

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2004 OUTCOME EVALUATION

University of Kentucky, Center on Drug and Alcohol Research

Drug Court is one of the most recent and promising advances made in the Criminal Justice system, and represents one of the fastest growing intervention approaches with drug-involved offenders across the nation. Following a set of standards known as the 10 Key Components (Drug Court Programs Office, 1997), the central organizing theme for Drug Court is combining traditional case processing with programming that emphasizes supervision and treatment for drug abusers. The Drug Court judge oversees a multidisciplinary team comprised of professionals from all aspects of the criminal justice and treatment systems who have set aside traditionally adversarial roles to address the related goals of public safety and offender rehabilitation. These goals are addressed in a systematic manner within the highly-structured Drug Court program environment that includes intensive supervision (through regular urine drug testing, regular contact with the drug court judge, and frequent visits by drug court team members to participants' homes, work, and school), accountability through quick sanctions for non-compliant behavior, intensive substance abuse treatment (individual and group-based counseling), employment, and other services needed by drug-involved offenders in order to have a chance at achieving long-term recovery and becoming productive members of society.

Drug Court in Kentucky has been recognized as being a national leader in the Drug Court movement, with many programs operated throughout the state, and with many more planned or beginning initial implementation. With any new intervention, it is imperative that ongoing empirical research be conducted to determine the effectiveness of these new approaches. To this end, the Administrative Office of the Courts Drug Court Department has worked extensively with the University of Kentucky Center on Drug and Alcohol Research since 1997 to conduct in-depth process evaluations of Drug Court programs around the state, and to conduct periodic effectiveness evaluations of multiple programs. One such evaluation was conducted previously which compared graduates to non-graduates of drug court programs who were enrolled between 1995 and 1996. Overall findings from this evaluation showed that these drug courts were effective in reducing recidivism (defined as charges and convictions), for improving employability, and for reducing the costs associated with recidivism to the Commonwealth of Kentucky (see Logan, Hoyt, & Leukefeld, 2001).

The current report summarizes a second multi-site effectiveness evaluation that examines 198 participants admitted to one of three adult drug courts in Kentucky between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2000, as well as comparison to a group of 606 persons who were charged with a felony drug law violation in these same jurisdictions during the same time frame. Baseline characteristics including demographics, drug use history, and criminal history were collected from the files of Drug Court participants as were during-program outcome indicators. During-program outcome indicators were based on participant-level program information that described the participant's retention in the program, drug use as measured by urinalysis, employment, sanctions and phase promotions. The primary emphasis of the current evaluation, however, was placed on whether recidivism outcomes were different between Drug Court graduates and non-graduates and between Drug Court participants and the comparison group. Recidivism was based on official criminal records from the Administrative Office of the Courts' CourtNet database, and information coded from these records included when a new charge or conviction was received (i.e., during-program, one year after the program, and two years after the program), the severity of the charge or

conviction (i.e., felony or misdemeanor), and the specific type of the offense charged (i.e., any charge or conviction, drug law violations, driving under the influence, property offenses, violent offenses, weapons offenses, probation violations, and other types of offenses). Overall findings from the current evaluation show:

- Drug Court was implemented in a manner that was highly consistent with the 10 Key Components, a national standard for effective drug court operations.
- Drug Court provided intensive supervision to participants through random urinalyses and regular contact with the Drug Court judge and team.
- Drug court graduates (11.5%) had significantly lower during-program felony conviction rates than drug court non-graduates (46.2%).
- Drug court participants who were enrolled in the program for at least one year were 69% less likely to be charged with a felony offense and 71% less likely to be convicted of a felony within two years of leaving Drug Court than those enrolled for less than one year.
- Even though drug abuse may be a chronically relapsing condition, the majority of the participants (52%) tested negative for illicit drugs while they were in drug court. Drug Court graduates (33.3%) were significantly less likely than non-graduates (60.2%) to test positive for illegal drugs during Drug Court.
- Participant employment rates improved during Drug Court.
- 1-year recidivism rates were low, with 29.3% of drug court participants receiving a new felony conviction in the year after leaving drug court. Drug Court graduates (13.5%) were significantly less likely to receive a felony conviction than were Drug Court non-graduates (42.2%).
- 2-year recidivism rates showed 36.7% of drug court participants received a new felony conviction within two years of leaving drug court. Drug court graduates (20.2%) were significantly less likely than non-graduates (51%) to be convicted for a new felony within 2 years of their discharge from drug court.
- Drug court graduates were significantly less likely than the untreated comparison group to be sentenced to a year or more of prison in the two years post-program completion.
- Cumulative figures indicated that at the end of the two year observation window, graduating from Drug Court resulted in reduced rates of felony charges and convictions. The conviction rate for Drug Court graduates was 13.5%, versus 52.1% for the untreated comparison group ($p < .001$). Two-year rates were also significantly lower for Drug Court graduates compared with the felony drug law violators (20.2% vs. 57.3%, respectively; $p < .001$).
- While during the first year non-graduates were significantly less likely to incur a felony charge or conviction, similar proportions of non-graduates and those in the comparison group were charged and/or convicted of a felony by the end of the two year observation.

Drug Court graduates have significantly lower during program, 1-year and 2-year recidivism rates compared with both non-graduates and the comparison group. It does appear though, that completion of the Drug Court program is an important predictor of recidivism. Further analyses found that the proportion of non-graduates charged and/or convicted of a felony offense was similar to that of the non-treated comparison group by the end of the two year follow-up window. Overall, however, when systematically compared to a group of drug law violators from the same jurisdictions, Drug Court graduates were significant less likely to be charged and/or convicted of a felony. Since it was found that Drug Court participants were more likely to have prior felony charges and convictions than the comparison group, these findings further support the effectiveness for Kentucky Drug Courts and warrant the continued support of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.