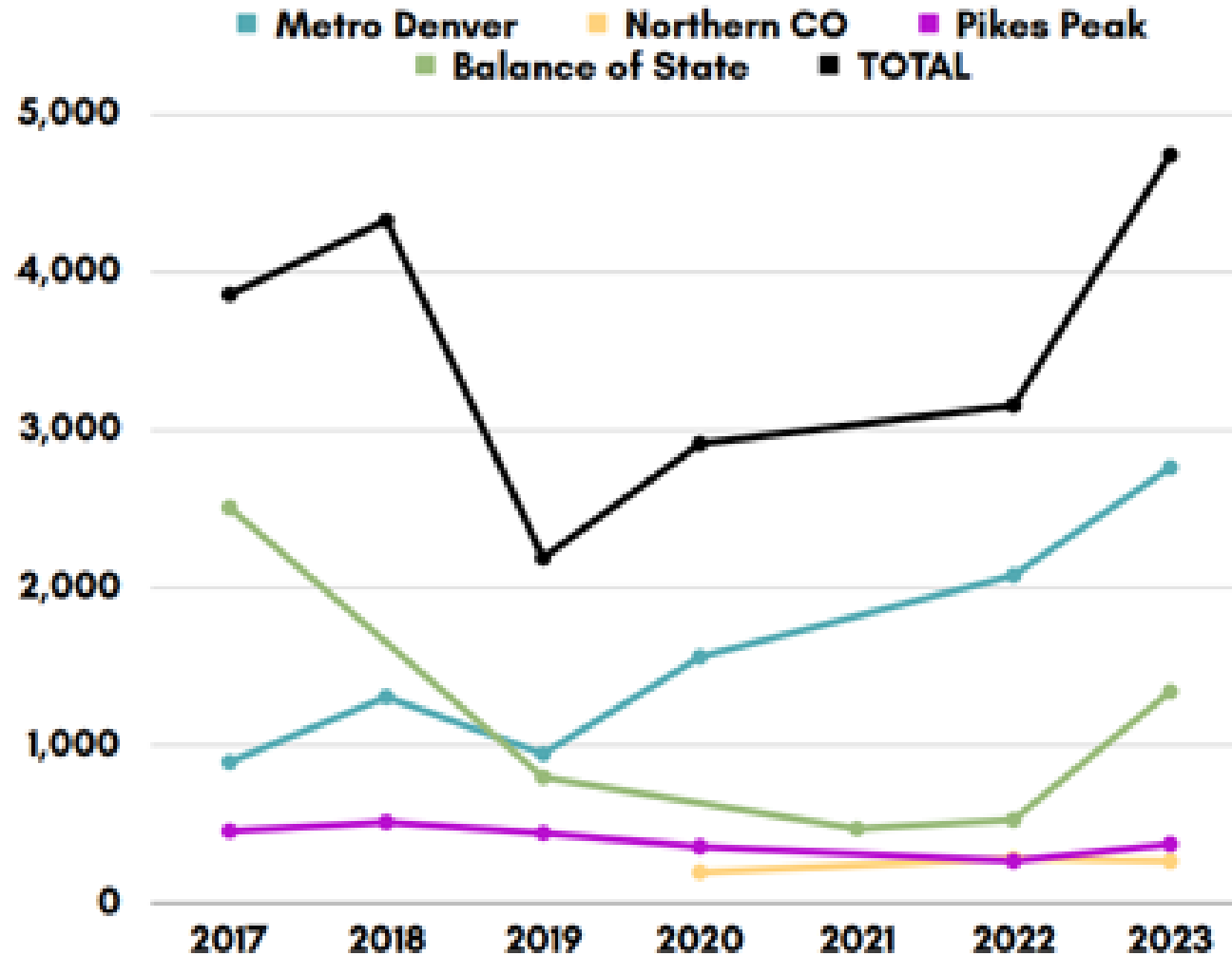
Chronic Homelessness



- Chronic homelessness has risen steadily over the last few years.
- Roughly 31% of the unhoused population is experiencing chronic homelessness.
- Most people (56%) experiencing chronic homelessness were unsheltered.

UNSHELTERED COUNT

HUD considers individuals and families sleeping in a place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (e.g., abandoned buildings, train stations, or camping grounds) as “unsheltered.”



