



## DRUG TREATMENT ALTERNATIVE TO PRISON PROGRAM (DTAP)

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### DTAP IN THE NEWS

## County program reclaims addicts' lives, saves taxpayer money

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By Patrick McNamara Arizona Daily Star

The road from drug addiction to recovery was long and difficult for Denise Hotchkiss.

She was convicted of drug offenses twice in state court and once in federal court, spent nearly five years in prison and more time in county jail than she remembers.

"Every time I went to prison or county jail, there's not really a lot to do to treat you," Hotchkiss said.

In other words, go in as an addict and come out as an addict.

That cycle began to change for Hotchkiss, 47, in 2010.

After an arrest for methamphetamine possession, Hotchkiss learned of a new program through the Pima County Attorney's Office that provides addicts with treatment options instead of prison.

"I was adamant that I wasn't going to prison," she said. "I said, 'I'm an addict and need help.' "

Hotchkiss was one of the early participants of the county's Drug Treatment Alternative to Prison program (DTAP), which allows people charged with drug possession to enter into treatment followed by intensive probation.

Now, nearly three years after program began, it has earned praise from prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges and participants.

"This is an incredible cost benefit to the taxpayer," said Pima County Attorney Barbara LaWall.

The County Attorney's Office on Thursday released an analysis showing the successes and benefits of the program.

Conducted by Maimon Research LLC, the report calculates the savings of treating drug offenders through DTAP versus sentencing them to prison terms at slightly more than \$1 million.

The study tracked the program's costs from January 2011 through June of this year. It says the program cost \$786,383, while the expense of incarcerating the same defendants would have been nearly \$1.8 million.

The report estimates the cost per participant at \$15,123, versus \$34,529 had that person been sent to

prison.

LaWall said the savings to local taxpayers could be calculated as even greater because the program's funding comes from grants from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In addition to the fiscal benefits, LaWall said, the program has helped many people pull their lives together and in the process become contributing members of the community.

Participants have to meet several criteria before entering the program. Only people with drug-possession arrests are eligible, not those with drug-sales arrests or offenders with domestic violence or sex-crime convictions.

The County Attorney's Office and Adult Probation Department screen the applicants for eligibility. If accepted, they enter a plea and immediately go into a 90-day treatment program.

After that, participants have 90 days in a transitional housing program. Their participation in DTAP lasts for three years after that, which includes intensive probation, bimonthly court appearances, drug testing, life-skills training and job training.

Pima County Superior Court Judge Teresa Godoy, who oversees the county's drug court and hears most of the DTAP cases, said the program has been a triumph.

"It's remarkable to see the successes they've had," Godoy said.

Godoy said she has seen the ways many drug offenders in the program have turned their lives around. Many have reconnected with family members, moved into their own apartments, found work for the first time in years and gained a renewed sense of pride, she said.

"They're just so excited when they show you their first checkbook or the keys to their first apartment," Godoy said.

Programs like DTAP and the drug court, which are available only to certain offenders, offer more effective ways of dealing with nonviolent drug offenders than locking up people, Godoy said.

That approach has benefited DTAP participant Daniel Leanna. "Things are going well, and I have DTAP to thank," Leanna said.

Leanna, 46, was arrested for possession of meth two times in 2011. At the time, he said, drug addiction had taken over his life.

"I was basically homeless at the time," he said.

Leanna didn't fall into drug addiction until well into his 30s, he said, having served in the U.S. armed forces and later marrying and starting a family.

It wasn't until he divorced and lost custody of his children that drugs began to take a toll on his life. Depression set in, and he quickly fell into addiction.

Today, Leanna has been drug-free for two years, has been working steadily and recently finalized a

home purchase. He and his fiancée also have a 2-year old child.

“He gave me inspiration to stick with it,” he said.

The DTAP program also has created alliances between the two sides usually diametrically opposed on matters of crime and punishment.

“I commend Barbara LaWall for starting this approach,” said Pima County Public Defender Lori Lefferts.

Lefferts said DTAP represents a more progressive way of dealing with nonviolent drug offenders, seeking rehabilitation over strict punishment.

But, she points out, few of the defendants who could benefit from the program ever get in.

“This is a small drop in the bucket,” Lefferts said.

Between January 2011 and December 2012, the period of the recent analysis the County Attorney’s Office commissioned, 52 defendants enrolled in DTAP.

According to the analysis, only 16 participants failed to stay clean. Those defendants were dropped from the program and sentenced to their original terms of incarceration. Another nine DTAP entrants finished the program, and 27 remain enrolled. Another 28 participants entered the program in 2013.

But the total number of felony drug cases filed in Pima County Superior Court on an annual basis dwarfs that which DTAP can accommodate.

In 2012, 1,501 felony drug cases were filed in Superior Court. That represents 27 percent of total felony cases. The number of felony drug cases also includes charges for drug sales and other drug-related offenses in addition to possession.

The volume of cases has forced communities to find new and streamlined ways of handling drug offenders through programs like drug court and DTAP.

“I think it’s been a recognition of the failure of the war on drugs,” Lefferts said.

Lefferts said more treatment alternatives like DTAP are needed in the community to help addicts transition into healthy and productive lives.

“It’s not just a benefit to the defendant but to the community,” she said.

For Hotchkiss, the opportunity to participate in DTAP helped her to completely change her life.

Since finishing the program, she has reconnected with her children and grandchildren and worked a steady job at a restaurant.

“I had to do all the work,” she said. “But if you really want it, this is the program for you.”

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