

# LAS VEGAS JUSTICE COURT DRUG COURT PROGRAM

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Clark County Drug Court Program is a court-supervised, comprehensive treatment collaborative for misdemeanor habitual drug offenders. This program uses a team approach composed of a presiding Drug Court judge (Justice of the Peace Ann E. Zimmerman), representatives from the district attorney's office, public defender's office, Clark County's Parole and Probation (if applicable), treatment providers (Choices Group and WestCare), and a program coordinator/ Specialty Court Specialist. The program includes regular court appearances before the presiding judge.

Program participants are identified through the substance abuse evaluation process or case negotiations. Either way, offenders are screened and determined appropriate to participate. Proposed participants are excluded from program participation if they have a history of sexual offenses, arson, and other safety issue that compromises the safety of the treatment community. All treatment providers have minors on property and their safety is paramount. Potential participants who present with severe psychosis are referred to a mental health court or Southern Nevada Mental Health Services based on their needs, per ADA regulations. The emphasis of the program is treatment, which includes individual and group counseling, regular attendance at self-help meetings (such as Alcoholic's Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous), and random, as well as regular, alcohol/drugs testing.

Treatment is generally provided on an out-patient status. The specific level of care is assessed on an ongoing basis to ensure that the proper level of care is being provided. Participants undergo a risk and needs assessment. After eligibility is determined, participants are accepted into the program, attend orientation at Choices Group, Inc and given a treatment schedule. This determines the initial level of care. Participants undergo a formal mental health evaluation per the recommendation of Choices when there is a presentation of such symptoms to ascertain, and/or rule out, any co-occurring disorders, and to again ensure an appropriate level of care is being provided. Participants that are identified as requiring a greater level of care, or specialized care, are appropriately referred. Ongoing aftercare services are available to all program graduates. With perfect compliance, participants can complete the program in six months. Typically, participants will relapse approximately seven times before attaining perfect compliance. These relapses are considered a "teaching moment" and are treated as such requiring written assignments such as triggers, letters to the judge for commitment level to this opportunity, relapse prevention plans, with remand as a last resort. (See below)

Program non-compliance is viewed as a detriment to the integrity of the therapeutic process and as such not tolerated. Participants identified as non-compliant are imposed a range of sanctions, which include: increase levels of care, more frequent court appearances, increased drug testing, return to custody, moving into a sober living environment, or program termination, and/or any combination thereof. Sanctions are usually recommended to the Drug Court team and generally imposed by the presiding judge.

The program's length is determined by each participant's progress, but is no less than six months. Each candidate for graduation is submitted to the presiding judge for consideration and approval. A formal graduation ceremony is conducted in open court to celebrate the participant's accomplishments and to serve as an inspiring motivation for new participants as well as a testimonial of the program's effectiveness. Graduates are encouraged to speak candidly to their cohorts and express what they have learned about their journey.

When participants graduate, their cases will be left open if their program fees are not paid. They receive status checks and the opportunity to make payments. The cost of the program for participants is \$400.00. This is a nominal cost compared to the cost of providing treatment, drug testing, and court supervision. The majority of participants are repeat offenders who are homeless, disenfranchised, and unemployed. When at Choices, participants are expected to buy their treatment workbooks after phasing up to phase two, three, and four. Usually by this time, the participants are working and paying for housing and transportation. As a result of their criminal history, most are underemployed. This is why the participant program cost is nominal. The program depends on grant funding to provide for the cost of program and treatment facilitation.

How the program is currently designed, potential participants are identified in any of the Justice Courts; the adjudicating judge refers the case to Justice Court Department 8 Drug Court. When in front of the originating judge, the marshal is supposed to give the potential participant a referral slip with the contact information of the Specialty Courts Specialist assigned to drug court. The potential participant is scheduled two weeks out, and instructed to contact the Specialty Court Specialist for a pre-program assessment to insure the potential participant is an appropriate fit. The exclusionary parameters include severe psychosis that requires a higher level of care, history of sexual offenses that present a potential danger to the treatment community (most programs have adolescent programs), or the potential participant is identified as a substance abuser who has not completed a drug diversion program.

Some potential participants are identified while in custody. The JEA or other court staff will request an assessment be completed before the individual is seen in drug court. Most in custody assessments are the result of a non-compliance remand and are assessed for stage of change. With limited resources and high demand, it is the goal of this court to allocate resources based on need, demand, and participant engagement.

The Specialty Courts Specialist meets with the program manager at Choices Groups, Inc. every Friday between 10:30 AM and 12:30 PM to review all cases on the following Monday drug court calendar. Problematic cases are discussed, sanctions and motivations to engagement are negotiated, and a coordinator's report is sent to the judge, defending attorney, JEA, and court clerk. This allows the drug court team to review the cases of concern, review treatment oriented sanctions, and prepare team members for feedback. This also allows the judge an opportunity to prepare her response for open court and clarify her orders based on her knowledge of each case. The court calendar attends to seventy to eighty cases, per week.