



# Teton County Family Treatment Court 2009 SYNC Review

- **TC-FTC-2009-015**
  - “The staff at the Van Vleck Group Home saved my child’s life.”
- **TC-FTC-2009-018**
  - “For me, adult drug court was a leap of faith; through their services, I developed faith in the system. Now that my children and I need help my faith has developed into trust for the efforts of Judge Guthrie and Teton County Family Treatment Court.”
- **TC-FTC-2009-019**
  - “A parent would like to see more consequences through the family treatment court. It may be beneficial for participants to be given clearer information prior to entering the family treatment court process to fully understand how it operates and what to expect from the process. Additionally, they may need to be reminded of that as they progress through the program.”

# Summary

- ✓ Immediate access to services in almost every instance;
- ✓ well organized, professional and efficient; clients have their printed tasks before leaving the family treatment court proceeding;
- ✓ this team and court has saved, and is in the process of saving, lives according to their clients past and present, and
- ✓ turf battles appear nonexistent in this group. The collective focus is clearly on serving those that need it through a restorative justice model.
- A clearly defined process regarding how families are accepted into family treatment court may provide for a “better fit” between clients and family treatment court;
- internal policies and procedures with regards to incentives and sanctions may be helpful for clients to better understand and respect the process, and
- help the community understand what this court is doing and how beneficial it is to the community.



### Access to Services:

- Access to services of the family treatment court are almost immediate according to participants in one review sample;
- it is reported that there are sufficient mental health services in Teton County and that those services are almost immediate for clients of family treatment court through memorandums of understanding between providers and family treatment court;
- this community has five crisis beds available through Van Vleck Home; four in a separate facility out of the city limits and one in the group home inside the city limits;
- many cases originate from the Department of Family Services (DFS) and other community partners and providers; the local child protection team has also made referrals of clients for family treatment court.

### Quality of Services Including Recovery Support:

- In general, it appears that the team and family treatment court work from a restorative justice model.<sup>1</sup>
- Family treatment court operates on an incentive and sanction philosophy:
  - Incentives can include such things as movie passes, various treats, tools and gas cards, for example.
  - Sanctions can include house arrest, community service or detention in severe cases, for example.
- One client was able to continue working with the same counselor after being released from Van Vleck Home; this allowed for a great continuum of care from start to finish;
- the family treatment court proceedings started on a “positive” note for each client;
- any misrepresentation of the facts by a client during the court proceeding is efficiently dealt with by the judge and the treatment team working together;
- the court and team members have a clear focus on encouraging clients to be successful through education and also through stable employment. Resume creation, job searches and day planner use are recommended of clients when appropriate, and
- there is an emphasis on completing and continuing education for clients in the family treatment court.
- The treatment team does a good job of “putting the pieces of the puzzle together” regarding a client’s changed behavior. In one case, the reasons for a client’s change in behavior was explored by everyone who was involved with the client putting forth their observations of such things as family dynamic changes since the previous treatment team meeting;
- the type of behavior, in terms of whether a client was being a leader of inappropriate behavior or a follower, was explored by the team so that services could be appropriately tailored;

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<sup>1</sup> Further information regarding restorative justice can be found at:  
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/courts/restorative-justice/welcome.htm>



- the importance of “family” is recognized and honored in a strength based fashion by the management team and the court itself; in one case it was part of a court order that the parent and child do a meaningful and enjoyable activity together;
- despite being required to have 6 hours of continuing education per year, team members appear to place a great emphasis on increasing their own knowledge and abilities; it also appears that this is supported by the drug court coordinator through the budget;
- the work of the management team and the court provided a client with the strength and tools to live in a community in another state where substance abuse was very high, without recidivating.
- It appears that this process does a very good job of bringing estranged parents into a discussion and often times into a collaborative relationship, to recognize and do what is in the best interest for their children, and
- the SAGE initiative was recognized and greatly appreciated for being able to provide a true, family centered wrap around service that is effective.

### Coordination:

- The court treatment team was well organized, factual and succinct when they met prior to court. The team members were focused on preparing for court with each team member being encouraged to state relevant information they had about the client’s progress since the last meeting. For each client, the discussion lasted five to ten minutes and gave the court productive recommendations;
- this family treatment court operates with a true “wrap around” philosophy both in their thinking and in their physical being in the court room. The client’s attention is directed towards the judge; on their right is the treatment team situated in the jury box and on their left is the court administrator.
- In the Teton County School District the dean of Students is a major player in the community and in the family treatment court:
  - This individual attends family treatment court meetings and court proceedings;
  - when a student is placed out of Teton County in residential treatment, they are visited by a Teton County education official to ensure that credit transfers and the transition back into the home community is planned;
  - juveniles coming back to Teton County transition back to mainstream education whenever possible through Summit School, the alternative school. This is done because it is smaller and the educational pressures are more easily managed;
  - students have a four year education plan in Teton County which is shared with the treatment provider when in placement, and
  - to quote the dean of students: “*Students are going to come home to our community; we want to be ready for them to help them succeed.*”
- Multi Disciplinary Team Meetings (MDTs) are reported to be working well in this area of the state and generally compliment the family treatment court;
- to keep team meetings operating efficiently, a “task master” is appointed and monitors the pace of the treatment team meetings;



