

Dear Judge Chow

People that come  
in front of you.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
OF EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES  
FOR  
KING COUNTY  
MENTAL HEALTH COURT**

Thank you for taking  
It has help me alot.  
When i love  
Keeps me  
out and using  
you thank you  
for the help  
me. you just  
How much it means to  
me all you have  
Done during live. And  
May you help more

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Time. So i will know,  
I never want to go  
Back to the live i  
once lived.

2-26-03

**By John R. Neiswender, Principal Investigator  
Washington State University**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Seven years ago a retired Seattle firefighter was murdered by a man with a history of violence and multiple psychiatric hospitalizations. In the midst of a psychotic episode, the man committed the murder within two weeks after his release from jail on a misdemeanor charge.

The incident galvanized the community and became the impetus for the formation of a task force that studied how the mentally ill defendant was treated in the criminal justice system. One of the numerous recommendations of the task force was to establish and test a pilot mental health court. The 18-month study revealed that the program was feasible for mentally ill misdemeanants and in February 1999, King County District Court Mental Health Court held its first hearing.

Now five years old, the King County Mental Health Court (MHC) has seen significant increases in its caseload, oftentimes doubling the number of clients seen from the previous year. As one of the first mental health courts in the nation, King County Mental Health Court has received a large number of accolades and much positive press coverage. Citations in the USA Today, Honolulu-Star Bulletin, Christian Science Monitor, Seattle Times and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation have featured stories on King County Mental Health Court. Furthermore, the Mental Health Court has been observed by a number of national and international visitors who have considered replicating the court in their own jurisdictions.

The goal of the King County Mental Health Court is to increase public safety and humanely deal with individuals with mental disorders who enter the criminal justice system. This court is committed to focusing resources, training, and expertise on the unique needs of these individuals.

In the Mental Health Court, incarceration is the exception, not the rule.

King County's Mental Health Court works by offering misdemeanor defendants with mental illnesses a single point of contact with the court system. During the process, the defendant works with the court's dedicated team consisting of the judge, prosecutor, public defenders, treatment court liaison, and probation officers.

Defendants may be referred to the Mental Health Court from a variety of different sources. In-custody defendants are often referred by jail staff who have screened for mental health issues. Defendants also may be referred for consideration by police, attorneys, family members, advocacy groups, or probation officers. A defendant may be referred by another District court at any point during regular legal proceedings if the judge feels the defendant could be better served by the Mental Health Court. In addition, the Mental Health Court handles all cases in which competency is an issue for the District Courts.

The Mental Health Court reserves the right not to accept cases into its jurisdiction if a person does not meet eligibility criteria. Likewise, participation in the program is voluntary, as defendants may be asked to waive their rights to a trial on the merits of the case and enter into a diversion or plea agreement, with a community-based treatment emphasis. The exception, however, is that cases in which competency issues have been raised are always eligible for transfer to Mental Health Court. If a person is treated and restored following a competency proceeding they then have the right to decide whether to opt-in to the court.

The Court holds daily (Monday - Friday) first appearance hearings for defendants newly booked into jail. The Court hears status and review hearings on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays (in addition to those days' first appearance hearings).

A court liaison to the treatment community is present at all hearings and is responsible for linking the defendant with appropriate services and for developing an initial treatment plan with the treating agency.

Defendants participate in court ordered treatment plans and successful participation may result in dismissed charges, early case closure, or reduced sentencing.

Defendants are placed on probation and the case is assigned to a Mental Health Court Mental Health Specialist Probation Officer. These probation officers have graduate degrees in mental health and they carry substantially reduced caseloads in order to be able to provide a more intensive level of supervision and expertise to this traditionally high-needs population.

The purpose of this outcome evaluation is to relay information showing the successes of King County Mental Health Court. The data presented in this study show that the program is compliant with meeting its goals as an organization, with respect to client and community benefits. The study confirms that King County Mental Health Court provides an alternative to incarceration that not only is cost effective but that also significantly reduces recidivism. Additionally, the study provides data on the nature of cases faced by the court and on client approval data.

