



PEER LEARNING COURT PROGRAM

JEFFERSON COUNTY DRUG COURT

LEAD AGENCY

Jefferson County Family Drug Court

LOCATION

Birmingham, Alabama

FIRST DATE OF OPERATION

February 2012

CAPACITY

Adults: 100

NUMBER OF GRADUATES TO DATE

Adults: 27

NUMBER SERVED

Adults: 176

Children: 322

MODEL

Parallel

DEMOGRAPHICS¹

Population: 660,793

Children under 18: 153,303

Persons below poverty level: 118,942

PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Initiated in February 2010, the Jefferson County Family Drug Court (FDC) was established to serve parents with substance use disorders who have lost custody of their children. The mission of Jefferson County FDC is to create change, rebuild families, and strengthen communities through recovery.

The program is a collaboration between Jefferson County Family Court, University of Alabama at Birmingham's Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities (UAB TASC), and Jefferson County Department of Human Resources (DHR).

The FDC extensively enhances and augments the traditional manner of addressing parental substance use disorders. Through the use of ongoing judicial interaction, frequent and random drug testing, intensive case management, and access to a continuum of substance abuse treatment, participants are assisted in developing parenting and coping skills that allow them to provide a safe and stable home environment.

Jefferson County is the largest county in the State of Alabama, encompassing the City of Birmingham 29 additional municipalities. In 2012, Jefferson County accounted for 15% of the state's reports of child abuse and/or neglect. In order to expand the target population, in October 2014, the FDC expanded to include a second track dedicated for parents with a substance abuse diagnosis. The track lasts 6-9 months and consists of two phases. A separate therapeutic group, court staffing and court review sessions are held for these individuals.

Additional plans for growth include adding another division within the jurisdiction, hiring a peer advocate, and providing technical assistance to other Alabama communities to expand the scale of FDCs within the state.

¹ United States Census Bureau. (2013). State and County Quick Facts. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/01/01073.html>

JEFFERSON COUNTY

PROGRAM GOALS

The primary program goals of the Jefferson County FDC are to:

1. Decrease the incidence of child abuse and neglect
2. Assist FDC parents to become emotionally, financially, and personally self-sufficient and to develop adequate parenting and coping skills
3. Enhance cross-system communication and collaboration
4. Increase the capacity of courts to intervene with substance-involved adults with allegations of child abuse and neglect
5. Expedite permanency for the children

TARGET POPULATION

The FDC is intended to serve parents whose substance use is identified as the primary concern in the safety of children. To be eligible for FDC, a participant must be 18 years old and reside in Jefferson County. In addition, the participant must have a substance abuse or dependence diagnosis.

Exclusionary criteria includes those individuals with a life threatening illness requiring intensive medical care, individuals with prior allegations of sexual abuse or a history of violent behavior.

PROGRAM SERVICES

Referrals are accepted through Family Court and DHR. In addition to unsolicited referrals, the FDC receives copies of all dependency petitions filed in Jefferson County. The case manager makes interest known in relation to cases that appear to meet qualifications for the FDC. The presence of the FDC has increased the number of referrals received by judges, attorneys and DHR. Implementing this early identification practice provides an opportunity to build rapport with the parent at the earliest possible point in the dependency case.

PLC DESCRIPTION



Children and Family Futures has identified best-practice models from across the nation and designated them as mentor sites called Peer Learning Courts. These exemplary programs are willing to help further education about Family Drug Courts through peer-to-peer technical assistance.

Peer Learning Courts provide:

- ***Consultation***
- ***Site Visits***
- ***Sharing of Program Policies & Procedures***
- ***Peer-to-Peer Virtual Learning Opportunities***
- ***Developing Technical Assistance Action Plans***
- ***Operational tune-ups***

JEFFERSON COUNTY

At the beginning of the FTC process, the FDC staff makes appointments with each perspective participant and fully explains the program's purpose and requirements to ensure full understanding and to ascertain interest. Individuals expressing interest are assessed to determine eligibility.

The case is then reviewed by the entire FDC team and recommendations are made for both program appropriateness and what treatment and other service referrals are needed. Program participation and referrals are integrated into the Individual Service Plan (ISP).