- Individual agencies, such as the school, deal with infractions as they happen in their professional environment. They then bring that information to the treatment team meeting so that the court has that knowledge before the court proceedings.
- By having the court involved every week or every two weeks, the court can hold the client accountable so that the therapist can do more counseling and worry less about consequence management.
- the current family treatment team coordinator is recognized by everyone as doing a very good job of coordinating and organizing the team; at one time, paperwork was not “followed up on” as well as it seems to be now under the current court administrator;
- the local mental health center is recognized as being a good community partner in Teton County.



### **Access to Services:**

- The transfer of a case from Lincoln County to Teton County for family treatment court took three to four months to be completed; once transferred by Lincoln County, services began immediately in Teton County;
- the “structure” or “process” of how families are initially referred or chosen for family treatment court is somewhat ambiguous; this is not unique to this particular court or other problem solving courts in Wyoming due to lacking statutory definition. This does lend itself to the question whether every family is appropriate for family treatment court and benefits fully. Is there then a duplication of services and an “underserved” population that exists that could benefit from this court.
- when detention is used, as a last resort for a sanction, the only detention facilities that are OJJDP compliant<sup>2</sup> for juveniles are in St. Anthony, Idaho or in Lander, Wyoming and a sheriff’s deputy must do the transport. This is of course difficult in poor weather. Home detention is used in some instances.
- It appears that it may be difficult for the general public to know “who to call” for an access point into the mental health and/or substance abuse services treatment community;
- there are families who may not have an underlying substance abuse issue that need services, but in order to access services through this family treatment court there must be an underlying substance abuse issue.

### **Quality of Services Including Recovery Support:**

- It is reported that there are no independent living services or juvenile transitional services in Teton County. This has also been an identified need in the Wyoming Child and Family Service Review Process for this area of the state;
- when a client is involved with a private school, the educational needs of the client through the family treatment court seems to be a bit more difficult to meet and there is less “free flowing” of information;

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<sup>2</sup> More information about compliancy can be found at: <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/compliance/index.html>.



- there appears to be a major focus on the children in a family treatment case and less emphasis on the other members of the family.
- No specific example was found, but one team member felt that an increased awareness of cultural competency among team members as this program matures might be important.

### **Coordination:**

- All three families commented that they would have liked to have seen stricter consequences delivered by the court in certain circumstances for specific behaviors. Possibly the clients do not have a clear understanding of the philosophy behind a family treatment court and possibly they do not have an understanding of, or substantial input into the services they will receive along with understanding the anticipated results from the services. For clients and team members to better understand the use of sanctions and consequences, it may be helpful to create, publish and use a systematic algorithm, as suggested by one of the team members.
- The members of the treatment team have clear goals for the client and the family. The clients expressed that they might appreciate being able to have more input regarding those goals when appropriate in the process.
- A residential treatment facility in Casper is reported having been difficult to coordinate with and not able to provide meaningful services for the client who was there. No fax machine was available for the client to receive homework assignments so that they could stay caught up on their school work.
- Financial services or assistance from DFS, at the state administrative level, seems to be cumbersome and less than helpful in some cases despite the efforts of local DFS workers;
- one parent reported that child support services for the state were very difficult to work with and caused unneeded financial stress on the individual's credit report by a decline of 200 points. The parent reported contacting child support services to set up payments while a child was in state's custody, but could not get anything going until almost a year later when the state demanded a lump sum payment creating a financial hardship. The state was less than helpful as well in trying to get child support from the other biologic parent as well.
- No indication that family partnerships are conducted in this area by DFS or others.

### **Systemic:**

- It is reported that it is difficult to get federal grants for family treatment court as many of those grant opportunities are created for adult drug courts;
- while no recommendation is made or applied, the state funding formula is of concern for funding for family treatment courts. There is evidence in this review and others that there are additional family members positively affected by the services of a family treatment court in addition to the clients who appear in court;
- coordination with the department of health has gotten much better in the past year with the most recent changes in administration;



- there is a need for the community in general to have a greater understanding of what family treatment court is, but that is reported to be difficult due to privacy issues. The drug court coordinators for both adult and family treatment court have indicated that they are going to establish a stakeholder/advisory group of community citizens to help address this issue.

*When asked how they, the treatment team members, remain so effective and are able to work so efficiently with one another the answer was simple and consistent: **We are friends and we respect one another.***