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Surrounded by public officials and organizers, Chief Judge Timothy C. Evans cuts the ribbon for a new community restorative justice court that opened at a Salvation Army center Englewood last week. The court, the third to launch in the city, is an alternative to typical prosecution and requires meetings between criminal defendants and their victims. — Rick Ruiz/Office of the Chief Judge

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Englewood restorative justice court opens

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Cook County Chief Circuit Judge Timothy C. Evans cut the ribbon Wednesday on a new Restorative Justice Community Court in Englewood, surrounded by judges, aldermen, lawmakers and community representatives.

The community court is designed to allow conflicts to be resolved through meetings between defendants, victims, family members and others in the community affected by a criminal act.

Victims are allowed to directly address defendants and say how they were hurt by their alleged actions.

The community court is located inside the Salvation Army Adele and Robert Stern Red Shield Center at 845 W. 69th Street on Chicago's South Side.

It's the third community court to be established since 2017. The first opened in North Lawndale on the West Side, and another opened recently in Avondale on the Northwest Side.

According to the circuit court's announcement, defendants must "repair the harm caused by their actions." This may include community service or other requirements. If defendants have issues with substance abuse, they also must go through a program to help that issue.

Cases eligible for the community court start with the victim of the crime agreeing to participate in the process. Additionally, the person charged must be between the ages of 18 and 26 and charged with a nonviolent felony or misdemeanor, have a nonviolent criminal history, live in one of the neighborhoods with a community court and accept responsibility for the harm caused.

Defendants who successfully complete the program have a chance at getting their charges dismissed as well as their arrest and court records expunged.

According to the court's announcement, the North Lawndale Restorative Justice Court has worked with 135 participants, and about 64 of them have graduated or await a graduation ceremony.

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