

Background

The DeKalb County Drug Court accepted the first client referral in mid-October 2006. After approximately five years of operation an outcome evaluation was needed. In 2010 a grant applicant to the Office of Justice Programs was submitted and funded for \$200,000 to accomplish the following: 1) complete an outcome evaluation, 2) hire a full time counselor, and 3) to establish an aftercare program. This document addresses the results of the outcome evaluation for the program.

Discussion / Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the outcomes for individuals who were participates in the Dekalb County Drug Court compared to the outcomes for those who applied to the court but were not admitted to the program. The study focused on nine specific targets including demographic information, criminal activity, drug use, treatment information, education information, family information, health information, and employment information using a survey interview method.

The second purpose was to ascertain the feelings about drug court from the graduates and comparison group using a closed structured interview addressing their experience, their likes and dislikes about the court, life before entering or applying to drug court, life after or since applying to drug court, and family relationships.

The third purpose was to gather and evaluate responses from community key informants in a (closed and open) structured interview to specific questions. The questions focused on community feelings toward the start of drug court and feelings now about the court, their feelings overall about the court, observation about drug court impacting crime, jail time and plea agreements, personal feelings about drug court in the beginning and how they feel about it now, the overall benefits of the court to the community, benefits to the participants, and if their was value to individual key informants professional practice, and finally ways to improve the court.

There were 13 drug court graduates and 10 comparison group individuals who participated in the study. There were 11 key informants from 4 different professional groups (law enforcement; public defender office; states attorney office; private law bar).

The study used the Kentucky Drug Court Addiction Severity Index with the addition of experimental questions and self-designed questions for the qualitative investigation of graduates and comparison group. The questions for key informants were designed by the research team.

The small numbers in all three groups of study participants (graduates, comparison group, key informants) allowed only for univariate statistics to be completed. The results were tabulated using counts and percents. The research design was a quasi-experimental non-equivalent comparison group design. Inherently this is a weak design comparing drug court graduates to offenders who were eligible for drug court but were refused for acceptance into the court. The design had questionable internal validity because those refused admission into the court are likely to differ on factors such as pre-treatment motivation; their perceived seriousness of the drug problem and self-efficacy. This is a selection bias. There is no external validity to the study because the participants were not selected randomly.

Even with all of the limitations of the study, there were some differences found between the graduate group and the comparison group. The following table provides a listing of the variables and the outcome which is better for the graduate group compared to the comparison

group. The table is divided by each of the seven target areas and the results of the graduate group which were better than the comparison group. In general, the following graduate participants had better outcomes, which could mean a better percentage or count. Some of the results show fewer percentage or counts which is more favorable to the drug court graduate. Each of the results by target area will be discussed as it relates to drug court.

Graduate Group Outcome Variables Performed Better than the Comparison Group Outcomes

Variable	Graduate Group Outcome
CRIMINAL ACTIVITY INFORMATION	
Probation / Parole	Had fewer group members on probation/parole
Charges	Fewer awaiting trial or sentencing
Jail	Fewer jail sentences
Fines	Lower amounts of fines and lower average fine per participant
Sentences	Fewer number of sentences after entering/applying to drug court
Feeling of seriousness of present legal problems	Less concern across all levels of concern.
Counseling needed for legal problems	No need for graduates compared to some need for comparison group.
DRUG USE INFORMATION	
Drug use relapse	Lower percent of participants relapsed
Abstinence	Higher percent of abstinence and longer period of abstinence
Drug cost	No daily drug use cost for graduates
Drug use	No hospitalization for drug use.
TREATMENT INFORMATION	
Prior treatment for drugs	All graduates had prior treatment for drugs
Prior treatment for alcohol	Larger percentage of graduates had prior treatment for alcohol
Attendance at AA/NA	Larger percentage who ever attended an AA/NA meeting and who attended in last month
Treated for alcohol or drugs as out-patient in last 30 days	Larger percentage of graduates has been treated as an out-patient for alcohol or drugs in last 30 days.
Medical problems not drug	Fewer graduates indicated medical problems.
Mental Health problems, not drug	Larger percentage of graduates reported mental health problems.
Not bothered in the last 30 days	Larger percent of graduates indicate they were not bothered by alcohol or drugs in the last 30 days.
EDUCATION INFORMATION	
Years of education	A larger percent of the graduates had less than 12 years of

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Graduate Group Outcome Variables Performed Better than the Comparison Group Outcomes

(Continued)

Variable	Graduate Group Outcome
Educational milestones	The graduate group had higher percentage who earned advanced college degrees. The graduate group and control group had identical percentages of participates who were full-time students.
FAMILY INFORMATION	
Family history of psychiatric problems	The graduate group extended family members all had lower percentage of psychiatric problems except for maternal aunt, paternal aunt, and paternal uncle.
Family history of alcohol problems	The graduate group extended family members all had higher (more occurrence) of alcohol problems with the exception of sisters which showed no difference between the groups.
Family history of drug problems	The graduate group extended family members had higher (more occurrence) of drug problems with the exception of maternal uncle and brother #1. There was no difference for maternal grandmother, maternal grandfather, maternal aunt, paternal grandmother, paternal grandfather, and sisters # 1 & 2.
HEALTH INFORMATION	
Medical problems	Graduates had fewer ER visits in last 30 days, fewer days in the hospital, fewer days with medical problems, and take fewer prescribed medications.
Mental Health Problems	Graduates had on average fewer numbers of days experiencing psychological problems in last 30 days, fewer out-patient treatments for emotional problems, and fewer hospitalized treatments for emotional problems. Greater percent of graduates were prescribed medication for emotional problems.
Experienced specific emotional problems in last 30 days	Graduates experienced less depression; anxiety / tension; trouble understanding, concentrating or remembering; trouble controlling violent behavior; thoughts of suicide; attempted suicide; experienced anorexia, bulimia or other eating disorder.
Experienced specific emotional problems in lifetime	Graduates experience more depression; anxiety /tension in their lifetime than did the comparison group.
Not troubled by emotional problems in last 30 days	Graduates showed a higher percentage of not experiencing emotional /psychological problems in the last 30 days.

Graduate Group Outcome Variables Performed Better than the Comparison Group Outcomes

(continued)

Variable	Graduate Group Outcome
Current need of emotional treatment	Graduates had a higher percentage of need for current emotional/psychological treatment.
EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION	
Profession	Graduates have higher percent who indicated they have a profession, trade or skill.
Employment Pattern in past 12 months	Graduates have a greater percentage of full-time employment and lower percents of unemployment and being in a controlled environment (i.e. jail, medical)
Average number of days with employment problems in last 30 days	Graduates have fewer days with employment problems compared to the days reported by the comparison group.
Living support	Graduates had lower percent of those who contributed to their living support and for those who got support it was from spouse/partner. Graduates relied on parent/foster parent for support less than did the comparison group.
Paid for work.	In the last 30 days graduates averaged more days working but earned less money on average than did the comparison group.
Other sources of income	Graduates had a lower average cost of food stamp assistance and got higher average assistance from mate, family, friends and child support than those in the comparison group.

Demographic Information

The demographic information suggests that the total number of participants was matched fairly well both between the total number and gender for both the graduate and comparison groups. There was more racial diversity in the comparison group than in the graduate group and this might suggest that the graduate group was more homogeneous and therefore less likely to bring divergent experience and cultural understanding to some of the target areas in the study. The average age of the graduate group was younger than the comparison group suggesting that perhaps maturity in the comparison group might have had an influence on employment, education and drug use patterns. Generally, the demographic information on the two groups was not different enough to suspect a difference in the outcomes in the study.

