

Ada County Juvenile Court Receives National Attention

The following article was published in a national journal highlighting Ada County's unique juvenile court system.

The juvenile court here in Ada County, Idaho is able to directly provide court-related juveniles with the kinds of mental health services that many jurisdictions lack. It maintains a clinical services division of six masters' degree therapists who inform me that their work is extremely well integrated with the judiciary and probation staff, to the clear benefit of the youths and families who receive this coordinated assistance. These professionals are engaged in an array of service provisions.

One is the eight-week residential substance abuse program that takes place in the juvenile detention center. Why, I had to ask, is it held there and under court sponsorship? "We are a Casey JDASI site," was the first answer, followed by: "We have a 76-bed facility that we had brought down to an average population of about 30. We knew that the community had only a small and inadequate number of residential beds for chronic drug abusers and that methamphetamine use was in particularly abundance. Limited state reimbursement meant that non-profits had little interest in opening a costly residential program. We had the unused beds, so we did it. Our post-treatment abstinence rate has been above average with these kids who were frequent flyers in detention and now don't come back often."

This is a Monday-Friday program. Several therapists, alcohol and drug counselors, probation officers, a certified teacher, and detention staff are all engaged with the eight juveniles in residence. There is individual counseling, daily group sessions that get into thinking errors and cognitive exercises as well as psychoactive drug education, intensive family group processes, and, of course, school. There is a mandatory four-week post-residence case management component, as well.

Some who enter residence are also involved in the juvenile drug court. Drug court juveniles when not in residence are encouraged to participate in the local

parks and recreation department's programs such as rock climbing, kayaking, and ropes courses. Court mental health therapists are involved with drug court youths.

One clinical services therapist directs a court diversion program that focuses on status offenders, where juvenile-family relationships are often askew. (Probation officers oversee a second diversion program for modest delinquent offenders where the primary task is assigned community service hours.) Therapists are key to the Parent Project, 16 units of instruction and problem solving for parents of high-risk youths to facilitate improved communication, effective discipline, parent assistance toward improved school achievement, and prevention of alcohol and drug abuse.



Varieties of clinical assistance provision during 2006 included 102 individual and family counseling clients, 52 out patient service clients, 45 drug court youths, and 24 domestic violence assessments (provided when this family dynamic was impacting a juvenile and necessitated comprehensive evaluation, design of a service plan, referral to a community agency, and retention of case management oversight). Also, the court has its own small, short-term foster home program (12 juveniles served during 2006); clinical services are engaged with this effort during placement and with transition home after a few months.

This court/juvenile services agency takes considerable pride in what it offers this community. It should.

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