- 33% of people experiencing homelessness were unsheltered.
- Unsheltered homelessness increased by 50% in the last year.
- The Balance of State region conducts full unsheltered and sheltered counts in odd years only. In even years, they only do the sheltered count.

** Only the Balance of State region held an unsheltered count in 2021*

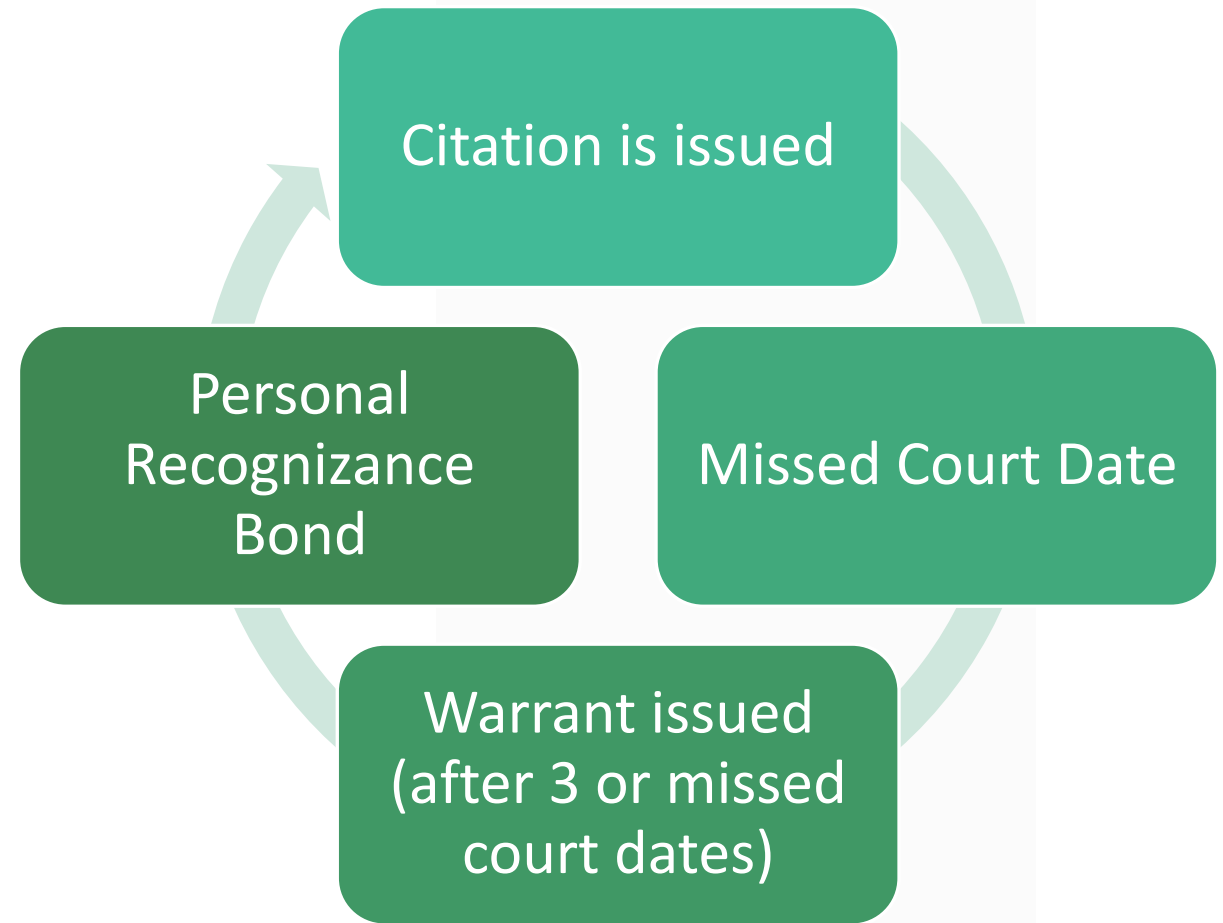
Municipal Citations



The unhoused have a high number of municipal citations for low level offenses

Traditional criminal justice approaches are ineffective at addressing the behavior and reducing recidivism

Typical cycle





The Community Court Approach

Boulder Municipal Court's Community Court Program
Addresses the root causes of crime one person at a time.



