



Fremont County 2008 Juvenile Drug Court SYNC Review

- **FC-R-J-2008-005***
 - *"I am kind of glad I got caught; if I wasn't in this program I would still be smoking and drinking. I am getting better grades too."*
- **FC-R-J-2008-006***
 - *"I wish I could have gone straight to residential treatment sooner."*
- **FC-L-J-2008-007***
 - *"Reviewers saw a healthy system at work with very good coordination."*



*Indicates all cases debriefed on 12/12/08; Riverton, Wyoming



Access to Services:

- Typically there is a ten day waiting period for an evaluation. During that waiting period there are services offered and preparation of the client being done for juvenile drug court participation.
- If there was a problem, or relapse potential, the client felt comfortable going to Fremont Counseling to seek help.
- Parent reports that preventive services may have helped keep their child out of trouble.
- Fremont County Youth Services is a very good portal to the system.

Quality of Services Including Recovery Support:

- DFS seems to do a good job of understanding the counseling needs of clients and matching those needs with the strengths of various counselors.
- Juvenile had success academically because of juvenile drug court; this seems to be a trend for juveniles in juvenile drug court.
- Client reports that the high school is more supportive than the middle school.
- Juvenile client appreciated the Morale Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) services as it helped the client establish a self understanding as well as understanding others.
- Client felt that all of the services that were offered were used and useful.
- Support and involvement of family members with team members was beneficial and productive.
- Client is very reliant, if only subconsciously, on the structure and “caring” of the juvenile drug court program; this is so needed by the client, but will be a challenge for the client to operate independently from juvenile drug court at some point.

Coordination:

- Good participation in Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings by those involved in the case.
- Client reported those who were involved in the case supported each other and the client.
- Juvenile reports that family was involved in the treatment plan and was a great support while the client was in treatment.
- The case manager’s position is the “voice of the family.”
- Good participation by Riverton High School; school would also attend MDTs.
- The White Buffalo Program was able to provide some funds for transportation for parents to go see their juvenile in out of county treatment.
- The attorney in the case advocated for the child, against the parent(s) wishes for extended treatment.
- Productive MDT meetings; all agencies involved seemed to communicate well and all knew how the client was doing.
- Appears to be good coordination between the juvenile drug court and the school(s) particularly in written form.



- School was very helpful; created a productive area for meetings, assisted with urinary analysis (UA).
- Seemed that all parties involved in the case were on the same page in what was best for the client.
- DFS caseworker has a regular case load plus she does cases for family court without additional compensation.



Access to Services:

- Client had to wait at least a month before being able to go to an in-state treatment facility; however, during that time frame services were provided locally.
- An 11 year old, who needed services at the district court level, was not able to access the intensive services needed until age 14; service needs may have been out of home placement or counseling.
 - Three juveniles were charged with shoplifting, one was Native American and the other two were not. The Native juvenile did not receive the level of services that the two non Native juveniles did according to several people interviewed.
 - The juvenile reports that treatment by the court was different in a punitive manner based on being Native American.
- Family counseling may have been beneficial for the juvenile earlier in the case to avoid problems later.
- Unless there is an open DFS case file, DFS has a very hard time paying for any services that might be beneficial to a juvenile.
- In-patient treatment facilities for juveniles do not exist in Riverton.

Quality of Services Including Recovery Support:

- Mother and child were living in a motel; it does not appear that the underlying poverty issue and parental alcoholism was ever really addressed. The focus of the case appeared to be strong on the child's behavior and not on any underlying issues with family members.
- Native juvenile was being seen by a non Native counselor which may have been a problem in acceptance on the part of the juvenile.
- Case manager, and former probation officer, has never heard of the concept of family partnerships.
- DFS is not always involved in cases coming through Youth Services; it might be helpful if DFS was included to a greater extent in the decisions to keep those cases at the county and city level.¹
- There appears to be some confusion on how a case is "bumped" up from Youth Services to the next level of court.
- Parent and child were living with relative who had an alcohol problem; parent received a driving while under the influence charge; child relapsed; Fremont Counseling Counselor did not see a need for therapy or family counseling.

¹ It is not known however that DFS wants to be involved earlier in these matters.



- Juvenile drug court is demanding; transportation is a problem for clients to get to all the meetings.
- MDTs and Family Partnerships are often combined in Fremont County; they are not the same and do not provide the same results.
- Cultural competency was not a strength in one case; this appears to be a two pronged issue:
 - There appears to not be anyone representing the Native culture in the program; coordination with the tribes is a challenge for consistency with continual changing probation officers, administrators and agency priorities.
 - Concern was expressed that the juvenile drug court may not have the flexibility in structure to accommodate other traditions in the Native cultures through representation on teams.
- Juvenile reports that it is the stress of the juvenile drug court program requirements that contributed to his single relapse.
- Juvenile indicated, and the interviewers speculate, that client relapsed because the client was not ready to be done with the program and wanted/needed continued structure, focus and attention.
- Stipulated orders essentially make juvenile drug court a voluntary program.

