

Prince George's County District Court Adult Drug Court Pre-Evaluation



Submitted to:

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Informing policy, improving programs

BACKGROUND

NPC Research, a Portland, Oregon-based social policy evaluation research firm, is contracted with the Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts to conduct impact/outcome evaluations and cost analyses for Maryland's Drug and DUI Courts. In 2006, NPC conducted a pilot in Prince George's Juvenile Drug Court for introducing a program to these intensive evaluation activities and gathering the preliminary information needed to begin these other types of studies. The information included in this report represents the summary of the pre-evaluation work completed in December 2007 with the Prince George's County District Court Adult Drug Court program.

Pre-Evaluation Process Description and Purpose

Process evaluation involves intensive and extensive information collection and analysis. To ensure that NPC's research team gets off to a "running start" in pursuit of this intense research endeavor, it will conduct what it refers to as a "pre-evaluation" for each drug court program that has not undergone a previous process evaluation.

Pre-evaluation activities include an introductory site visit to the drug court, utilization of an electronic survey, and a telephone interview with the program coordinator or other drug court representatives possessing a broad overview perspective of the program. The pre-evaluation data that are collected through these activities provide the researchers with a general understanding of the drug court's organization and current processes, assist the evaluation team in determining the direction and content of further process evaluation questions, and inform future outcome and cost evaluation work. In addition, contact information for key informants, a description of general roles of partnering agency representatives, and related information is collected during the pre-evaluation. Perhaps of greatest importance during this brief period of contact with each site is that NPC's researchers have an opportunity to develop a positive and productive working relationship with drug court representatives, in particular program coordinators.

ELECTRONIC PROGRAM SURVEYS

Since the drug court programs participating in the pre-evaluation process are located throughout the state of Maryland, and in the interest of making the most efficient and effective use of research staff and resources, it was decided that NPC's process evaluation team would administer an electronic survey to key informants (generally, these are the program coordinators). The use of an electronic survey allows the researchers to begin building the pre-evaluation understanding of the program, described above, as well as to collect data that will support a future full process evaluation of the site.

Prince George's County District Court Adult Drug Court Pre-Evaluation Process

NPC staff conducted the following research activities with the Prince George's County District Court Adult Drug Court Program:

1. Initial introduction of the pre-evaluation process with the program coordinator, including a general description of future evaluation activities
2. Completion by the program coordinator of the Program Survey
3. An interview (and additional follow-up communications) by NPC staff with the program coordinator and judge, to:
 - a. Ensure that the program understands the 10 key component
 - b. Share the current status of the research in these areas
 - c. Learn about the drug court's program policies and procedures and how they are implementing these as they relate to best practices
4. Confirmation that the site currently has a program flow chart (i.e., a visual illustration of partner agencies and the process for individuals to enter the program)
5. A site visit by NPC staff to discuss program operations and to address any questions that arise

Evaluation products that resulted from the above activities included:

- Findings and recommendations for the program based on the 10 key components.

General Summary of Findings

This site does not currently have a coordinator, though (per a recent e-mail from the drug court judge) they have hired one and are waiting on background check results. They have also hired a new drug court case manager who is scheduled to start on January 19, 2008. We did not have an opportunity to complete the data elements worksheet with the previous coordinator before she left her position, and she was unable to work on it with after transitioning to her new role. Further, we were not able to identify another contact person at the site to work through this information with. This task can be completed with the new coordinator in the future or at the time of a future full process evaluation.

The current judge did inform us that the drug court has not yet transitioned to the SMART data management system. She also informed us that a new drug court judge would be taking over on December 12, 2007, adding that she would work with the team informally during the transition.

Thus, this site has successfully implemented their program; however, they are going through a period of substantial transition (new coordinator, new judge, new case manager), so it will be an important time for them to focus on training and developing relationships within the team.

Other specific findings about this program (also included in the full 10 key component summary) are:

- The program uses the services of 10 treatment agencies, including the Prince George's County Health Department. The PGC Health Department is the coordinating agency (for services) and the single point of contact for participants.
- The drug court accepts participants through a variety of decision points and referral sources in the judicial system, including post conviction and violation of probation status. Participants may even be interviewed (as potential program participants) while in detention, prior to trial/conviction. Individuals with non-drug charges are also allowed entry into the program (which is associated with positive outcomes in other studies).
- Participants have access to treatment providers that offer gender-specific services (i.e., men's groups) and language-specific services (i.e., services offered in Spanish).
- Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous programs are offered through the community; participants can use this service while waiting for an initial treatment placement. Further, while in specific program phases, participants are required to attend these support groups (the required number is based on their case manager's recommendation).
- The program has specific requirements regarding the number of required group treatment sessions (which is associated with higher graduation rates and lower investment costs in other research studies), but the actual number received is individualized based on participants' needs.
- The drug court judge is fully engaged with the program and with participants. She actively facilitates interaction with participants during court sessions, encouraging them to share their opinions and points of view. The judge is committed to the drug court model. [While she is leaving this role, she plans to work with and help to orient the incoming judge.]
- Sanctions used by this program are graduated, from least restrictive to most serious. The program has standard sanctions and the staff members focus on imposing sanctions as close as possible in time to when the behavior occurred.
- The program has established linkages with several local programs and services to benefit participants, including agencies that provide employment and education support, housing and homeless assistance, and parenting education.

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY ADULT DRUG COURT

10 Key Components of Drug Courts

DEFINITIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR ADULT DRUG COURTS

Key Component	Preliminary Site Findings	Suggestions/Questions/Recommendations
<p>1. Drug courts integrate alcohol and other drug treatment services with justice system case processing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All team members, including a treatment representative from the Health Department, attend weekly pre-court meetings. They also all attend drug court sessions. • There is a law enforcement representative who attends some of the team meetings. • A treatment representative provides updates to the drug court team prior to pre-court meetings. • The program uses the services of 10 treatment agencies, including the Prince George's County Health Department. The PGC Health Department is the coordinating agency (for services) and the single point of contact for participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further engage law enforcement to encourage at least one representative to attend team meetings on a regular basis.
<p>2. Using a non-adversarial approach, prosecution and defense counsel promote public safety while protecting participants' due process rights.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Office of the Public Defender and State's Attorney's Office work closely together and representatives from both offices attend weekly pre-court team meetings and drug court sessions. • The program allows entry to individuals with non-drug charges (which is associated with positive outcomes in other studies). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no suggestions at this time. When a full process evaluation is conducted in the future, core team members will be interviewed and this key component will be more fully explored.

Key Component	Preliminary Site Findings	Suggestions/Questions/Recommendations
<p>3. Eligible participants are identified early and promptly placed in the drug court program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program accepts participants through a variety of decision points and referral sources in the judicial system, including post conviction and violation of probation status. Participants may even be interviewed (as potential program participants) while in detention, prior to trial/conviction. • The program identifies and determines eligibility in a timely manner (usually within a week). • Eligibility criteria are written and clear, and provided to all partner/referral agencies. The screening process is standardized (e.g., coordinator → State's Attorney → team). Eligibility does not include a targeted drug of choice. • The program has created a flow chart that illustrates the path participants take from arrest to drug court entry and the multiple sources from which participants are referred to the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-plea only programs are associated with lower graduation rates and higher investment costs, so it is beneficial to continue to explore pre-plea entry options. • The existing program flow chart can be used as a guide to monitor whether the entry process changes over time, and also to identify any bottlenecks in the process that may exist.
<p>4. Drug courts provide access to a continuum of alcohol, drug, and other related treatment and rehabilitation services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program has access to 10 treatment providers including the PGC Health Department case managers. The Health Department serves as the central agency point of contact, referring participants out to other providers for needed services. • Participants who need housing assistance or transitional housing placement receive support in this area from the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In prior studies, programs that required one or fewer treatment sessions per week were associated with less positive participant outcomes. However, if the program is providing treatment intensity based on individual needs, the participants should be receiving the level of service that is most appropriate for

Key Component	Preliminary Site Findings	Suggestions/Questions/Recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family counseling, anger management classes, inpatient treatment, and one-on-one therapy are available through the program and provided as needed. • Participants have access to treatment providers that offer gender-specific services (i.e., men's groups) and language-specific services (i.e., services offered in Spanish). • Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous programs are offered through the community; participants can use this service while waiting for an initial treatment placement. Further, while in specific program phases, participants are required to attend these support groups (the required number is based on their case manager's recommendation). • The Health Department covers the cost of treatment services with participating providers. • Program has specific requirements regarding the number of required group treatment sessions (which is associated with higher graduation rates and lower investment costs in other research studies), but the actual number received is individualized based on participants' needs. • All participants must have a 180-day (post-program) abstinence plan in place in order to graduate. 	<p>them (including specific treatment modalities).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that participants are actually attending the number of sessions that are indicated based on assessment results. • While compliance with treatment requirements does not appear to be a problem in this program, the program should continue to monitor participant compliance with the number of recommended sessions (as indicated in their assessment).

