

Second Chances

AN OVERVIEW OF PROBLEM SOLVING COURTS IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

Over the past few years, several opportunities have been created in San Diego for individuals facing a cycle of incarceration due to substance abuse, mental illness, or co-occurring disorders. A brief look at three programs designed to address the underlying causes of criminality may help you steer clients in the right direction.

Reentry Court Program

The Reentry Court Program (RCP) is designed to break the cycle of incarceration for individuals committing felonies due to substance abuse issues. Many of the current participants in RCP have been to prison repeatedly with no positive change in their behavior patterns. RCP offers treatment instead a return trip to prison. In order to be considered for RCP, an individual must plead guilty to a probation eligible felony and agree that a term of imprisonment will be imposed and stayed, pending successful

completion of probation. Sex offenses and individuals with strike priors are not eligible (unless the strike is stricken during plea negotiations). While in RCP, they will engage in either residential or intensive outpatient treatment, have regular court appearances, and be supported by a team of medical professionals, law enforcement representatives, and the court. Job training and placement assistance are available. Referrals to RCP are made by the by the court taking the plea. Once a plea agreement is



In San Diego County, we are fortunate to have a talented group of treatment professionals, legal practitioners, and judicial officers dedicated to working in a collaborative environment to help find the source of criminal behavior and address it at the most fundamental level.

When these initiatives are successful, we all win.

Lives are changed for the better.

Crime is reduced.

Neighborhoods are safer.

Families are stronger.

Healing can happen.

made, the case may be referred to Dept. 34 for an admissions evaluation prior to the sentencing date. The RCP Team meets every Friday morning at 9:00 on the eighth floor of the Hall of Justice to consider new cases and review current participants. Immediately following the team meeting, participants are seen in Dept. 34 on Fridays at 10:30. If an individual is admitted to RCP, their sentencing will take place in Dept. 34. If they are not admitted, the sentencing date set by the court taking their plea will go forward. By participating in RCP for the full term of probation, individuals avoid a return trip to prison and more importantly, get a second chance to get their life back on track.

Drug Court

Drug Courts operate throughout the county at each branch location as well as the central courthouse. Following the National Drug Court Model, these programs seek to engage individuals with substance abuse problems in treatment as opposed to jail or simply letting them struggle with

addiction on their own without effective support. Drug Courts accept narcotics possession offenses as well as a limited number of felony drug offenses on a case-by-case basis. In order to participate in Drug Court, individuals must have a nonviolent criminal history, be currently charged with a drug-related offense, and be willing to actively engage in treatment. Referrals are made by the readiness department at each courthouse to their individual Drug Court. Upon successful completion of Drug Court, the individual may have their term of probation reduced or their simple possession case dismissed. More importantly, they have the chance to engage in effective treatment and avoid further tragedy to their life caused by addiction.

Veterans Court

In 2011, San Diego County started a pilot program to help Veterans who commit crime as a result of a duty

related mental illness. Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) accepts current and former service members who have been sentenced to probation. Both misdemeanors and felonies are accepted (sex offenses and crimes resulting in the loss of life are excluded). Once probation has been imposed, individuals may be referred for admission to VTC by the sentencing court. VTC will not consider anyone who has not already been sentenced. For a referral, the defense must establish their client (1) served in the military, (2) suffers from a duty related mental illness such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Military Sexual Trauma, or substance abuse, and (3) committed the underlying crime as a result of that mental illness. Once the referral is made, the defense attorney will be scheduled present their case to the VTC Team on a Tuesday morning at 9:00 on the eighth floor of the Hall of Justice. The client will then appear in Dept. 34 that same day at 1:30 to determine whether

they will be assessed by the Veterans Administration for an admissions determination. Both in-custody and out-of-custody clients can be screened for admission. Once accepted into the program, the client will be supervised on formal probation by the VTC Team, be given a customized treatment plan, and potentially have their civil rights restored pursuant to section 1170.9 of the Penal Code. The treatment process lasts anywhere from 16 to 36 months, depending

on each individual's unique needs and progress.

For more information...

Reentry Court Program or Veterans Treatment Court

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Drug Court

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