

12/6-8/2010 SYNC Review

Sheridan County Adult Court Supervised Treatment Program SUMMARY

- The Sheridan County Adult Court Supervised Treatment Program was established in August of 1998 after a one year planning period.
- The program effectively accomplishes their counseling in house which leads to a much more effective client experience.
- Clients seem to be ready to accept consequences and often times call the probation officer to report on themselves; there appears to be good respect between clients and staff.
- Success is celebrated appropriately and consistently. Yet, the reality of treatment and recovery is always present in the proceedings and interactions.
- The Judge is approachable and easy to converse with; he comments in essence that if he delivers expectations to the clients in an appropriate manner while understanding the disease and treating them with respect he believes they can be successful citizens.
- The Sheridan County Adult Court Supervised Treatment Program is an effective program as demonstrated by the following statistics for misdemeanor offenses:
 - At the general time of this review, since this court supervised treatment program has been in operation, the treatment program has saved a total of 21,100 misdemeanor incarceration days.
 - At a cost of \$75.00 per day this equates to \$1,583,250.00 not being spent on incarceration costs in Sheridan County.
 - The average number of arrests per client **prior** to attending the court supervised treatment program is 4.5.
 - If each arrest costs \$1,625.00 this would equate to \$987,187.50 for all client arrests prior to treatment.
 - **After** receiving treatment through the program, the average number of arrests is 1.7 per client.
 - Again, assuming each arrest costs \$1,625.00 the figure would be \$372,937.50 or \$614,250.00 not being spent on arrests in Sheridan County.
- Ironically, the Sheridan County Adult Court Supervised Program is housed in the old Sheridan County Jail where countless inmates have served time for drug and alcohol related offenses.
- Recidivism: A records check on 144 graduates showed 59 arrest or citations being issued on 32 prior clients. Of those, 11 were cited or arrested for an alcohol or drug related offense equating to a 7.6% recidivism rate for this treatment program.

Underlying Theme from this SYNC Review

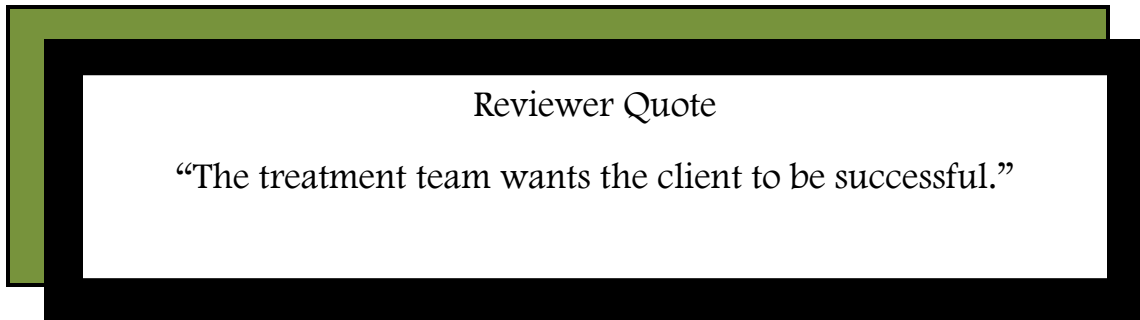
“The Spirit Wants to Survive.”

Access to Services:

- Access to this court supervised treatment program is controlled; a client is typically referred by a court in some fashion and screened for appropriateness.
 - However, there is a much larger systemic issue regarding access to treatment in general that was echoed several times by people interviewed. Based on comments by clients any attempt to seek counseling services on their own through organizations such as Northern Wyoming Mental Health is difficult and awkward at best.
 - Additionally, one client attempted to access services through the local Department of Family Services Offices for the client’s children and was simply “brushed off” and told to take a “parenting class.” This was not an appropriate referral for the issue at hand in this case and clearly whomever the client talked to did not take the time to understand the issue.
 - Services should be coordinated among all providers that no matter what “portal” a client uses to seek services, they are appropriately dealt with and supported through a referral process.
 - The program administrator does a very good job on not imposing limits for program capacity; he is tuned into how his workers feel with regards to how many participants can be in the program at any one time.
- When asked how one would receive substance abuse and/or mental health services in the community if not through this court supervised treatment program, several professional individuals interviewed in this process did not have any suggestions as to how that would look for those needing these services in Sheridan County. Again, this is not specific to this court supervised treatment program but speaks to a much larger issue in Wyoming.
- In Wyoming, dual occurring (mental health and substance abuse) treatment programs are difficult to find and it is no different in Sheridan County.
- Prior to being admitted into this court supervised treatment program, one client reported waiting for seven months to be admitted into a VOA treatment facility.¹
- Client was thankful for 4th driving while under the influence charge as it opened up a door for entry into this court supervised treatment program.

¹ This proper name of this VOA treatment facility has been shortened as it specifically identifies gender by its name. Every attempt is made to keep SYNC reports as gender neutral as possible.

- While this is a real testament to the quality of this program, it does lend itself to the larger question regarding society being at risk while this individual continued to drive under the influence in three prior situations with apparently no effective services being offered for those incidents.
- A client reported trying to seek services on their own from Northern Wyoming Mental Health however the following obstacles prevented that from occurring:
 - Excess hurdles to “jump” through;
 - Psychiatrist turned the client away saying his/her case load was already burdened with too many patients;
 - Could not get any type of services, including maintenance services until, the ASI² was complete, and
 - No money was readily available for the client to pay for the ASI.
- Transportation for participants may be enhanced by greater use of the available public transportation system.



Quality of Services:

- The Court does a good job of holding clients accountable yet consideration of client honesty seems to be considered in sanctions.
- While not able to “fraternize” outside of proceedings; participants are very encouraging to each other.
- The Judge does a great job of encouraging clients to focus positively on themselves and their accomplishments rather than dwell on the obvious of being involved in a court supervised treatment program. We admire this in the Judge since at the time he has been a sitting Judge in municipal court for many years and sees much negative in the course of his work.
- Clients demonstrated a great deal of motivation to reach their milestones and receive acknowledgment in the form of acknowledgement by the Court, their counselor, probation officer and medallions.

² ASI stands for Addiction Severity Index. More information can be obtained at <http://wdh.state.wy.us/mhsa/treatment/DENS.html>.

- Participants are adamant in the philosophy that if you follow the treatment program “it works!”
- The Judge does a very good job of allowing the clients to communicate with the Court and then explaining expectations to the clients.
- A client in a VOA treatment facility felt that a specific religion was “pushed” in that client’s treatment.
- This court supervised treatment program seems to support continuing education in a very appropriate and productive manner.
- Sanctions are not arbitrary or capricious; they seem to be administered in a graduated fashion.
- Prior to entry into this program a client felt as if nobody cared and his/her life did not matter. Upon graduation, he/she was able to stand in front of a room of people and acknowledge that his/her life did matter; first to him/her-self and also to others.
- When asked, those associated with the program universally feel that the courts and this court supervised treatment program do not treat people of color differently.
 - However, the same people report that the community in general still treats people of color differently.
- A “natural doctor” prescribing medications contrary to main stream medication dispensing seems to be creating some problems for clients and this court supervised treatment program.

Coordination of Services:

- While no prosecutors were interviewed in this review, it seemed based on comments from others that total support for court supervised treatment programs may not be 100% by prosecuting attorneys; this is simply a perception by some.
- There appears to be good community support however not a lot of community involvement and promotion has been done and for this program, that seems to be appropriate. The Judge described it as “known, but not too visible.” We applaud that approach as probably the last thing a treatment program such as this needs is for clients who are in recovery and working the program to be under a “community microscope.”
- Reviewers in this process were not left with the impression that the Northern Wyoming Mental Health (NWMH) center was easy to work with or effective. The Wyoming Citizen Review Panel advocates for openness and transparency to insure that clients have a say in the services that they are receiving. However, based on a number of interviews, there appears to be little if any transparency with this mental health center. Further it appears that they have been plagued by personnel issues and hide behind HIPPA to evade answering questions and being accountable. As one person interviewed stated: “They do not evaluate themselves closely and no one else can look at them closely either.”

- Professionals interviewed not employed by this court supervised treatment program universally commented on the poor quality of assessments from the NWMH.

Systemic Issues:

- While not specific to this court supervised treatment program, participants expressed a level of apprehension about “staying clean and sober” once they have completed the program.
 - Several members of the treatment team were asked about this; all responded that if any client wanted to come back for support and professional fellowship the door was always open. All three reviewers sincerely believe that this is in fact the case of this court supervised treatment program.
- While not sure of the logistics, the Wyoming citizen Review Panel would like to see an “alumni association” of some sort used in Wyoming for a support network for clients who have successfully completed a program.
- It has surfaced from other reviews, and was somewhat felt at this review, that the State Supreme Court might do well to fully understand and support these types of court supervised treatment programs.
- Ironically, one of the reviewers in this SYNC review used to work for Sheridan County. This reviewer noted a great deal of “generational” substance abuse. This reviewer’s time in the system was prior to court supervised treatment programs. The program administrator reports that 5-10% of the clientele are in fact generational.
- Homes and housing in general are much more affordable in this area of the state now for clients as the methane gas boom has moved into a maintenance phase of sorts.
- Court dockets seem to be pretty full in this area of the state; one participant reported that an order to show cause hearing reportedly took nine months to get on the court docket. However, court hearings for participants in this court supervised treatment program run regularly as scheduled thus demonstrating another reason to the benefit of these treatment programs.
- Professionals surrounding this program universally report that Wyoming as a state needs to “legitimize” court supervised treatment programs with standards like other courts in the state.

Reviewer Quote

“This program provides a presence of support for the client, no matter the time or situation. The client felt like the treatment team was responsive and could be called on at any time.”