Key Component	Preliminary Site Findings	Suggestions/Questions/Recommendations
<p>5. Abstinence is monitored by frequent alcohol and other drug testing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing occurs randomly (and is fully observed), a total of 2 to 3 times per week in phases 1 and 2, and additionally if a suspicion of use arises. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy manual is unclear about the requirement of how long participants must be drug-free prior to graduation. Drug court programs that expect a client to have greater than 90 days of negative drug tests before graduation are associated with positive outcomes and higher graduation rates.
<p>6. A coordinated strategy governs drug court responses to participants' compliance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The drug court team discusses possible sanctions and rewards during pre-court team meetings, and they make recommendations to the judge, who has the final authority to administer them. • The sanctions used by this program are graduated, from least restrictive to most serious. The program has standard sanctions and the staff members focus on imposing sanctions as close as possible in time to when the behavior occurred. However, if a participant's drug test shows a positive result, for example, the day after the drug court session, he/she may not receive a sanction until the next drug court session (which could be as long as 2 weeks away). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to administer responses to behavior (both sanctions and rewards) as close to the behavior as possible, for maximum impact. • Programs are encouraged to use incentives and rewards liberally, to balance needed sanctions and to create a positive, strength-based program climate.
<p>7. Ongoing judicial interaction with each drug court participant is essential.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The judge is fully engaged with the program and with participants. She actively facilitates interaction with participants during court sessions, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to build in as much transition as possible from the current to the incoming drug court judge, so that the replacement judge can learn the

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	<p>encouraging them to share their opinions and points of view.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This judge has been present since implementation; she participated in program planning and start-up activities. The program does not impose a fixed/limited term on the position of drug court judge. • The judge is committed to the drug court model. • The frequency of proposed court hearings is in line with current best practices. • A substitute judge is available to run hearings if the active judge is unavailable to preside over a drug court session (e.g., due to vacation or illness). • The current judge will be leaving the program and a new judge will be starting December 12, 2007. 	<p>drug court model (and understand his role in the program). If possible, allow the incoming judge to observe drug court sessions and learning directly from the experience of the sitting judge. At least, try to arrange time for the current judge to be available for consultation or questions.</p>
<p>8. Monitoring and evaluation measure the achievement of program goals and gauge effectiveness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program collects required data and maintains it electronically. It will be transitioning to the SMART system in the near future. • Program participants complete release forms for sharing information with partner agencies. • The program has a written confidentiality policy in its participant handbook. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain data from the current system even after transitioning to SMART, including both paper records and electronic files. These materials will be needed for future evaluations. • If the program does not currently engage in self-monitoring, it may want to set specific time aside for the drug court team to review program data and identify potential areas for program improvement. Examples of questions related to program

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		<p>improvement include: “What target population is being served?” (e.g., are participants who enter drug court meeting the stated eligibility criteria?), “What is the graduation rate?” (especially compared to the unsuccessful completion/termination rate), “Who is successful in the program and who isn’t?,” and, “How long does it take participants on average to complete the program?”</p>
<p>9. Continuing interdisciplinary education promotes effective drug court planning, implementation, and operations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The judge is the only current team member who participated in the national drug court training workshops. • Newer team members attend trainings offered through the Office of Problem-Solving Courts (including Drug Court 101). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important that each team member is trained on the drug court model, and specifically with regard to his/her role in the program. The program should support and encourage regular, ongoing training for team members. Initial and ongoing training for team members has been demonstrated in national research to contribute to positive participant outcomes & higher graduation rates. • The program may want to develop a system for recording staff trainings (such as a training log) to ensure that staff receive initial and continuing training and education in a timely manner.
<p>10. Forging partnerships among drug courts, public agencies, and community-based organizations generates local</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program has established linkages with several programs and services to benefit participants: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In national research, programs with a law enforcement representative on

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<p>support and enhances drug court program effectiveness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Employment support: resume development, career development workshops, job training, etc. ○ Education support: ○ GED training and testing, education assistance (referrals to local community colleges), tuition assistance Housing and homeless assistance through the treatment providers ○ Parenting education ● The program is working to establish a connection with the local 4-H Program. ● None of the community partners participate on the drug court team. 	<p>the drug court team had more positive participant outcomes and higher graduation rates. As suggested in KC 1 above, more fully engaging law enforcement on the drug court team is encouraged.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The program may want to establish a regular mechanism for requesting feedback from participants on the types of community services that would benefit them, or any unmet needs or barriers that community organizations could support (e.g., transportation or childcare challenges). ● Other programs have benefitted from developing connections with local businesses, faith communities, and recreational opportunities in their counties.