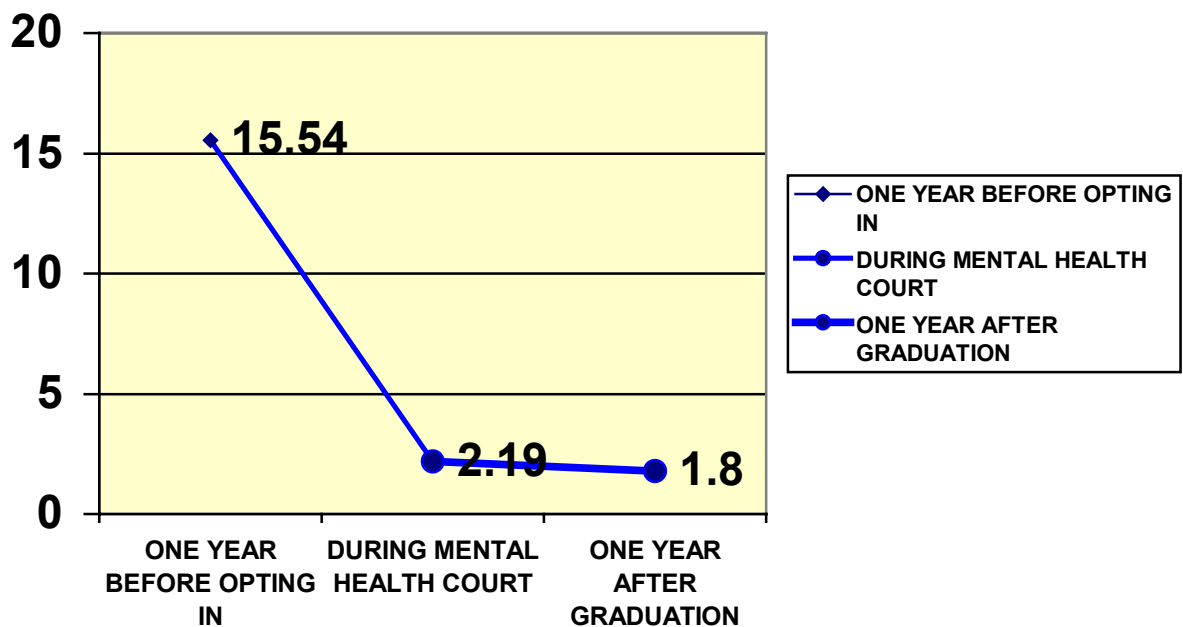
- I. **King County Mental Health Court significantly reduces recidivism (A 75.9% decrease in the number of offenses committed).**
- II. **King County Mental Health Court successfully provides a means to significantly reduce the occurrence of violent criminal activity amongst its participating defendants. Data indicate an 87.9% decrease in the percentage of violent offenses committed by its graduates.**
- III. **The results of the preliminary findings of a client survey study, unsolicited letters and praise, along with the absence of formal complaints indicate that the King County Mental Health Court exhibits a high level of customer and consumer satisfaction.**

## FINDINGS

The focus of these findings is to report the successes of King County Mental Health Court as it relates to recidivism, violence de-escalation and consumer satisfaction.

Recidivism has been defined for the purposes of this study to mean “reconviction” of the mental health court graduate.

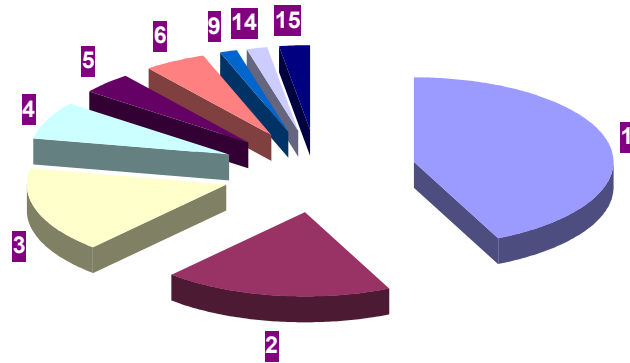
### Incarceration Time (Days)



*The above chart indicates not only a **significant** drop in the time of incarceration one year prior to opting in to King County Mental Health Court and the time in the program, but also a continued drop one year after the client has graduated from King County Mental Health Court.*

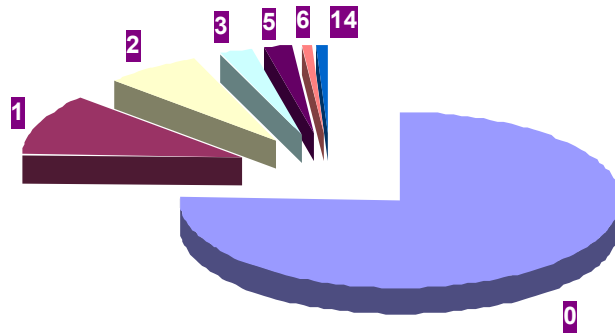
**Reconviction:**

**NUMBER OF OFFENSES ONE YEAR PRIOR TO OPTING IN TO PROGRAM**



*The above chart indicates that over half of all graduates of King County Mental Health Court were chronic recidivists prior to opting in to the program.*

