

Drug court participants re-offend less often, are incarcerated less

Written by

Tuesday, 10 July 2012 17:13

Drug court participants have lower rates of recidivism, spend less time incarcerated, and make greater progress on social indicators, such as attainment of a driver's license, than do non-participants, according to the first comprehensive study of the effectiveness of Minnesota's drug courts. The Minnesota Statewide Adult Drug Court Evaluation, a two-and-a-half-year study, compared 644 non-participants to 535 participants from 16 drug court programs covering 23 counties. The two groups were matched on key characteristics including criminal history, chemical dependency status, and key demographics. The study was produced by the Minnesota Judicial Branch State Court Administrator's Office.

"The positive Minnesota results further confirm federal government and other national findings that drug courts work," said Chisago County District Court Judge Robert Rancourt, Co-chair of the Minnesota Drug Court Initiative Advisory Committee and President of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals.

"They are a win-win, for the participants, who get help turning their lives around, and for our communities, that gain improved public safety."

The study found that drug court participants have a significantly lower rate of recidivism than non-participants. Two-and-a-half years after entering a Judicial Branch drug court program, about one quarter of the participants had been charged with a new offense, compared to 41 percent for non-participants.

"This study confirms what many of us in law enforcement have believed for years, which is that Minnesota's drug courts improve public safety by reducing drunk driving and other crimes associated with alcohol and drug addiction," said Dakota County Attorney James Backstrom.

The study also shows that drug court participants spent fewer days incarcerated (jail and prison) than non-participants. As a result, \$3,189 less was spent on incarceration of drug court participants than of non-participants. The study calculated incarceration costs using per diem costs, including clothing, feeding, and housing offenders, provided by the Minnesota Department of Corrections.

Minnesota's drug courts have a 54 percent graduation rate, according to the study. Participants typically spend 18 or more months in drug court programs, which include treatment for drug dependency, frequent court appearances, random drug testing, and sanctions for failing to meet court-imposed requirements.

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Drug court participants are more likely than non-graduates to show improvement across a number of what the study calls “community functioning measures,” including:

- Unemployment dropped from 62 percent at drug court entry to 37 percent at drug court discharge for all participants – including those who did not graduate.
- The unemployment rate for participants who graduated from a drug court program dropped from about 50 percent at entry to less than 15 percent at graduation.
- Twenty percent of graduates raised their highest educational attainment during their time in the program.
- Almost three-fourths of graduates who were not compliant with their obligation to pay child support at the beginning of their program were compliant upon completion.

The study found that drug court participants are twice as likely to have completed a drug treatment program (80 percent) than non-participants (49 percent).

Evaluators plan to continue tracking recidivism for the two groups for up to three-and-a-half years and use the study findings to continue to improve the effectiveness of Minnesota’s drug courts.

The Judicial Branch currently operates 38 drug court programs serving 32 counties. The study fulfills a goal of the FY12-13 Judicial Branch Strategic Plan, which called for completion of an evaluation of drug court effectiveness.

The evaluation can be found in the Publications and Reports section of the Minnesota Judicial Branch Website at <http://www.mncourts.gov/?page=519>.

Source: Minnesota Judicial Branch