FDC participants will have both a DHR caseworker and a TASC case manager assigned to their cases. The TASC case manager will offer support and encouragement, working with the participant to maintain treatment goals, secure housing, obtain employment, meet any educational aspirations, and develop life skills.

Parents have access to an array of evidence-based practices, including The Strengthening Families Program, Seeking Safety, Beyond Trauma and New Life for Women. FDC parents also have access to multiple levels of substance abuse treatment including in-patient, day treatment and intensive outpatient. All treatment centers offer mental health services for parents who have a co-occurring mental health diagnosis.

In addition to substance abuse treatment, other outside resource referrals are made, including parenting classes, individual counseling, anger management, domestic violence prevention education, or any other service or program deemed appropriate by the FDC team.

Program children receive services through Oasis Counseling for Women and Children. The agency provides mental health/developmental assessments as well as play and family therapy. Two inpatient treatment providers allow children to accompany parents.

OPERATIONS: HIGHLIGHTS

Evidence Supported Practices

- Seeking Safety
- Strengthening Families
- Motivational Interviewing
- Intensive Case Management
- Beyond Trauma

Services for Children

- Developmental Assessments
- Play Therapy
- Family Counseling

Substance Abuse Treatment for Parents

- Intensive and Extended Outpatient
- Intensive Inpatient
- Co-Occurring Residential Care & Gender Responsive Treatment
- Day Treatment

Screening and Assessment

- ASAM
- Mental Health Screening Form III
- Trauma Screening

Highlights

- In-home Services

JEFFERSON COUNTY

KEY OUTCOMES

A mixed-methods evaluation of the Jefferson County FDC was conducted in 2013. A comparison study of FDC parents and non-FDC parents was conducted to assess the outcomes of the program.

Program Period Data consisted of 104 FDC children and 34 non-FDC children. These data were from FDC or potential FDC participants during the period February 2010 to August 2013. The potential participants were parents who refused to participate in the FDC. Comparison Years Data consisted of 104 FDC children and 59 non-FDC children. This data set contained information from parents and children during the three years prior to the FDC program.

- An analysis of number of days from DHR intake to close indicated that for the Program Period data, the mean number of days for FDC children was 208.4 and for non-FDC children the mean was 337.4, a difference of 129.0 days. For the Comparison Years data, the mean for non-program children was 334.0, for a difference of 125.6 days.
- For Program Period data, 28% of FDC children versus 25% of non-FDC children were reunited with parents. For Comparison Years data, 17% of non-FDC children were reunited with parents.

Potential cost savings to the State of Alabama based on this data were calculated. An estimate of \$15 per day for foster care or group home care per child was used. With 65% of children placed in foster or group home care, the savings for program children would be around \$1,884 per child. Additionally, estimating \$21,642 as the annual cost for treating one child who was drug exposed, the program's 13 nondrug exposed children resulted in a savings of approximately \$281,346.

KEY PARTNERS AND AGENCIES

Child Welfare & Services for Children

- Department of Human Resources (DHR)

Substance Abuse & Mental Health

- Oasis Counseling for Women and Children
- Gateway Focus
- Aletheia House
- Beacon Addiction Treatment

Courts

- Parents' Attorneys
- Guardian ad litem
- DHR Legal

Other

- University of Alabama at Birmingham's Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities (UAB TASC)
- Fellowship House

JEFFERSON COUNTY

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN VISITING JEFFERSON COUNTY FDC?

Day and Time of Court Hearings:

Pre-filing FDC – 9:00 a.m. Thursday, Traditional FDC – 3:00 p.m. Thursday

Hosting Availability:

Quarterly

Visitor Capacity:

10

Nearest Airport:

Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport (BHM)

CONTACT INFORMATION

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

SUZANNE MUIR

401 Beacon Parkway West
Birmingham, AL 35209
Phone: (205) 917-3784

JUDGE

HONORABLE ALAN W. SUMMERS

Jefferson County Family Drug Court
120 2nd Court North
Birmingham, AL 35204
Phone: (305) 638-5691



This project is supported by Award No. 2013-DC-BX-K002, awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs.