



*proud past, promising future*

**CLARK COUNTY**  
WASHINGTON

**District Court**  
**Therapeutic Specialty Courts**  
**2014 Year End Summary Report**



# **INTRODUCTION.....**

In 2014, Clark County District Court had three active Therapeutic Specialty Courts (TSC). A TSC is a multidisciplinary team approach to work in coordination with the justice system and several treatment and recovery-oriented ancillary agencies to promote sobriety and well-being, long-term stability, and reduce recidivism. These specialty court programs offer community solutions and a huge cost-savings to traditional case processing. Therapeutic Specialty Courts started in 1989 in Miami—Dade County, Florida with the first Drug Court Program. It was born out of an idea that community safety and accountability can be increased by treating substance-abusing offenders in the community, thus reducing recidivism and stopping the revolving door of criminal activity.

Clark County District Court had three TSC programs in 2014, the Substance Abuse Court, Veterans Court, and the Mental Health Court. With the help of a special one-tenth of one percent sales tax, Clark County has been able to maintain, create or expand upon substance abuse and/or co-occurring treatment services in the community. 2014 marks the 14<sup>th</sup> year District Court has had TSC programs.

Eligible program participants are identified early in the justice system which accelerates their ability to return to the community with a wrap-around treatment of care approach working towards sustained recovery. This report summarizes the 2014 activity of the programs. I would like to thank the Clark County Community at large for the support of the Therapeutic Specialty Court programs. There are countless agencies and personnel that give their heart and souls to the Therapeutic Court programs and the participants we serve. But I would especially like to thank the hard work and effort that our participants and alumni put in 24 hours a day, dedicating their life to recovery.



Shane Wolf  
District Court TSC Coordinator

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# **SUBSTANCE ABUSE COURT.....**

Honorable Kelli Osler Presiding

- Started April 1999
- 168 Total Graduates through 2014
- Court held Tuesdays at 10:30 a.m. and 2 p.m.  
Main Courthouse, Courtroom 2-3, Second Floor  
1200 Franklin, Vancouver WA

Active Caseload December 31 <sup>st</sup> 2014	40
Opt In	39
Graduated	21
Opt Out	2
Terminated	19
Deceased	1
Referrals to Program	143
Referrals Accepted	59
Referrals where Client Declined	30
Referrals with Disqualifier	51
66% Accepted Referrals Opt Into Program	

Substance Abuse Court (SAC) is a twelve month minimum District Court Therapeutic Specialty Court program that monitors misdemeanor offenses in a judicially supervised court program that promotes sobriety, recovery and stability through a coordinated team approach. The team is a collaboration of substance abuse treatment agencies, probation and law enforcement agencies, a court coordinator, and traditional court staff. The SAC program utilizes a myriad of ancillary recovery support systems to help each participant reach their potential and reduce any barriers getting in the way of their success. The judge employs the use of a graduated system of sanctions and incentives within a four-phased structure to monitor and motivate offender behavior change. The program has been in existence for 14 years.

# VETERANS COURT.....

Honorable Vern Schreiber Presiding

- Started April 2011
- 25 Total Graduates through 2014
- Court held Wednesdays at 10:00 a.m.  
Main Courthouse, Courtroom G-3, Ground Floor  
1200 Franklin, Vancouver WA

Active Caseload December 31 <sup>st</sup> 2014	19
Opt In	13
Graduated	10
Opt Out	0
Terminated	5
Deceased	0
Referrals to Program	29
Referrals Accepted	12
Referrals where Client Declined	5
Referrals with Disqualifier	12
82% Accepted Referrals Opt Into Program	

The Veterans Therapeutic Court is an alternative treatment and sentencing option for veteran defendants suffering from an underlying substance abuse and/or co-occurring mental illness and facing misdemeanor criminal charges. Veterans are identified early through specialized screening tools and must voluntarily participate in a judicially supervised treatment plan developed by a team of court staff, probation and law enforcement officers, veteran peer mentors, veteran resource professionals, and treatment professionals. The program is a minimum of one year in length. Because each branch of the military has its own culture, its own language, code of conduct, rules, regulations, norms, ranks, stories, legends, rituals and rites, we feel we are justified in creating a separate specialized court docket dedicated solely to address the specific needs of our service men and women and forge a stronger relationship with the VA. Another component of the program is pairing a veteran mentor with a veteran court participant to provide additional support and camaraderie through the program.

