



## 12/6-8/2010 SYNC Review

### **Sheridan County Juvenile Court Supervised Treatment Program SUMMARY**

- Sheridan County Court Supervised Treatment Programs were established in August of 1998 after a one year planning period.
- The Judge for the court supervised treatment program in transitioning back to the Honorable Judge Sampson who has a long history with this program and is in large part responsible for this type of court supervised treatment program being in Wyoming. Several items are worth notation after observing his courtroom demeanor and visiting with him in person:
  - The Judge brings a personal history to the program, which when understood motivates clients and reinforces the concept that they can aspire to become whatever they want by working their program and staying clean and sober.
  - The Judge is approachable and easy to converse with and has a very clear understanding of what he hopes to accomplish in young people's lives through this program.
  - This review took place in early December before the holidays and the associated stress that time of year often brings. During the court proceedings, the Judge challenged participants to mentally work through how they might handle temptation or stress during this time of the year.
  - Court proceedings are very consistent. The judge hears from the client, the treatment team, counselor and probation.
  - Finally, the Judge allowed parents of juvenile clients to appropriately participate and provide input; however it was clear that in at least one case he relied on his own thoughts and those of the treatment team when handing down a consequence.
- This court supervised program effectively accomplishes their counseling through Big Horn Mountain Recovery which leads to a much more effective client experience. At least for this program, it simply makes sense to have this wrap around approach to treatment.
- Services offered from the Northern Wyoming Mental Health Center are reported by those seeking them and/or those having used them as sometimes not being of sufficient quality, quantity or timely. Since this program contracts with Big Horn Mountain Recovery, this does not negatively affect the quality of this program or the findings of this review.



As shown in the picture to the left, electronically monitoring is effectively used for the least restrictive option possible

Underlying Theme from this SYNC Review

“If we model the behavior we expect, and treat them with respect...”

## Access to Services:

- It seems that some parents are vested in the process and attend the court proceedings with their sons or daughters.
  - From purely an observer’s stand point, the parents in attendance did not seem to treat the court with the respect it deserves.
- At the time of this review, there were twelve juveniles enrolled in this program.
  - This court supervised treatment program is very good at collaborating with others who have a vested interest in the process and keeping their numbers reasonable depending on what the treatment team feels can effectively be managed at any one time. Without any hard line stances regarding how many can be in the system at any one given time, there does not appear to be any significant waiting times.
- An effective evaluation system appears to be in place to evaluate those who may be seeking entry into the program based on their anticipated chances of success in this program.
  - This screening process is reported to take place every Monday when the group gets together and discussed the cases of those juveniles who have received a citation in the past week.
- Both the program and the Court place an emphasis on keeping kids in the community as opposed to sending them out of the community for services; this was noted by the Judge Sampson as being important so that they could continue their education.
- Judge Sampson typically does diversion on the first minor in possession for those seventeen and under.<sup>1</sup> He usually requires three months supervision and then the record is cleaned. This concept, he reports, has created the least amount of repeat offenders in any program.
- Most professionals interviewed report that special services are available in the community for the most part, but there is a wait sometimes.
- Judge Heaphy<sup>2</sup> feels there is a need for greater follow up after a client graduates from the program particularly with regards to showing the effectiveness of these programs.
- Judge Heaphy feels that drug and alcohol use typically get a client into the program but quite often there is an underlying mental health issue that needs to be treated as well.

<sup>1</sup> Depending on the circumstances, Judge Sampson will consider diversion for an older juvenile as well.

<sup>2</sup> Judge Hayden Heaphy is being replaced by Judge Sampson; Judge Heaphy was the Judge for the program for approximately five years.

### Professional Interviewee Quote

“These are dollars well spent by the county and city to effectively treat juveniles.”