Criminal Activity Information

The graduate group had better outcomes in the area of criminal activity in the following areas. Fewer of the graduate group was on parole / probation indicating that either they had resolved these issues during the course of drug court or they did not have as serious charges when entering the program. It seems far more likely that the graduates had resolved the probation/parole issues while in the court and the comparison group was continuing to struggle with the issues. The graduate group had fewer individuals waiting for a trial or for sentencing than those in the comparison group. This result comes from the fact that the drug court graduates had less criminal activity (or were not apprehended for the activity) as often as the comparison group. The result shows that there is some change in the drug court graduates regarding criminal activity. Graduates do not, as a whole, commit criminal activities compared to those in the comparison group. In addition, graduates after one year out of the program have fewer jail sentences. This is a logical outcome of committing fewer criminal acts. Graduates may have spent time in a jail prior to entry into drug court and perhaps even received a jail sanction during their participation in drug court but after graduation it would seem that their behavior does not warrant being arrested and placed in jail. The graduates had fewer amounts of fines and the average fine per participants was lower than the comparison group. The graduates also had a fewer number of sentences after entering drug court compared to the number of sentences for the comparison group since applying to drug court. Both the fines and sentences are examples of a lower amount of criminal activity by drug court graduates compared to those who did not enter the specialized court. Drug court graduates had lower feelings of concern for their present legal problems and did not feel the need for counseling related to their legal problems compared to the comparison group.

The overall response to criminal activity comparing the drug court graduate to the comparison group applicant indicates that the graduates have fewer problems in most areas of criminal activity. After drug court, the graduates seem to be law abiding citizens who have far better criminal outcomes than those in the comparison group. There were no statistical tests on the criminal activity outcome but the percentages indicate an improvement greater than the individuals in the comparison group.

Drug Use Information

Drug court graduates one year after graduation compared to those in the comparison group had better results related to drug use. Drug court graduates had a lower percent of individuals who relapsed compared to the comparison group. Relapse was defined as using an illegal drug after a period of sobriety. This would seem to indicate that the treatment the drug court graduates received during the program had lasting effects on their drug use post graduation. The tools learned for sobriety carried for at least a year past their court involvement. The comparison group did not have as good a relapse percentage rate indicating that those who did not receive drug court treatment were still struggling with their addiction. The comparison group relapse rate was 50% showing that every other individual had a relapse while for the graduates it was approximately every 3.8 person. Abstinence from drugs was higher for the graduates by 90% compared to the abstinence for the comparison group. The abstinence was measured from the interview to get into drug court for each group. The results indicate that the drug court graduates began their sobriety immediately and it continued for at least a year post graduation. The average number of months of sobriety for graduates was over two times longer than the average for the comparison group. Higher percentage and longer period of abstinence indicates

that drug court graduates have a high motivation to get clean (free from drug use) and consistently maintain their abstinence while those not admitted to the program continue to struggle with abstinence and were not able to maintain it as long. The court provides tools and structure to help develop the abstinent lifestyle.

The graduates did not have any (\$ 0) daily drug use cost while the comparison group averaged drug use cost of over 10 dollars per day. This indicates the comparison group is actively using drugs while the graduate group is not using and is able to use the money for living expenses or family expenses instead of for drug use. The graduate group was not hospitalized for drug use while approximately one-fifth of the comparison group had been hospitalized for drug use. The hospitalization of drug users is an expense to the individual but to the medical system as well. Drug court graduates are not using medical resources that might be used for others in medical need in the community. Graduates have become better community citizens and better stewards of the resources.

The overall response to drug use comparing the drug court graduate to the comparison group applicant indicates that graduates have fewer drug related incidents. The results seem to indicate that drug court has an impact on the use of drugs by drug court graduates.

Treatment Information

The results indicate that the drug court graduates have been more actively involved in treatment over their lifetime and in the past year than the individual in the comparison group. A greater percent of the graduates have been treated for alcohol or drug use both in-patient and out-patient. This suggests that the graduates were at a point in their lives where they were ready to make a change regarding substance use and that the comparison group members were less committed to the change. The graduates made better use of the community support groups (i.e. AA or NA) than did those in the comparison group, again indicating a more serious commitment to recovery and a connection to the recovery community that goes beyond the control of the drug court program. It is interesting to note that the graduates attended on average three support meetings per week while the comparison group averaged six meetings. This could suggest that the graduates feel that they have their addiction under control and need the support groups for maintenance while those in the comparison group are still struggling for control of their addiction and need more groups as a pseudo form of treatment instead of a support network.

