

## Drug Court Update

1/9/17

By Angela Anderson, Senior Deputy Whatcom County Public Defender's Office

Currently the Whatcom County Drug Court has thirty six active participants. According to the Public Defender's records around forty nine files (or case numbers) are listed as Drug Court cases. After checking our records as far back as September 2015, this number has remained fairly consistent. This appears to support the argument that Drug Court numbers have not increased or decreased since the Task Force was created. However, Chris Furman, the Drug Court Coordinator feels that there has been a slight increase in the number of participants just recently.

I consulted both Ms. Chris Furman and Maia Vanyo, who is the Public Defender assigned to Drug Court, regarding potential issues surrounding Drug Court currently. The main issue is housing! There is simply a lack of quality housing for participants. Those houses that Ms. Furman thinks highly of are typically running at capacity. Housing clearly is the core of getting sober- it provides stability and a safety. Additionally, Drug Court has eight participants on suboxone. There is only one clean and sober house that allows suboxone users. Historically, this particular clean and sober house has not been one of our favored locations. As a side note, the HEN program has been positive for our participants. Currently 5 or more clients receive this is a funding source to pay for their housing.

### Housing & Emergency Needs (HEN)

Another issue related to clean and sober housing is the lack of coordination by in patient facilities to appropriately house clients upon release from treatment. When a gap occurs between in patient and a clean and sober house, the client tends to end up back in an unhealthy environment and very prone to relapse. Coordinating this is the responsibility of the in patient facility and recently there are been problems.

In patient as well has been fluctuating. There are been changes over this past year to how long a client's stay is with a focus on therapeutic need versus a set time line. However, in application, it appears clients may be staying shorter than longer at treatment. PCN and PCE (two in patient centers) also reduced the length of their program from 60 to only 30 days. Historically in drug court, the longer the client stays at treatment the better he or she does upon release so these shorter stays are concerning.

(PCN) Pioncer Center North

(PCE) Pioncer Center East

On the flip side, there are many positives with Drug Court to report. Ms. Furman wants to acknowledge how essential and beneficial it was that Anne Deacon and the Health Department found Detox the ability to do in custody assessments for in patient treatment. Otherwise, Drug Court was unable to serve those clients and clients were facing long in custody wait times. Additionally, Ms. Furman feels the number of participants are at a good number. She feels Drug Court could possibly handle as much as ten additional clients with the staff they have. However Ms. Furman suggests that should more clients been allowed to participate, more staff should be added. With her current number of participants, she is limited to truly case management. She does not have the ability to go out into the community to advocate for Drug Court or to fundraise for their foundation.

Drug Court acceptances are coming faster and more frequent than before the Task Force began. For example, in the fall of this year:

9/1 – 1 letter  
9/21 – 8 letters  
10/10 – 6 letters  
11/10 – 12 letters  
11/18 – 4 letters  
11/29 – 3 letters  
12/19- 1 letter

When Ms. Furman was asked about any changes should thought Drug Court should consider or if she had unlimited resources what changes would she make, she believed the restriction on drug dealers should be lifted. In reality, most users are at some point dealing to support their habit and it is just about who got caught when. She does not think it would place a danger on those in recovery or in the program. As more of a lofty idea, she suggested creating a supervised housing resource similar to the old recovery house, where Drug Court participants could live and it would be managed or funded by the health department.

Lastly, the Task Force should know that Drug Court is working! Five people will graduate on January 26 at 2:30! We are all invited to attend!

## FAST TRACK UPDATE

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In 2016 there were according to the records kept by the Whatcom County Public Defender's office:

423 cases selected as "Fast Track"

278 resolved as "Fast Track"

145 were reassigned due to one of three options:

- rejected offer
- offer lapsed due to non-response
- no Fast Track offer actually made

In reference to felonies resolving as misdemeanors, according to Mr. Follis, approximately only four clients in 2016 accepted the Fast Track offer of a "misdemeanor with District Court probation" in lieu of a felony. He further reports not seeing those offers in the recent months. There was some discussion from the prosecutor's office of a possible "Burglary 2- to- misdemeanor Shoplift- dropdown" but those have not come to fruition. Lastly Mr. Follis reports seeing significantly less misdemeanor offers on felonies that don't offer probation, which was a fairly common plea offer in years past.