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## FACT SHEET

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# Dependency Drug Courts

Dependency drug courts—also referred to as family treatment drug courts and family drug treatment courts—were established to assist the courts and child welfare agencies in their efforts to help parents overcome their drug dependency and to provide a healthy and safe environment for their children. Judges, attorneys, Child Protective Services, and treatment personnel work in partnership in a nonadversarial manner toward accomplishing shared goals. This collaboration focuses on providing safe, nurturing, and permanent homes for children while simultaneously providing parents with the necessary support and services needed to address substance abuse and addiction concerns.

### Prevalence

Since the first dependency drug court opened in 1995 in Reno, Nevada, these courts have greatly increased in number. There are currently more than 300 dependency drug courts across the country and 33 dependency drug courts in 22 counties in California.

### Outcomes and Costs

Studies conducted on dependency drug courts have consistently showed successful outcomes. In addition, studies have shown these courts to be cost-effective.

- One study listed dependency drug courts as one of four models that has been successful at addressing co-occurring issues of child maltreatment and substance use.<sup>i</sup>
- A meta-analysis showed that dependency drug court participants were more likely than nonparticipants be reunified with their children without increasing the risk for subsequent investigations.<sup>ii</sup>
- Researchers have also found that the court programs decrease the number of foster care placements<sup>iii</sup> and the amount of time children spent in foster care,<sup>iv</sup> as well as the time involved with the child welfare system.<sup>v, vi</sup>

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- Children of participants have significantly shorter stays in foster care, significantly fewer removals from the care of parents or caregivers, and significantly fewer placement changes while in foster care.<sup>vii</sup>
- Those who completed a dependency drug court program may have fewer psychological problems, fewer trauma-related symptoms, and better family functioning, as well as higher rates of reunification than those who do not complete the program.<sup>viii</sup>
- Overall, cost savings result from parents spending less time on probation or in jail, as well as from reductions in child welfare and foster care costs.

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<sup>i</sup> A. L. Murphy, W. Harper, A. Griffiths, & C. Joffrion, “Family Reunification: A Systematic Review of Interventions Designed to Address Co-Occurring Issues of Child Maltreatment and Substance Abuse” (2017) *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 4/5, 413–432.

<sup>ii</sup> S. Zhang, H. Huang, Q. Wu, Y. Li, & M. Liu, “The Impacts of Family Treatment Drug Court on Child Welfare Core Outcomes: A Meta-analysis” (2018) *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 88, 1–14.

<sup>iii</sup> J. van Wormer & M. Hsieh, “Healing Families: Outcomes from a Family Drug Treatment Court” (2016) *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 67(2), 49–65.

<sup>iv</sup> M. Lloyd, “Family Drug Courts: Conceptual Frameworks, Empirical Evidence, and Implications for Social Work” (2015) *The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 96(1), 49–57.

<sup>v</sup> E. J. Bruns, M. D. Pullmann, E. S. Weathers, M. L. Wirschem, & J. K. Murphy, “Effects of a Multidisciplinary Family Treatment Drug Court and Family Outcomes” (2012) *Child Maltreatment*, 17(3), 217–230. doi: 10.1177/1077559512454216.

<sup>vi</sup> E. J. Gifford, L. M. Eldred, A. Vernerey, & F. A. Sloan, “How Does Family Drug Treatment Court Participation Affect Child Welfare Outcomes?” (2014) *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 38(10), 1659–1670.

<sup>vii</sup> Children and Family Futures, “Sonoma County Dependency Drug Court: Year Three Evaluation Findings” (2012). Retrieved from [www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/grants/241057.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/grants/241057.pdf).

<sup>viii</sup> M. Cosden & L. Koch, “Evaluation of Family Treatment Drug Court for Children Affected by Methamphetamine” (2015) University of California, Santa Barbara. Retrieved from [www.researchgate.net/publication/299505882\\_Evaluation\\_of\\_family\\_treatment\\_drug\\_court\\_for\\_Children\\_Affected\\_by\\_Methamphetamine](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/299505882_Evaluation_of_family_treatment_drug_court_for_Children_Affected_by_Methamphetamine).