The graduate group had a much lower percent of individuals who were receiving treatment for medical and mental health non-drug problems. Overall the graduates engaged in treatment over a longer period of time and make better use of the community support systems than do members of the comparison group.

Education Information

The graduate group had less formal education and fewer months of training than did the comparison group. The two groups were the same regarding their current status as a full time student. These results seem to suggest that the graduate group of participants were composed more of drug addicts while the comparison group had drug abusers. The addict spends most of his/her time trying to maintain their addiction and does not function well in terms of educational

pursuit. On the other hand, the drug abuser can usually function and is not as controlled by their drug use. The fact that the same percent of graduates and comparison group members are full time students suggests that the drug court graduates have moved past their addiction needs and are able to look at life goals and pursuits as least equal to that of a drug abuser.

Family Information

The family information examined the family history of psychiatric problems, alcohol problems and drug problems for each of the drug court graduates and for each member of the comparison group. The graduate family members generally had lower percentages of psychiatric problems compared to the same family members of the comparison group. The only graduate family members who had higher percent of psychiatric problems were maternal aunt, paternal aunt, and paternal uncle. In terms of an alcohol problem all family members for the graduates reported higher percents of the problem than did the comparison group. This would seem to indicate that for the drug court graduate they have experienced and been exposed to continual alcohol abuse with little opportunity to see and experience a model of abstinence or responsible alcohol consumption. The comparison group had lower percentages of an alcohol problem for all the family members suggesting that the nuclear and extended family had provided some models of responsible alcohol use and that in turn the comparison group individuals were not addicts but perhaps were abusers. The family history of a drug problem shows a larger percentage of family members for drug court graduates for the following family members; mother, father, paternal aunt, paternal uncle, and second brother. The comparison group showed a larger percent for maternal uncle, and brother 1. The results suggest that for alcohol there is a family connection for the graduates but not for the comparison group. The drug problem for graduates has a family relationship for 36% of the nuclear and extended family members and about 14% of the nuclear and extended family members for the comparison group. Future study should continue to investigate the relationship between addiction and family history of drug and alcohol problems in nuclear and extended family units.

Health Information

The health information that was collected covered both medical and mental health. Medically the drug court graduates had fewer emergency room visits in the last 30 days, fewer days in the hospital, and reported fewer days with medical problems compared to the responses by the comparison group. A lower percent of the graduates take prescribed medication regularly compared to the percent of comparison group taking prescribed medication. One could surmise from this data that the graduates require less medical care or engage in less medical care than do the comparison group. A lower percent of graduates regularly use cigarettes, however they consume more than do the comparison group. It raises the question as to whether the drug court graduates have replaced their addiction to drugs with an addiction to cigarettes. This question needs to be addressed in future studies with drug court participants.

Drug court graduates in terms of mental health experienced less psychological problems in the last 30 days, fewer out-patient treatments for emotional problems, and fewer treatments for emotional problems. More graduates took prescribed medication for emotional problems than did the comparison group. The results suggest that the mental health issues for graduates have

been identified and treated appropriately making the graduates psychologically stable with less stability being seen in the comparison group.

The emotional stability of the drug court graduates is further supported by the results of specific mental health diseases compared to the comparison group. In the last 30 days fewer graduates experienced depression, anxiety or tension, hallucinations, trouble understanding – concentrating or remembering, controlling violent behavior, thoughts of suicide, attempts of suicide, and experienced anorexia – bulimia or other eating disorder than did the comparison group. These results suggest that drug court graduates are more emotionally stable than individuals in the comparison group and that part of the stability is in part due to participation in drug court. In addition, a higher percent of drug court graduates indicated they are not troubled by emotional or psychological problems in the last 30 days and that they are not currently in need of treatment.

Employment Information

The employment information addressed percent employed, employment patterns, paid for work, other support, and dependents. The drug court graduates had a higher percentage who had a profession or skill but a lower percent who were currently employed. This could suggest that while the graduates are part of the skilled work force, the current national employment situation holds down their ability to secure employment. In addition, some were not able to retain former employment after entering drug court treatment. Of the drug court graduates who were employed a larger percent were employed full time in the last 12 months as compared to the percent employed by the comparison group. The graduate group had a lower percent of the graduates who were unemployed as compared to the comparison group and none of the graduates were in a controlled environment (jail) so that they could not work while some in the comparison group were in a controlled environment. The graduates had a fewer number of days of employment problems in the last 30 days compared to the comparison group. The results suggest that the graduates are better adapted to the work milieu and do not have substance abuse issues to disrupt their ability to get along in the work environment.

A lower percent of drug court graduates have someone who contributed to their support and of those who did contribute the greatest percent was from spouse while the majority of the support for the comparison group was from parent/foster parent. The drug court graduate seems to be able to provide for him/herself and the additional support is from a spouse which is normal. The graduate seems to be normal in the employment area and is comparable to others in society. The drug court graduate in the last 30 days worked more days than the comparison group but earned less money. The results suggest that the graduates are able to hold employment but that their earning potential is not at the same level as the comparison group. This difference could be because the graduate has not been at the job as long as the comparison group who did not interrupt their employment career for treatment. The drug court graduate gets less from government support (i.e. food stamps) than does the comparison group but they have higher financial support from spouse or child support. Generally, the drug court graduate seems to be reintegrated into the employment world and is making a contribution to society.

Qualitative Responses

The drug court graduates were asked to respond to a question on the drug court experience and generally the answers were positive. Many felt the program was good and that it had a long lasting effect on their lives. The comments also expressed the amount of struggle the participants endured to change their lives. In particular most identified that the program was long and that it was difficult. All of these comments would suggest that the program initiates a change in the participant not only in terms of no drug use but also to change thinking patterns, friends and places they go.

When asked what the graduates liked most about the drug court they identified that the court provided encouragement and support as well as a structure that they felt helped them reach graduation. The responses suggest that the relationships and the approach of mutual respect was a key component for the success of the court program. Future studies should examine the relationships between the drug court participants and the drug court staff looking for a variable that might influence the success of treatment courts as well as traditional court proceedings.

When asked what the graduates liked least about the drug court they identified just about everything in the program (i.e. journals, sanctions, court, drug testing, etc.). One interesting comment was that the team was too protective and did not give the participants a chance (to succeed or fail). This seems to be an important facet to consider. Often the drug court team becomes so vested in the success of the participants that they fail to recognize that the participant is an adult who can and does make decisions. Future research should look at the balance between providing direction to participants but not removing the participant's right to self determination. The comments about the program requirements such as journals, sanctions, etc. suggest the need for the team to constantly monitor those responses to make sure there are continuous valid reasons for their use.

Graduates and comparison group members were asked to respond to describing their lives before applying to or entering into drug court. Participants in both groups identified common themes (dysfunctional, out of control, used everyday, just terrible). It seems that the responses give a good picture of the destructive pattern of drug use. All of the participants in both groups had a sense that they had lost control of their lives and that loss was having damaging effects personally, professionally and in relationships with their families. The results suggest that there are no successes for anyone involved in substance use regardless of whether they enter a drug court or not.

Graduates and comparison group individuals were asked about how life is after drug court or since applying to drug court. The essential differences between the two sets of responses for the comparison group are in the areas of being unsure about pending charges, struggling about their sobriety and a sense of life being chaotic. The comparison group also expressed a level of success at overcoming their substance use without the assistance of the court system. They expressed joy, happiness, enthusiasm, hope and sobriety for a period of time. The graduates almost completely expressed a feeling of success, happiness, optimism, aspirations, hopeful, sobriety, and having a good job. There is no doubt for the graduates that they have overcome a huge obstacle in their lives and they recognize what has been accomplished. The success of the comparison group is fragile at best while the success of the graduate group is stable. The difference the court program makes is providing the tools for the participants to feel confident in their ability for the future. Additional future study needs to follow both groups for a period of time to see if the current outcomes continue.