# MENTAL HEALTH COURT.....

Honorable John Hagensen Presiding

- Started April 2000
- 325 Total Graduates through 2014
- Court held Wednesdays at 2:00 p.m.  
Main Courthouse, Courtroom 2-5, Second Floor  
1200 Franklin, Vancouver WA

Active Caseload December 31 <sup>st</sup> 2014	24
Opt In	17
Graduated	24
Opt Out	0
Terminated	17
Deceased	0
Referrals to Program	117
Referrals Accepted	31
Referrals where Client Declined	34
Referrals with Disqualifier	48
55% Accepted Referrals Opt Into Program	

Mental Health Court (MHC) is a Clark County District Court Therapeutic Specialty Court program that offers eligible participants the chance to enter an alternative treatment and sentencing alternative program for defendants with a serious and persistent mental illness that are facing misdemeanor criminal charges. The team is a collaboration of mental health treatment agencies, probation and law enforcement agencies, a court coordinator, and traditional court staff.

To participate, the defendant must enter a plea of guilty and voluntarily agree to enter and abide by the conditions set forth in the program. The mission of Mental Health Court is to promote public safety, reduce criminal activity associated with offenders with a mental illness, and enable the participant to live productive and law-abiding lifestyles in our community. The judge employs the use of a graduated system of sanctions and incentives within a four-phased structure to monitor and motivate offender behavior change. The program has been in existence for 14 years.

## **Coin a reminder of veterans court graduates' trials, triumphs**

**Vancouver man is first to receive honor**

<http://www.columbian.com/news/2014/sep/24/clark-county-veterans-court-honor-coin/>



*Graduating veteran Jan "Jay" Couch is congratulated by Judge Vernon L. Schreiber at the Clark County Courthouse in Vancouver on Wednesday. Couch received a certificate as well as a commemorative coin at the ceremony. (Natalie Behring)*

By [Erin Middlewood](#), Columbian special projects reporter

Published: September 24, 2014, 4:34 PM

Jan "Jay" Couch has spent 47 of his 66 years in and out of jail.

Now he carries a coin to remind him that he's done with all that.

Couch graduated from Clark County Veterans Therapeutic Court on Wednesday.

He was the first to receive a new honor coin that all graduates will receive to remind them of what they've been through, as well as the importance of sticking to the law-abiding and sober habits they built through the court program.

Couch, who began drinking alcohol at a young age, took up methamphetamine after he ended a four-year stint in the Navy in 1970.

"I was pretty much a hell-raiser all my life. Veterans Court has put the slam dunk on that," said Couch, a Vancouver resident.

District Court Judge Vernon Schreiber presented him with the honor coin designed by Derek Fuller, a U.S. Army sergeant medically evacuated from Iraq in 2008. Fuller recently completed his associate degree at Clark College, and he now attends Washington State University.

One side of the coin displays the seals of all five military branches. The other features Southwest Washington icons Mount St. Helens, Fort Vancouver and the Esther Short Park clock tower.

Schreiber invited Fuller to attend Wednesday's ceremony. It was the first time the artist had a chance to hold and inspect the product of his design.

"It's amazing to see months of hard work coming together," said Fuller, a 32-year-old Vancouver resident.

"Thank you, brother," Couch told him. "It's a beautiful coin. It will be with me for always."

Clark County is one of seven counties in Washington that offer a therapeutic court for veterans. Before Couch, 25 had graduated from the local program since its inception in 2011.