Living with
family and
friends

Engaged with
services



Living in car

Engaged with
services



Living on
streets

Disengaged
with services



Living in
shelter

Engaged with
services

Who is seen at Community Court

The unsheltered/unhoused who are living on the streets and have been reluctant to engage in services

Boulder's Community Court Program

- Grant from Bureau Justice Assistance
- Engaged with other Community Courts across the country
- Collaboration between government and social service agencies

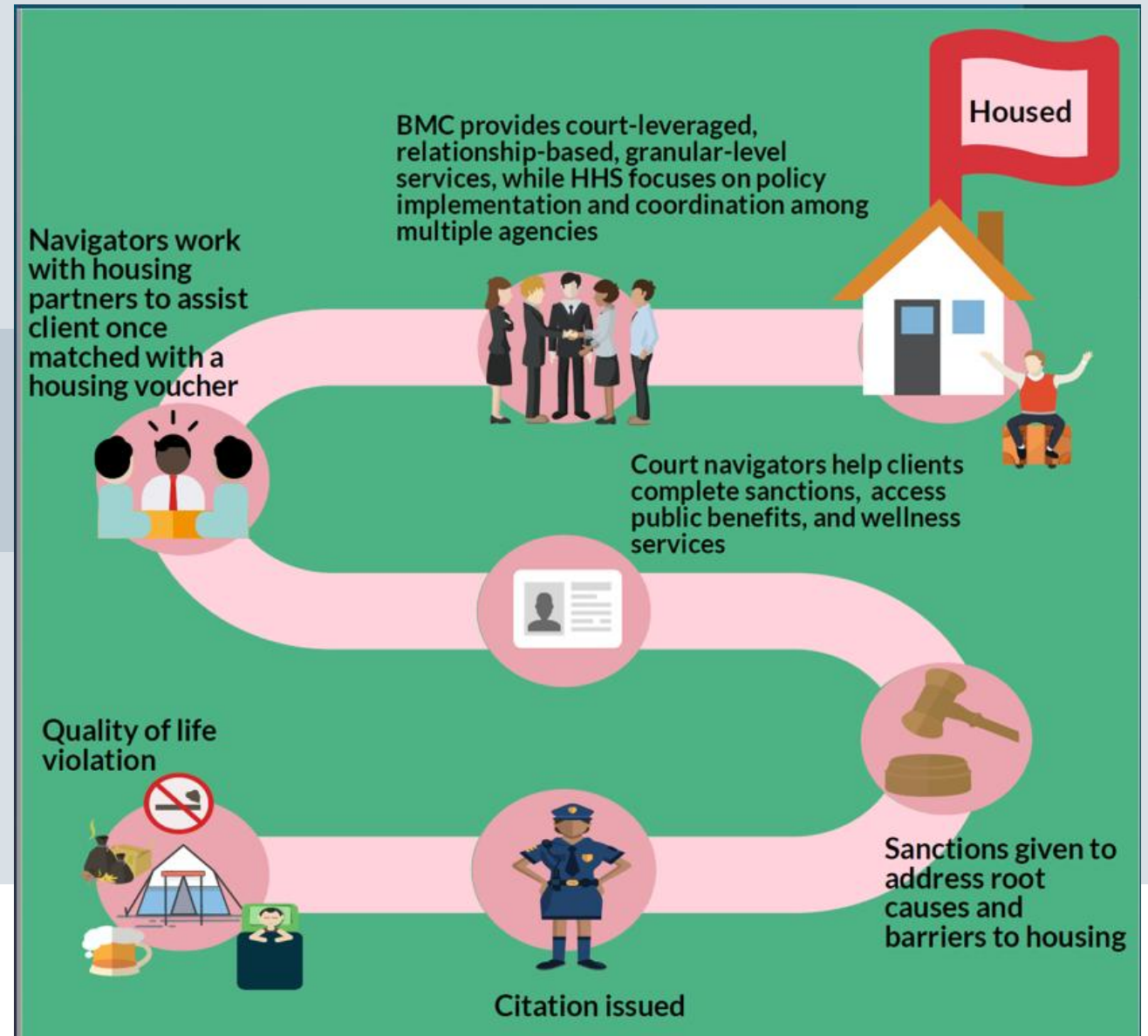


Setting the Stage

- Outdoor at our city municipal building
- Service Providers
- Coffee and Snacks
- Clothing
- On site mental health counselors
- Open to all
- Navigators
- Prosecutors
- Judge available via video conference
- HOT Team
- Outreach Teams
- Selter representative



