

Alternative Courts: Innovative and Restorative Public Safety Approaches – Part II

“Reentry Court is the latest step in reducing prison overcrowding, holding offenders accountable, and addressing the threat to public safety.”

- *San Diego County District Attorney
Bonnie Dumanis*

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*Fewer than one-third (31%) of Reentry Court participants were returned to prison within a year of release, compared to 46 percent of all ex-offenders.*

- *Preliminary results from AOC’s statewide evaluation of Reentry Court*

This month’s CJ Fax highlights San Diego County Superior Court’s Reentry Court, one of several collaborative courts<sup>1</sup> in the region that strives to prevent repeat criminal behavior in cost-effective and innovative ways. The increasing importance of implementing cost-effective system-wide approaches, such as collaborative courts, becomes apparent in light of the additional responsibilities placed on the local justice system under public safety realignment.

To slow the revolving door between community supervision and re-incarceration, San Diego County was one of six in the state to implement a grant-funded

Reentry Court in late 2010 to keep ex-offenders out of jail by addressing their underlying risk factors, such as substance abuse, mental illness, education, and unemployment. Using a collaborative justice model, Reentry Court serves eligible offenders (who have been convicted of new non-violent, non-sexual felonies while under community supervision) by integrating community treatment and services with rigorous monitoring by judges and law enforcement. San Diego’s collaborative team includes the San Diego County’s District Attorney, Health and Human Services Agency, Probation, Public Defender, and Sheriff, as well as the San Diego Police Department and California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Participants are selected based on their criminal history, assessed risk for reoffending, and severity of need for treatment. The typical participant is a 39-year-old, non-white male, nearly half (46%) of whom have used drugs for more than 21 years. Participants’ drugs of choice are most often either methamphetamine or cocaine (75%), and nearly two-fifths (39%) have a mental health issue. At entry, most participants are unemployed (90%), do not have stable housing (89%), and two-fifths (40%) have not completed high school. If participants successfully complete treatment, remain drug/alcohol free, and obtain the means to become self-sufficient, the Court can discharge them from community supervision. Preliminary results from a statewide evaluation of Reentry Court revealed that only 12 percent of graduates returned to prison within the first year of entering the program.<sup>2</sup> To date, 30 individuals have graduated from the San Diego program and have avoided a combined 71 years of sentenced imprisonment.

Collaborative courts are just one of many innovative approaches being used to protect public safety, improve offenders’ lives, and ensure justice is served. Additional information regarding the alternative courts described in the June and July CJ Faxes can be obtained by contacting the [San Diego County District Attorney’s Office](#) or the [San Diego City Attorney’s Office](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Collaborative courts include Reentry, Veterans, Drug, Homeless, and Behavioral Health.

<sup>2</sup> Administrative Office of the Courts. (no date). California parolee reentry courts. Available [on-line] [www.courts.ca.gov](http://www.courts.ca.gov)