Coordination:

- It appears that the state requires a great deal of data reporting, it does not appear that the local juvenile drug court is able to benefit from that data in the form of local queries and local reports to aid daily operations or program management.
- Self reporting from clients, that typically make up the DFS reports, don't include the collateral information and contacts that a juvenile may have encountered from other providers or programs and that the client may not want to provide voluntarily.
- Parent did not feel like she was involved in any sort of case planning and that little consideration was given to her scheduling needs and work schedule.²
- For those clients living on the Wind River Indian Reservation, transportation, communication and finances are issues.
- There are times that Native juveniles do not have a probation officer due to the high turnover among workers in tribal programs, more specifically the Northern Arapaho program.
- When juvenile was in treatment out of county, it was reported by the parents that Riverton Middle School did not send school work to the juvenile in treatment causing him to fall further behind in school.
- Parent and juvenile reported that the Northern Arapaho probation officer was hard to coordinate with; calls would go unanswered and not returned.

² This comment was made by a parent who when interviewed liked nothing about the program but by the end of the interview felt that the program had been beneficial for her daughter.



- Parent would like to see some services coordinated on the same day of the week; juvenile drug court requirements required transportation to town of the juvenile seven days per week.
- Mother had to contact an advocate to work with the school for the juvenile's hearing issues and his Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- Juvenile was given an iss and nobody notified the family
- Client wanted to know if the juvenile drug court could coordinate with the public transportation system available in Fremont County, specifically the one that transports to the Wind River Indian Reservation.
- Trust of non natives by Natives can be a hindrance for clients to admit to needing treatment or counseling.
- As of July, 2008 and the advent of new Juvenile Court rules, many cases handled through district court, are done by stipulated agreement as a time saving measure for the court docket. This does not allow for the powerful and sobering effect of client/judge interaction.³
- A Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) is not normally used but a public defender is assigned to all cases. Some, not all, public defenders are not motivated by what is in the best interest of the child, but are simply interested in getting the child released from the charge.
- It is unclear how family system intervention planning is done with cases and what influence others such as DFS have in this process; juvenile drug court relies on other partners to often lead on initiatives such as family centered practice, but DFS and others may not provide that leadership to the extent necessary.⁴
- Native client reports that a peer, who got in more "trouble" and was not Native did not receive the same treatment in the system; juvenile drug court personnel reported bringing the issue to the awareness of the judge.

Family Court Considerations:

- More consistency is needed throughout the state regarding drug court structure; often it is beneficial for clients to leave treatment and not return to the same environment they left. In these situations, it could be beneficial for the client to be able to transfer to another community and drug court but there is not enough consistency between the different drug courts for that to be easily facilitated.
- It is very important for the parents to receive family systems interventions in support of juvenile success, as well as have parents and juveniles to go before a judge and be congratulated on achievement. When adults are charged with abuse/neglect, Child In Need of Supervision (CHINS), etc., there is a need for a family court in Wyoming with a judge that is trained in juvenile and family issues and has time to see these clients.

³ While not specific to the cases reviewed, several people interviewed made this general comment about the stipulated agreement process.

⁴ Lack of leadership by DFS on the Family Centered Practice model internally and for others is a noted opportunity for improvement in the 2008 Wyoming Citizen Review Panel Annual Report.



- The potential exists for there to be family members in both juvenile drug court and adult drug court. In these instances, a true family court might be beneficial to treat these situations as a “family unit.”
- All cases are filed in district court and an initial juvenile hearing is scheduled. Stipulated agreements are signed about 50% of the time (as of July, 2008) prior to initial hearing. Often, the time it takes to get a petition filed via the County Attorney is extensive, adding to the time it takes to schedule Juvenile Court hearings. These delays influence defense attorney’s to favor stipulated agreements in order to speed juvenile/parent involvement in juvenile drug court. Attorneys are beginning to assess each case for need to attend a juvenile hearing prior to juvenile drug court and press for initial/dispositional hearing when needed. However, parents and juveniles that rise to the level of care indicated by drug court participation would likely benefit from the sobering experience of “face time” with the judge. It appears that stipulated agreements serve as a time saving device for the court, but may not be in the best interests of promoting juvenile/parent change.
- In most cases, Fremont County Juvenile Drug Court provides services for parents and siblings so as to operate as a family court already. However, no adults currently served by juvenile drug court are charged with a law violation under juvenile court jurisdiction, which is the true definition of a “family court”.

A challenge unique to juvenile drug courts is the engagement of youth fully into treatment, including their acceptance of the help that is needed in order to face their abuse. Many youth do not feel that they have a problem, and are often in denial about the problem. At the same time, the difficulty of establishing a pattern of abuse or addiction is present due to adolescents having a shorter history of use than adults.

Fremont County Juvenile Drug Court participants are typically 65% male, 35% female; 51% Native American, 49% non-Native American between the ages of 14-16 and average 3 arrests prior to program entry. 50% have a co-occurring mental health issue; many are diagnosed with learning problems and were not attending school regularly before starting. Juveniles report drug/alcohol use starting from age 7 upwards. Family systems are in need of intervention.

Drug Court is a coordination of community services...

Lora Davidson, Fremont County Juvenile Drug Court.