How it Works



How the Legal Process Works

Meet with a prosecutor to discuss outstanding citations
(generally meet with a navigator too)

Video conference with the court to record the
sanctions/tasks, continue case to a date in the future

Complete the sanctions/tasks

Charges are dismissed and case is sealed

Eligible Offences



Camping

Tents and Propane Prohibited

Travel Restrictions to Designated Trails

Possessing/Consuming Alcohol in Public

Littering

Public Urination

Smoking Prohibited

Consuming Marijuana in public

How Sanctions are Determined

Sanctions are developed collaboratively between the Defendant, Navigator, and Prosecutor



Determine what would be the most useful next step in the process

Counseling
sessions

Coordinated entry

Obtaining legal
documents

Housing
assessments

Health
appointments

Applying for
government
benefits

Navigators Help Clients Complete Sanctions



Help apply for ID, SSC, birth certificates, sign up for Medicaid, SNAP, and other benefits. They can administer housing assessments and assist in the housing process.



Navigators attend appointments with clients and provide transportation. This includes County and District Court hearing.



For High Acuity clients that need additional resources, attend housing related appointments, provide regular check-ins for newly housed clients. When appropriate the Navigators will provide a warm hand-off to additional services.



Remain involved from first contact to after housed.



Coordinate with other provider agencies to provide wrap around services.

Community Court Principals

Restoring the Community

- Recognizing the impact on the community
- Combine accountability with help
- Open services to the community

Bridge the Gap Between Communities and Courts

- Make justice visible
- Make justice accessible
- Make justice proactive

Knitting together a fractured criminal justice system

- Link criminal justice agencies
- Use existing expertise in the community
- Encourage social service providers and criminal justice system to work together
- Explore crossing jurisdictional lines

Community Court Principals

Helping Offenders Deal with Problems that Cause Crime

- Put problems first
- Use court as a gateway to treatment and resources
- Remain involved beyond disposition of the immediate case

Providing Better Information

- Make as much information available as possible
- Make information available to everyone
- Use current information to enhance accountability

Design the “Courthouse”

- Make it a physical expression of the court’s goals
- Make it more than just a courtroom
- Put everything in one place



Is it Effective?

Boulder Municipal Court's Community Court Program

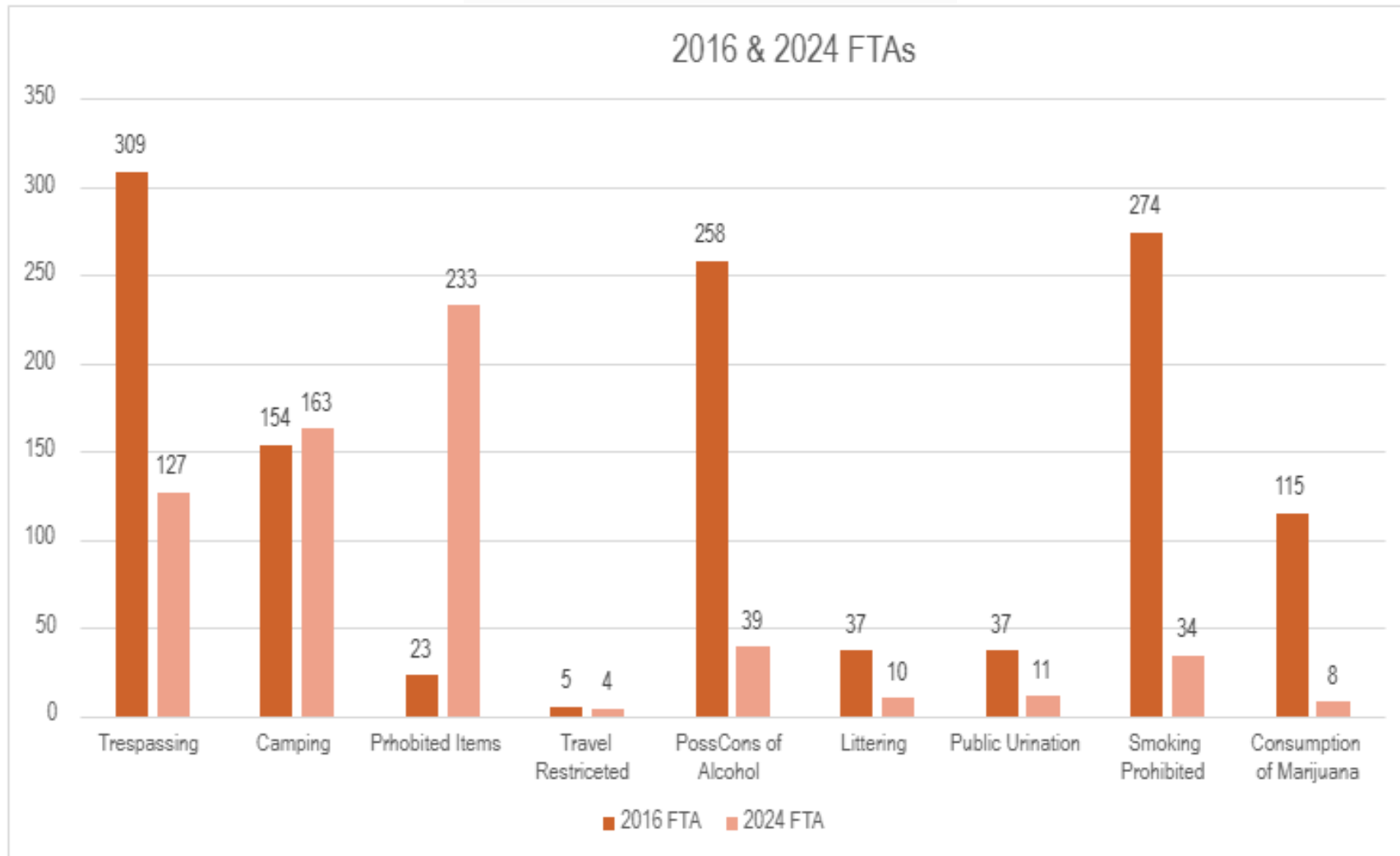


| Community Court | 2024 |
|---|------|
| Community Court Sessions | 44 |
| Number of cases addressed | 401 |
| Number of sanctions | 543 |
| Mental Health/Substance Use Appointments Attended | 73 |
| Outreach Activities | 105 |
| Housing Case Conference Meetings Attended | 40 |
| Bus Passes Given Out | 540 |
| Compliance Rate for Program | 98% |

A VETERAN, ROBERT, WHO SERVED FOR 12 YEARS HAS FINALLY BEEN MATCHED WITH A VOUCHER THROUGH THE VA. HE HAS BEEN HOMELESS FOR OVER 10 YEARS AND IS NOW WORKING WITH A THERAPIST, MEETING WITH HIS CASE MANAGER, AND APPLYING FOR HOUSING.



Overall Reduction in Failure To Appear Instances for Community Court Cases





A young woman, Sara, with serious disabilities who started getting tickets in early 2021. She was camping in the downtown corridor and accumulated 48 tickets in just under a two-year period. It took multiple agencies and many efforts but once she was housed with supportive resources, she did not receive any new charges either in municipal court or in state court. Reports from her case management are that she is like a different person now that she is housed. She was on death's doorstep while she was living outside and now, she is thriving. If we had relied on traditional criminal justice approaches, it is very likely she would not be alive today.



In 2023, 32 Community Court Participants Were Housed

465 Cases Pre-Housing

8 Cases Post-Housing

| # of people | # cases per person before housed | # total cases before housed | # total cases after housed |
|-------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 7 | 100-264 | 988 | 6 |
| 11 | 51-99 | 761 | 4 |
| 16 | 25-50 | 556 | 3 |
| 16 | 11-24 | 260 | 0 |
| 13 | 0-10 | 49 | 0 |
| 63 total | | 2614 total | 13 total |

Impact of Housing to Recidivism of Minor Offenses

* 2012 to 2022



There is a couple, Smoky and Angela, who have been homeless for over 15 years. They are leaders in their community, guiding people to engage in case management and holding people accountable to treat everyone with respect. A few months ago, they began working at a church and are saving money in hopes of getting a home.

How to Get Started

- [Community Courts Initiative | Publications | Bureau of Justice Assistance](#)
- [You searched for - Center for Justice Innovation](#)
- [Developing a Community Court, Part II: Practical Advice - Center for Justice Innovation](#)
- [2018 Community Courts and Public Safety Conference - Supplemental Materials - Center for Justice Innovation](#)

Thank you

QUESTIONS?

- Tatet@bouldercolorado.gov
- Kissickkellyd@bouldercolorado.gov