

New Deschutes Family Drug Court Targets Long-Term Solutions

by K_Guice

Look though Oregon State statistics and it is clear to see a long-term solution is needed to combat an ever-increasing drug issue. Many believe the creation of a family drug court in Deschutes County is a good place to start.

According to the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission crime rate statistics, between 1991 and 2003 the number of drug arrests in Deschutes County increased from 26.4 per 10,000 of the population, to 53.8 per 10,000 of the population. The actual number of drug arrests increased from 213 to 702.

According to the Office of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OMHAS), 43 percent of the drug treatment court participants reported amphetamine/methamphetamine as their primary drug of choice.

In an effort to curb that addiction and the crimes committed in relation to drug use, Scott Johnson, the Deschutes County mental health director says, the county has received funding to create a much-needed family drug court.

“We have received two grants,” Johnson said. “A state grant of \$1 million dollars from the criminal justice commission. Those are funds from efforts of the last legislature to combat methamphetamine in the community.”

The second source of funding is a federal grant. “It is a public safety grant we will receive for two years,” he said.

Looking at statistics from Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) it is money well spent. In the two-year period following graduation or termination, offenders who participated in drug court instead of “business as usual” had: 58 percent fewer arrests for property crimes, 75 percent fewer arrests for felony person crimes and 80 percent fewer probation/parole violation arrests.

In addition to less crime, the new county drug court could save taxpayers money. In looking at a detailed cost analysis evaluation of Multnomah County Drug Court in 2003 it found that the drug court cost \$1,441.52 less per participant than “business as usual,” including jail costs, probation, treatment, courts, etc.

Total cost and investment savings to the taxpayer over a 30-month period averaged out to \$5,071.57 per drug court participant. With 300 participants going through Multnomah County Drug Court every year, the savings to the taxpayer potentially exceeds \$1.5 million.

According to Johnson, Deschutes County Family Drug Court only expects to see 30 to 50 families come through the system in the first year, but says the benefits will go beyond just taxpayer’s pockets.

“We are targeting families where there are significant drug or alcohol problems,” Johnson said. “These are all families where one or more children and been removed and they are in the care of child welfare services.”

Their goal is not only to help reform addicts, it is to reunite families and give them the support they need to be successful in the community.

Johnson says the county has three goals. “We want to successfully treat addiction problems. Second, we are trying to keep them out of the public safety system. Third, reunite families and have it be a safe caring environment for children.”

The new court plans on accomplishing those goals by making every resource available to the program participant and easy to access directly through the court.

“The nature of the family court is that we have a number of community services lending assistance,” Johnson said. “You have the child welfare workers working with the family, you have intensive treatment, individual treatment, group treatment, a 12-step program and we have the health department.”

In addition, the family resource center is providing training and skill development. “The mental health department will also have a therapist available to work with them as well,” Johnson said.

For families in the system with children under four years of age, Ready, Set, Go, a child development program will provide home visits to assist families in both development and abuse prevention.

Last but not least, Johnson says the county has some “wrap around funds”™ to assist with housing, transportation and employment.

At the heart of the program, according to Johnson, is the drug treatment that will be provided by BestCare Treatment Services. They were awarded the contract that will amount to about \$190,000. That is roughly half of the grant dollars.

“We work with individuals with issues ranging from driving under the influence citations through serious long term dependence problems,” stated Randy Johnson, a director at BestCare Treatment Services. “BestCare also helps those with co-occurring disorders; both addiction and mental health challenges. We are the only facility in Central Oregon that offers the full continuum of care.”

Scott Johnson says it is the most important piece of the puzzle. “Without this kind of a program there is much less chance for change and without the program there is much more of a likely hood that a child would not be returned to their parent or parents.”

The oversight of the program will be managed by the partnership team, which will meet weekly. In these meetings, both new and existing cases will be reviewed. Randy Johnson says the program is proposed to operate in the following phases:

Phase I

- Unsuitable or at-risk homes are identified and children are removed from their homes by DHS.
- DHS and the district attorney’s office confer regarding Family Drug Court suitability.
- Families are screened by DHS and BestCare.
- The Court approves or denies access to the program.
- Orientation and probation assignment is set in preparation for entering program.

Phase II

- Client families participate in treatment and 12-step meetings (BestCare Family Drug Court program).

• Health evaluation and testing, mental health assessment, supervised parenting and probation.

• Frequent random drug testing is conducted and case progress is monitored weekly by court and family drug court team.

Phase III

• Ongoing treatment, drug testing, parenting support and weekly review.

• Wrap-around services (housing, job skills, transportation issues, etc.) case managed.

Phase IV

• Transition to family reunification with continued substance abuse treatment and parenting classes.

• Drug Court Team continues to monitor progress and briefs court (court conducts monthly hearings).

Phase V

• Substance abuse and parenting classes continue and progress continues to be monitored.

• Court conducts monthly status meetings until family graduates from the program.

Ultimately, Randy Johnson says, this is a win-win for all. "The individuals are given a realistic chance at having a productive and satisfying life. The children are given the best possible opportunity to not follow in the same behaviors that led to the need for this program. The courts will have an option for working with families at risk and the community stands to have productive citizens as opposed to inmates and prospects for a future generation of substance abuse and incarceration," he added.

The family drug court begins in August. Court will be in session every Monday with Alta Brady serving as the circuit family court judge.

For more information on the family drug court program, contact the Deschutes County Mental Health Department at 322-7500. For BestCare Treatment Services information, contact 617-7365.

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