



# OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Shay Bilchik, Administrator

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## The Juvenile Drug Court Movement

by Marilyn Roberts, Jennifer Brophy, and Caroline Cooper

Many nonviolent, substance-abusing adult and juvenile offenders repeatedly cycle through the judicial system because of a lack of intervention measures that would provide the sanctions and services necessary to change their deviant behavior. To address this problem, some communities have established adult and juvenile drug courts. Beginning as a grassroots initiative, drug courts have spread across the Nation. Currently more than 244 drug court programs are under way or are being planned, with 25 dedicated to juveniles. Local teams of judges, prosecutors, attorneys, treatment providers, law enforcement officials, and others are using the coercive power of the court to force abstinence and alter behavior with a combination of intensive judicial supervision, escalating sanctions, mandatory drug testing, treatment, and strong aftercare programs.

### Drug Court Grant Program

Title V of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Pub. L. 103-322) authorizes the Attorney General to make grants to States, State courts, local courts, units of local government, and Indian tribal governments to establish drug courts. The Drug Courts Program Office (DCPO) in the Office of Justice Programs administers the drug court grant program and provides financial and technical assistance, training, related programmatic guidance, and leadership. In conjunction with other Federal agencies, especially the National Institute of Justice, DCPO will conduct comparative evaluations of drug court programs to identify the most effective program elements and designs to combat drug abuse and crime.

The Drug Court Grant Program is a competitive discretionary grant program to award planning, implementation, or enhancement drug court grants. Through Fiscal Year (FY) 1995 funds, DCPO awarded 52 grants for planning, 5 for implementation, and 7 for enhancement. Another 9 implementation and 7 enhancement grants were awarded with FY 1996 funds. Across the Nation, 12 jurisdictions are using these FY 1995 and FY 1996 funds for juvenile drug court planning or implementation. The FY 1997 Drug Court Grant Program appropriation was \$30 million.

### Juvenile Drug Court Movement

The populations and caseloads of most juvenile courts have changed dramatically during the past decade. Delinquency and dependency have become far more complex, involving more serious and violent criminal activity and escalating degrees of substance abuse. During the past 2 years several jurisdictions have tried to determine how juvenile courts can adapt the experiences of adult drug courts to deal more effectively with the increasing number of substance-abusing juvenile offenders. Juvenile drug courts, however, face unique challenges not encountered in the adult drug court environment, such as the need to:

- ◆ Counteract the negative influences of peers, gangs, and family members.
- ◆ Address the needs of the family, especially families with substance abuse problems.
- ◆ Comply with confidentiality requirements for juvenile proceedings while obtaining information necessary to address the juvenile's problems and progress.
- ◆ Motivate juvenile offenders to change, especially given their sense of invulnerability and lack of maturity.

Accordingly, the development of juvenile drug courts has required special strategies. The following characteristics are common to juvenile drug courts compared with traditional juvenile courts:

- ◆ Much earlier and much more comprehensive intake assessments.
- ◆ Much greater focus on the functioning of the juvenile and the family throughout the juvenile court process.
- ◆ Much closer integration of the information obtained during the assessment process as it relates to the juvenile and the family.
- ◆ Much greater coordination among the court, the treatment community, the school system, and other community agencies in responding to the needs of the juvenile and the court.

- ◆ Much more active and continuous judicial supervision of the juvenile's case and treatment process.
- ◆ Increased use of immediate sanctions for noncompliance and incentives for progress for both the juvenile and family.

## Juvenile Drug Courts in Action

Six States currently operate juvenile drug courts, with the greatest activity in Florida (four programs) and California (two programs). The jurisdictions that are implementing juvenile drug courts with the help of DCPO grants include Pensacola, Florida, and Birmingham, Alabama. The following program descriptions provide an overview of these two typical juvenile drug court operations.

**The Escambia County Juvenile Drug Court.** This Pensacola, Florida, program, which began operating in April 1996, is a 12-month, three-phase approach to treating substance abuse/use/addiction. Phase I lasts approximately 2 months, Phase II lasts 4 months, and Phase III lasts 6 months. The Drug Court judge supervises and reinforces treatment of up to 40 offenders by reviewing reports from the treatment provider to determine the need for either positive or negative incentives to encourage compliance and by holding regular status hearings for program participants. More frequent and intensive treatment services are offered during the early stages of the program. Treatment focuses on motivation and commitment to treatment, the recovery process, development of a drug-free support system, relapse prevention, and preparation for aftercare. Two residential treatment beds are available for the program. Overall, this program provides early intervention and serves as a meaningful alternative to incarceration for the offender who can function adequately in the community with support. The goal of the program is to reduce the recidivism rate for those offenders who successfully complete the program.

**The Jefferson County Juvenile Drug Court.** Established in January 1996, this program is a collaborative effort between the Jefferson County Family Court and the Birmingham (Alabama) Treatment Alternatives To Street Crime Program. The Drug Court track lasts a minimum of 6 months with three phases consisting of weekly, biweekly, and monthly attendance. The court operates on a system of graduated sanctions for noncompliance and

rewards (decreased court contact) for compliance. Services are provided on several levels, depending on the degree of drug involvement. The primary treatment component consists of intensive outpatient services administered through the Drug-Free Program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Drug-Free groups meet twice a week for 12 weeks, but noncompliance can extend time in the program. Juveniles who do not benefit from outpatient treatment are referred to residential treatment or, if necessary, 30 days in boot camp. Compliance with program requirements has increased steadily since the program began, with a 76-percent rate of compliance for October 1996.

## A Look Ahead

Through FY 1996 and FY 1997 funding, DCPO expects to see an increase in the number of juvenile drug court grantees. In addition, DCPO will be coordinating with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to provide technical assistance, training, and resources to the juvenile drug court field. Jurisdictions interested in learning more about juvenile drug courts may obtain a copy of *Juvenile Drug Courts: Preliminary Report*, a summary of a 2-day workshop that focused on identifying the critical components of juvenile drug courts, differences between adult and juvenile drug courts, and the reasons a jurisdiction may need a juvenile drug court. A summary of the proceedings is available through the Drug Court Clearinghouse at the American University (202-885-2875).

## For Further Information

To learn more about juvenile drug courts call the Drug Courts Program Office (202-616-5001), the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (800-638-8736), or the U.S. Department of Justice Response Center (800-421-6770); or visit the Drug Courts Program Office's home page: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/dcpo>, or OJJDP's home page: <http://www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm>.

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