



Superior Court of California

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The Mental Health Court of the County of Santa Clara**

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The Superior Court, County of Santa Clara, announces the proven success of its Mental Health Court. The Mental Health Court program began as a pilot in 1998, and became a permanent specialized calendar in January 1999. As of January 1, 2001, 56 participants had successfully completed the program. There are currently 211 active participants.

The vision of the Santa Clara County Superior Court Mental Health Court is to bring together the Court, the Criminal Justice System, the Mental Health System, the Drug and Alcohol System, and community treatment to reach defendants with pending criminal cases who are mentally ill, often with co-occurring disorders that relate to mental illness and substance abuse, and to release them from jail into community treatment consistent with public safety.

The Mental Health Court accepts referrals of mentally ill defendants directly from the jail, as well as from other judges and county agencies. Defendants are accepted regardless of whether they are referred pre-conviction or post-conviction. The entire focus of the court is treatment and successful re-entry into the community. In order to graduate, each participant must complete at least one year in the treatment program and maintain medication and treatment compliance as well as sobriety.

The courtroom team includes the Judge, District Attorney, Public Defender, and Mental Health Caseworkers. The program has no outside funding and is supported entirely by the dedication of existing resources from all of the stakeholders (Court, Mental Health, Department of Alcohol and Drug Services, Probation, Department of Corrections, Sheriff), and general funds provided by the County Board of Supervisors.

Our measure of success relates to client success in community treatment resulting in a decrease in the number of days these clients remain in custody and a corresponding reduction in the costs of incarceration. The impetus behind the program was the large numbers of mentally ill defendants being held in jail for lengthy periods of time or being rearrested and booked into jail numerous times at great human cost as well as public expense.

During the 2 years prior to entry into the Mental Health Court, this group of 56 graduates was held in custody for a total of 19,040 days, at a cost of approximately \$1,252,832. The effect of moving these 56 clients from jail custody into community treatment over a one-year period (with successful completion of this mental health program), the actual jail days saved (not having to be served) were 6,013, at a cost savings of approximately \$395,655 to the County of Santa Clara. There were no new arrests for these graduates.