## Quality of Services:

- The Program Coordinator for the court supervised treatment program appears to know the administration of the program very well is also very aware of the clients and their individual issues. He clearly has a very good grasp on all elements of this program and that in part appears to be what makes it successful.
  - Those who work for the program administrator seem to enjoy their jobs and respect the administrator.
- The treatment team seems to value education for their juvenile clients and understands that without some degree of learning, the clients may not understand how to be successful and navigate the transition into adulthood.
  - Interestingly, there was only one question on school and education during the court proceedings, however. While some courts observed in this process over the years routinely ask about “school,” this one did not.
- Some of court supervised treatment programs have been more innovative than this one appears to be with regards to engaging the parents in the process.
  - This would lead one to wonder if only the client is treated, and there are little services to remediate or mitigate the environment that the client came from if the client can reasonably be expected to be successful once out of the program. Again, no judgment is passed on this comment, it just casually seemed to reviewers that parents might not be as respectfully of the program or engaged in the process as some of the other court supervised treatment programs in Wyoming.<sup>3</sup>
- Judge Heaphy places emphasis on the fact that in many of these juvenile treatment cases there is a significant mental health issue that needs to be addressed.
- This court supervised treatment program coordinates well with a private program called Big Horn Mountain Recovery Center. Reviewers were very impressed with the quality of services offered by this private provider.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This is of course a very “slippery slope” to navigate as the court itself has little if any supervision over the client’s parents generally.

<sup>4</sup> Further information regarding this private provider can be found at [bighornrecovery.com](http://bighornrecovery.com)

- A client reported understanding the concept of co-occurring disorders and felt that both the court supervised treatment program and the private provider in the client’s case effectively addressed this issue..
- Northern Wyoming Mental Health Center was reported several times to hide behind a “shroud of secrecy” and for the most part was described as being “hugely dysfunctional” even to the point of employing unhealthy professionals and being part of the continuation of system problems.
- As described by several involved in this court supervised program, they types of programs are being asked to do more and more with less resources and no increase in compensation. This reporting is not unique to this specific court either and has been reported in other similar reviews around the State of Wyoming.

## **Coordination of Services:**

- A client was sent to an appropriate group home as a sanction despite the both the mother and the client not desiring that this be done. The court and program do not seem to be driven by emotions but rather by fact and the science behind these sorts of treatment programs.
- Several professionals and clients of this court supervised treatment program commented negatively about the Northern Wyoming Mental Health Center. While we are not able to confirm or refute any of those assertions at the very least there appears to be a disconnect between the Northern Wyoming Mental Health Center and we encourage the administration of that facility to reach out to their community and work through whatever is causing the concern in the areal
- School District #2 and the “smaller schools” are reported to be better collaborators with substance abuse and mental health treatment services than School District #1.
  - It was reported that many of the schools, if not all lack any substantive substance abuse treatment services.
  - It was reported at least twice, that some juvenile clients are “targeted” by school administration when participating in the court supervised treatment program and ostracized by other students.
- One professional reported good coordination with the Wyoming Department of Family Services.
- It is clear that for the most part, this program works with a unified voice and clients would have a hard time finding a “weak link” in this coordinated approach.
- Progressive Youth, a program of Big Brothers/Big Sisters was recognized in a prior review as being a very beneficial asset to this community and continues to be recognized as such in this review.
  - Unfortunately, only the participants that are in this court supervised treatment program through district court can utilize these services.

## Systemic Issues and Observations:

- In very general terms, the Judge Sampson philosophically feels records should be expunged every ten years.
- Several felt that this program is a “well-kept secret” among the community and that those involved in it may not “get the message out enough” to community members about the good that this court supervised treatment program accomplishes in this community.
- Due to the geographic location, some reported that because it was “Sheridan County” they were often forgotten by the state and others.
- It was alarming to reviewers that many of the juveniles reported abusing substances at very early ages; some degree of generational abuse is present in this community estimated at 5-10%.
- When interviewed, Judge Sampson had a very interesting philosophical concept that at its core, seems to make sense. The Judge would not make juvenile delinquency confidential. He felt making it public would allow for greater shame and/or accountability at the time and would prevent records from being opened later and used as a greater cause against the client after the age of 18.
  - The Judge believe that juveniles should receive a “clean slate” at 18 in a lot of cases so that their records are not used against them later and they do not suffer from restriction in moving on to higher education and greater employment.
- In this community, it is reported that alcohol is seemingly involved in almost every community activity and has a long history of such. This is a problem because it creates the impression that alcohol must be involved in order to have fun.
- Discrimination is seen and felt in the community as reported by some interviewed, but not in the Sheridan County juvenile justice system or in this court supervised treatment program.
- Juvenile treatment is more expensive and as such creates a burden on the program administrator to keep it adequately funded.

### Client Quote

“Drug Court Cares!”