Florida Adult Felony Drug Courts Evaluation Results

PREPARED BY NPC RESEARCH
PORTLAND, OR

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What are drug courts?

- Designed to guide drug-addicted offenders into treatment
- Reduce drug dependence
- Increase quality of life
- Reduce crime
- Reduce taxpayer cost
- Increase public safety
Statewide evaluation

- NPC contracted with Office of Court Improvement in 2011
- Conducted statewide assessment of program practices, aligned with known best practices
  - 33 programs assessed
  - 29 practices assessed
- Five counties selected to represent state in further process, outcome/impact, and cost evaluation
  - Selection was based on use of best practices, diversity (geographic location, racial/ethnic composition of participants, size of area, type of program)
Summary of key results: Best practices

- Over half of practices were used by over $\frac{2}{3}$ of programs
- Prescription drugs most common drug of choice in 41% of programs
- All programs:
  - Treatment provider regularly attends drug court sessions
  - Treatment provider communicates with court via email
  - Require participants to pay court fees
- Few programs:
  - Law enforcement attends drug court team meetings (staffings)
Summary of key results: Common practices

- 21 practices common among programs nationally
  Examples:
  - Included prosecuting attorney, defense attorney, treatment provider, and judge on drug court team
  - Allowed participants with co-occurring disorders
  - Had written eligibility requirements

- Florida programs had high rates of implementing common practices
Summary of key results: Process evaluation

- Five sites received more in-depth evaluation, including site visit
- Site-specific reports detailing alignment with best practices, commendations, and recommendations

Examples of common recommendations
- Work to decrease the time from arrest to program entry
- Ensure training of all team members
- Work on achieving non-adversarial relationships between team members
- Decrease reliance on use of jail as a sanction
- Reach out to community partners
Summary of key results: Outcome evaluation

- Same five sites were part of site-level outcome evaluation
- Graduation rates
  - Ranged from 43-85%; average of 57% (above national average)
- Length of stay
  - Programs ranged in intended length from 12-15 months
  - Participants remained in programs average of 12 months, graduates 14.5 months (non-grads shorter LOS)
Summary of key results: Outcome evaluation

- Participant characteristics that predicted success
  - Older (4 of 5 sites)
  - Spending longer in the program (4 of 5 sites)
  - Fewer overall prior number of arrests (2 of 5 sites)
  - Fewer prior felonies (2 of 5 sites)
  - Fewer prior property offenses (2 of 5 sites)
  - Fewer prior drug-related arrests (2 sites)
  - Fewer prior person crimes (1 site)
  - Male (1 site)
Summary of key results: Outcome evaluation

- Reduced re-arrest rates from before to after program entry
  - Program participants generally had lower re-arrest rates and numbers of arrests in the period 24 months after program entry compared to the 24 months before program entry
  - From 18-24 months after program entry, average of 21% re-arrested
  - From program entry to 24 months after entry, participants on average had 1.7 new arrests

- Reduced drug arrests (24 months pre-post entry)
  - Program participants generally were re-arrested on drug charges less often after program entry than before
Summary of key results: Impact evaluation

- Participants from 5 sites combined, matched with comparison group of offenders who did not participate in drug court
- Key question: Does participation in drug court reduce the number of re-arrests for those individuals compared to traditional court processing?
Summary of key results: Impact evaluation

- **YES**
  - Figure A. The Recidivism Rate Is Significantly Lower for Drug Court Participants (total felonies)

![Bar chart showing recidivism rates for Drug Court Participants and Comparison Group](chart.png)
YES

Figure B. The Recidivism Rate Is Significantly Lower for Drug Court Participants (total drug arrests)
Key question: How much do drug courts cost?

Table 1. Program Costs per Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transaction</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drug Court Sessions</td>
<td>$1,018 - $4,500</td>
<td>$2,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Management</td>
<td>$665 - $2,404</td>
<td>$1,768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Treatment</td>
<td>$267 - $2,164</td>
<td>$1,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Treatment</td>
<td>$177 - $10,352</td>
<td>$3,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA Drug Testing</td>
<td>$233 - $1,141</td>
<td>$651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,385 - $17,156</strong></td>
<td><strong>$9,242</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendations: Statewide

- Increase connections with law enforcement
- Extend length of program from 12 to 18 months, especially for programs serving high risk/high need offenders
- Use evaluation and assessment data to make program modifications
- Consider accepting individuals with mental health issues (unless served by a mental health court and if adequate services are available)
Recommendations: Statewide

- Ensure that responses to participant behavior are happening immediately
- Require that participants (before graduating):
  - Have a job,
  - Be in school, or
  - Have some other legal/sustainable way to support themselves
Recommendations: Study sites

- **Work on improving data quality**
  - At the local program level
  - Through collaboration with other state agencies
  - Maintain core set of data elements
  - Use electronic data systems
  - Use consistent definitions for variables
  - Maintain a record of the arrest that brought the participant to drug court
  - Separate program sanctions from new arrests, unless they are truly new arrests
Recommendations: Future studies

- Establish system-level data sharing agreements between agencies, to facilitate access to arrest, jail, prison, and court data
- Establish a procedure for allowing access to National Crime Information Center data
- Work to identify comparison groups that had specific alternatives to drug court
  - Drug diversion programs
  - Other alternatives to incarceration
Florida drug court programs have been successful in their main goals of reducing drug use and recidivism among its participants and increasing public safety.
Contact information

Juliette R. Mackin, Ph.D.
Executive Vice President and Senior Research Associate
Northwest Professional Consortium, Inc. (NPC Research)
5100 SW Macadam Avenue, Suite 575
Portland, OR 97239
office: 503-243-2436 x114
fax: 503-243-2454
cell: 971-244-3655
www.npcresearch.com