The program provides alternative treatment and sentencing for veterans arrested on misdemeanor charges who have trouble with substance abuse or mental illness.

The veterans receive help from court staff, law enforcement officers, peer mentors, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and treatment professionals over the course of at least a year.

"While a lot of us have been able to sit in the comfort of our living rooms ... people have voluntarily taken time out of their lives to defend this country," Schreiber said.

Veterans court gives vets a chance "to address issues those of us who have never been in that situation can never understand," he added.

Schreiber would like to see the veterans court program grow. About 25 are enrolled, but the program has capacity for 50.

The program costs a few thousand dollars per participant, but saves much more by keeping veterans who make mistakes from revolving through jail and court, Schreiber said.

He sees the difference the program makes in their eyes. That's why, in addition to a certificate and now a coin, Schreiber gives graduates a printout of all their previous booking photos.

"The changes in the faces," he said, "are amazing."

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# Mental health court a 'safe zone' of help

## Assistance program for those in criminal justice system not feeling pinch, official says

By [Stephanie Rice](#), Columbian Vancouver city government reporter

Published: September 29, 2014, 6:00 AM

<http://www.columbian.com/news/2014/sep/29/mental-health-court-safe-zone-of-help/>



*Tracey Green walks out of District Court Judge John Hagensen's courtroom with a smile on her face Wednesday after having a successful appearance in Clark County Mental Health Court. ([Zachary Kaufman/The Columbian](#))*

**Tracey** Anne Green walks 9 miles round-trip to make her Clark County Mental Health Court appearances.

“That’s my meditating time,” Green said Wednesday following a five-minute check-in with a judge.

Green, 53, has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression. She doesn’t travel by bus from her Hazel Dell mobile home to the Clark County Courthouse in downtown Vancouver because she’s uncomfortable in confined spaces with strangers, a result of being sexually assaulted. She had a clean record until a few years ago, when she was arrested, on separate occasions, for driving under the influence and attempting to steal clothes from a Wal-Mart.

The sudden spiral of offenses triggered a referral to mental health court.

For the first time in her life, she was evaluated and began receiving treatment.

"I just kept thinking that was a part of life," she said Wednesday, referring to panic attacks she'd been experiencing.

She's on track to graduate Oct. 22 from the 16-month mental health court program. On Wednesday, she was praised by District Court Judge John Hagensen for staying on track despite challenges such as the retirement of her therapist. Hagensen asked Green how it was going with a new therapist. She said it was fine, and she thanked Hagensen and the court staff for their support.

"You're the one who has done it all," Hagensen told her. "Hopefully, you take some pride in that."

Before she started out on her walk home, Green expressed gratitude for the program.

"This is like a safe zone," she said, adding that the 16-month commitment has helped her stay clean and settle into a routine with therapy and taking medication.

"It's not just, 'Hey, wham, bam,' and they push you out the door," she said.

## Court resources

Modeled after drug courts through which nonviolent addicts receive substance abuse treatment, mental health courts attempt to reduce the number of mentally ill defendants cycling through the criminal justice system for minor, nonviolent offenses.

While the number of people eligible for mental health services through Southwest Washington Behavioral Health Regional Support Network has grown by more than 30,000 since the Medicaid program expanded this year, the extra pressure on the already stressed system won't affect mental health court, said Shane Wolf, District Court's therapeutic speciality courts coordinator. The network works with the program to make sure clients are able to receive treatment from providers such as Columbia River Mental Health, Community Services Northwest and Lifeline Connections.

The court has a capacity of 50 clients. That limit is driven by court resources, not community resources, said Wolf, whose \$58,848 annual salary comes from revenues from a one-tenth of one percent sales tax increase Clark County approved in 2006 to help pay for drug and mental health treatment.

Nationwide, there are three times more seriously mentally ill people in jails and prisons than in hospitals, according to a 2010 study by the National Sheriff's Association and the Treatment Advocacy Center. The study also found that in 1955 there was one psychiatric bed for every 300 Americans, and by 2005 there was one psychiatric bed for every 3,000 Americans.