Graduates and comparison group individuals were asked how they would rate the drug court program. Approximately 85% of the graduates had differing levels of appreciation for the

court and only 15% did not have an opinion. None of the graduates had a negative response to the program. The comparison group clearly identified the strengths of the drug court and recognized what they missed by not being admitted to the court. The results suggest that the program is meaningful and successful to the graduates and the success is observed and recognized by others not in the program.

Finally, graduates and comparison group members were asked about specific improvement categories in their lives (i.e. family relationships, self-esteem, friend relationships, drug/alcohol use, and quality of life). The graduates showed greater improvement over the comparison group in each area except for relationship with friends. Graduates improved their relationship with family members, increased their self-esteem, decreased their drug/ alcohol use, and improved their quality of life. Each of these areas showed a greater percent of improvement than the same areas for the comparison group.

The results suggest that the court program has a greater effect on the lives of the participants than just simply stopping the drug use. This change is far greater than the change made by the comparison group. The only area where the graduates did not exceed the comparison group was in relationships with friends and this is probably because the graduates have been told that they need to change friends to keep a sober life style. The old friends were their drug using associates and not appropriate for their new sober life. However, the relationships with new sober friends showed marked improvement for graduates. Future research should continue to monitor the improvements the graduates have experienced to see if the improvements hold true in the future or if they migrate back to old friends without the support of the court program.

Key Informants Responses

The purpose in asking for responses from the key informants was to try and ascertain the value of the drug court program to the community and to the offices that would use the program for their clients. The key informants were asked about the initial community reaction to the drug court when it first started. A fairly large percent of the responses were negative and secondly neutral concerning the court. This result suggests that either the drug court concept had not been adequately presented to the community or that the community did not believe in the concept regarding rehabilitation and treatment for drug offenders. The community reaction to drug court was asked again after six years of operation and there were zero negative responses and a lower percent of neutral responses to drug court. The results suggest that drug court has established an acceptance level in the community and the presentation of the program to the community is well established. The key informants rated the court overall as being good with the ratio being 4 good responses to 1 bad response. The result clearly indicates that the court is considered to be a good effective tool in the community criminal justice system. The same key informants were asked to evaluate from their perspective the impact on several areas of criminal justice (i.e. reduction in crime, time in jail, and plea agreements). In all three areas (crime, jail and plea) the key informants felt the program had reduced crime, reduced the amount of time spent in jail and that it had a positive impact on plea agreements. The results would suggest that the program serves the safety of the community and is cost effective and helps give better options for the individual charged with a drug crime.

The key informants were asked to respond to questions that asked about their personal responses to the court. A large percent of the informants felt positive about the program at the beginning of the drug court and that positive feeling continues after six years of operation. This

result seems to indicate that the court is meeting the expectations of the key informants on a personal / professional level. In the future continued monitoring of the key informants for feedback on the court would be invaluable in keeping the program meaningful for the professionals who use the program. The informants were asked if the court had been of value to their professional practice. A large percent of the informants felt the court had been of value to their practice. This again reinforces the value of the court to help address the needs of the drug client in a therapeutic corrective environment. A large percent of the informants felt that the participants in the program were benefited as well as the community. Again, these results suggest that the drug court has good community and participant outcomes. There is a change in the individual participant which in turn creates a change in the community.

The results of the research outcomes for the Dekalb County Drug Court indicate that the court has affected a change in the participants' lives and the change goes past the time they are in the court. Participants are given an opportunity to not only stop using drugs but to change the direction of their lives and to begin again with tools and opportunities that they might not have had without the court. The community has benefited from the change in their lives reducing the criminal justice cost from such a program. Many in the community recognize the work and success of the court. This report contains a detailed description of the work and success which inherently loses some of the real life pathos of these drug court participants. The future court and participants will continue to add to the successes in this document.