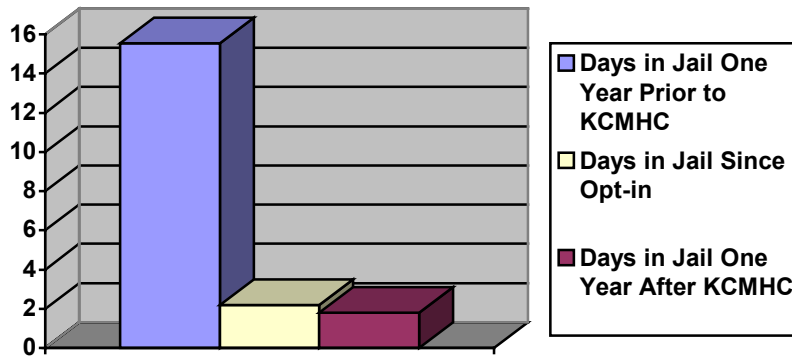
**NUMBER OF OFFENSES ONE YEAR AFTER GRADUATING FROM PROGRAM**



***The above chart indicates that over 75% of King County Mental Health Court graduates have not committed an offense one-year following their graduation from King County Mental Health Court. Over 85% committed only one offense or less one-year following graduation from King County Mental Health Court.***

Besides success being measured in terms of reconviction, success of King County Mental Health Court can also be seen in the reduction of jail time for those who have graduated from King County Mental Health Court.

**Jail Time:**



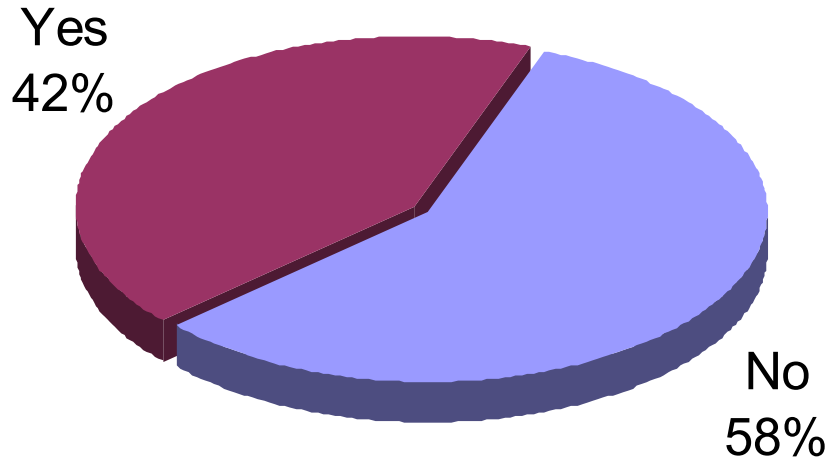
Statistics

	DAYS IN JAIL ONE YEAR PRIOR	DAYS IN JAIL SINCE OPT-IN	DAYS IN JAIL ONE YEAR AFTER
<u>Mean</u>	15.54	2.19	1.80

*The above table indicates that graduates averaged approximately 15 days in jail one year prior to opting in to King County Mental Health Court. Following their completion of the King County Mental Health Court program, graduates spent less than two days in jail - a **reduction in jail time by 90.8%**.*

Moreover, success of King County Mental Health Court is being measured in terms of de-escalation of new charges levied against King County Mental Health Court graduates (if new charges were in fact levied). De-escalation here relates to graduates tending to commit less violent offenses, if they commit any offenses at all.