In Washington, 10 of 39 counties have mental health courts, according to the Administrative Office of the Courts.

All of the programs are voluntary.

Following King County's lead, Clark County started a program in 2000. Early findings were encouraging. A 2003 report by Portland State University's Regional Research Institute for Human Services included a study of 119 Clark County defendants. In the six months before signing up for mental health court, the 119 defendants had been booked into jail a total of 288 times.

After six months in the court program and meeting regularly with a judge, fewer than one-third of the participants had been re-arrested.

More than 320 people have graduated from Clark County's mental health court.

Even among those who fail to complete the program, re-offense rates are lower than among defendants who don't participate at all.

To qualify, there must be a nexus between the mental health diagnosis and the crime, Wolf said. Defendants plead guilty and pay a \$100 court fee.

If they graduate, the conviction stays on their records, but their probation ends and they don't have to pay \$2,400 in probation fees.

Since 2009, the most recent year detailed statistics are available, recidivism rates ranged from 14 percent for graduates to 28 percent for people who were kicked out of the program, Wolf said.

Recidivism rates vary by type of crime and offender, but can be as high as 70 percent for defendants who don't receive any type of treatment, said Clark County District Court Judge Vernon Schreiber, citing a study from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

## The next step

Green first received treatment through the criminal justice system, but most mental health court participants have been diagnosed before they are ever arrested, Wolf said. Many report not staying on medication, particularly anti-psychotic drugs, because they don't like the side effects such as drowsiness. Or they start feeling better and believe they can stop taking medication.

Dustin S. Richardson, 23, who graduated from court Wednesday, had been avoiding treatment for behavioral disorders for as long as he can remember. Diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, he was on an individualized education program throughout school. He was referred to mental health court after he was arrested for trespassing; his mother, who has custody of his daughter, called 911 after he refused to leave her property.

On Wednesday, Hagensen congratulated Richardson for making therapy a priority.

"The whole program is designed to give people some tools to get back on their feet," the judge said.

Richardson has a full-time job and a place to live. The next step, he said, will be trying to get his daughter back.

Richardson told the other mental health court participants that his motivation to sign up for the court was to avoid jail, but eventually he came to terms with the fact that he needs to stay on his medication and in counseling.

"That's 20 years in the making," he said.

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# **LETTER FROM GRADUATE.....**

Initially, I was just jumping through the hoops and doing what I had to get through the process. I had been an active alcoholic for 20 years, You see, some of you may not know that prior to being arrested and charged with DUI, I didn't care. I was at one of the lowest points in my life, and I didn't care if I woke up in the morning or not. I drank with Methadone and oxycodone, knowing full well that I could go into respiratory arrest in my sleep, and I didn't care. Showing up for work as a Department Supervisor, still fully drunk from the night before, and staggering when I showed up to work. I didn't care. I very nearly alienated my entire family through a violent temper, unpredictable outburst, and intimidation. I didn't care.

The Veteran's Court process, and those who work within, and along with the SATP, showed me that others do care, and I learned to care as well. My psychologist with the Vet Center, used to ask me "Are you worth it?", meaning am I worth it enough to stop drinking. It took me a long time to give an answer other than "I don't know". At some point I learned that life is worth living, and I did care.

This past September 14 marked my birthday of two years. I have been sober for over 734 days at this writing, and I cannot think of a better place to be than sober today. I don't even think about drinking, as any memories that I have of alcohol are bad ones. And those are only the ones that I remember.

Everyone has seen black and white movies, and that's what my life was like for over 20 years. I saw everything in gray. Once I sobered up, and realized that the world is actually in color, I was amazed! As simple as it is, I was floored! I love living in color, and caring.

In conclusion, I wish to thank all of those in the program, whether they directly interacted with me or not. This program saved my life, and I thank you for that.

*- Rodney Clem, Veterans Court Graduate 2014*

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