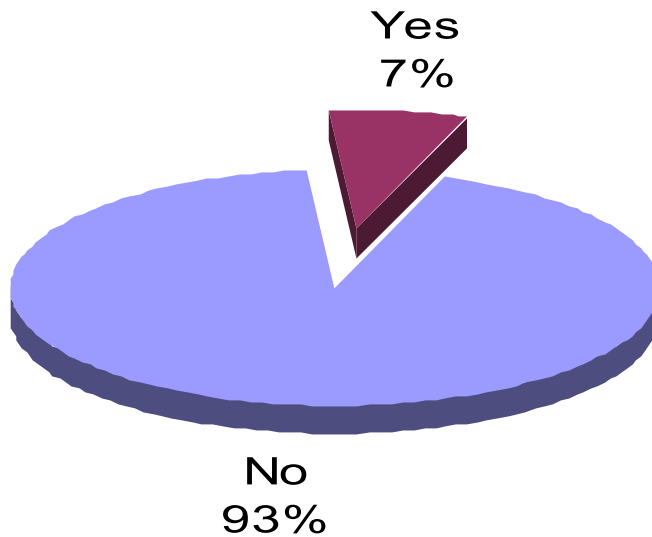
**De-escalation:**



**PAST OFFENSE (VIOLENCE)**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	NO	48	42.1	42.1	42.1
	YES	66	57.9	57.9	100.0
	Total	114	100.0	100.0	

*The above chart indicates that **over half** of King County Mental Health Court graduates had committed violent offenses during some point prior to opting in to King County Mental Health Court.*



**NEW OFFENSES (VIOLENCE)**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	NO	106	93.0	93.0	93.0
	YES	8	7.0	7.0	100.0
	Total	114	100.0	100.0	

*The above chart indicates that over **90%** of King County Mental Health Court graduates **HAVE NOT** committed a new, violent offense. This is a **87.9%** decrease in the percentage of violent offenses committed by King County Mental Health Court graduates.*



## **CLIENT APPRAISAL**

Since its implementation in 1999, King County District Court Mental Health Court has maintained a high standard of service by successfully preventing crime and by reducing recidivism. This high standard of service has also translated into a level of client appraisal. Over the past five years not one formal complaint has been made in relation to King County Mental Health Court.

In fact, over the years King County Mental Health Court has received several unsolicited letters from current and former clients. Here are some of the words of former clients:

*“Thank you so much for the help you gave me. You just don’t know how much it means to me...all you have done in my life. May you help more people that come in front of you. God bless you, and thank you so much. I never want to go back to the life I once lived”.*

*“I consider myself very fortunate. I worked with excellent people who knew where I was coming from.”*

Besides measuring client satisfaction in terms of unsolicited remarks, King County Mental Health Court has also begun a more rigorous study of client appraisal. Begun in the late Fall of 2003, King County Mental Health Court has distributed a survey to current and past clients in order to more objectively determine their thoughts towards the program. The final version of this report is set to be completed by March 2004.

The survey that was distributed contains primarily objective questions regarding the clients’ level of satisfaction with King County Mental Health Court. In addition, open ended questions were included to garner some of the client’s more personal opinions and feelings with respect to their participation in King County Mental Health Court. Those comments include the following:

*“ When I first entered Mental Health Court, I did not want to be there, I didn’t like it. When I started to realize that they weren’t there just to put me in jail, but to try to help me, I started to turn my life*

*around. Now I have two jobs, I keep myself busy, and I'm independent again, that's important to me."*

*"I simply thank this program for the help I did receive."*

*"They didn't treat me as a "criminal", it was a sympathetic process where people were more concerned about me getting better than punishing my crime."*

Preliminary results from the client satisfaction survey reveal a strong level of support for the MHC from its client participants. When asked their overall impression of the MHC, 61.5% found it to be Very Good and 38.5% rated it as Good. None of the respondents were dissatisfied with the MHC. Over 92% maintained contact or reconnected with their family members.

Over 90% felt that their life was better after their involvement with the MHC and 92.3% would opt in to the court if given another chance.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The results of this outcome evaluation show that King County Mental Health Court significantly reduces criminal activity. Additionally, findings indicate that most new offenses (if any) are less violent and result in a significant reduction in jail time. Additionally, oversight is high and is well received by the participants in the program

This researcher finds conclusively that King County Mental Health Court is in complete compliance with the goals of its mission statement. Furthermore, King County Mental Health Court stands as one of the more effective programs of rehabilitation and crime control that has been studied thus far in the field of public policy and criminal justice science. With continuing commitment by the community, the County, and the MHC staff, King County Mental Health Court should remain a progressive, effective and advantageous program in the future.

The researcher would like to thank Judge Mark C. Chow, MHC Program Coordinator/Manager Fredese Whitsett, MHC Manager Karan Waterman, and

the entire King County Mental Health Court staff for their candor and input. Additionally, much credit should go to Derrick Tomasa of Seattle University for his very hard work on this project.

Respectfully Submitted,

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