



Seattle Community Court News

"A nontraditional approach to address traditional problems"

Volume 4, Issue 2

Summer 2011

In this Issue:

- Community Service at St Vincent DePaul 1
- Alternative Community Service Program 1
- New Theft Awareness Class 2
- Community Courts: A Rational Approach to Social Problems 2
- Advisory Board Meeting 3
- In The News 3
- Third Time 's The Charm 3

Community Service- St. Vincent DePaul Food Bank

By Yonatan Aldort & Jeremy Ciarabellini, Community Court AmeriCorps

On any given Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday AmeriCorps can be found with a crew of community court defendants putting in hard and rewarding work at the St. Vincent DePaul food bank. Located in Georgetown, it is one of the largest food banks in Seattle, providing food and clothing to more than 800 people every week.

As community service monitors, we also appreciate St. Vincent because our crew members enjoy working there.

A typical day at St. Vincent entails a combination of heavy lifting, customer service, and light janitorial work. During the food bank's open hours, from 11AM till 2PM, most of us assist people in carrying boxes of food to their cars or to a nearby bus stop. Before and after the open hours, we help with cleanup, organizing, and bagging produce.



From left to right: Mark, Pete O'Brien, Charley Nelson from St. Vincent de Paul; Yonatan Aldort, and Jeremy Ciarabellini

St. Vincent has partnered with Community Court for over two years. It is an essential site because it provides regular indoor work during our wet and wintry months. St. Vincent, as a volunteer staffed operation, benefits heavily from the presence of Community Court service crews; on at least one occasion in February of this year, the food bank required our presence to even open its doors.

Numerous defendants have expressed their appreciation of the food bank, and some have even vowed to begin volunteering on their own time after completing their first day of service.

Staff and longtime volunteers at St. Vincent have repeatedly expressed their gratitude for our presence, and their positivity often brings out the best in the defendants as well. In this environment of charity and humanity, we have seen many individuals rise to meet challenges they previously thought were beyond their grasp. We believe our work at this site greatly benefits the community, our defendants, and the food bank all equally.

Alternative Community Service Program Launched for Defendants with Disabilities

By Kent Hay, Probation Services



SCC has seen a substantial increase in the number of defendants with verifiable disabilities. The majority of our community service sites, however, are not set up to accommodate defendants with severe physical limitations. In the past, this has limited SCC's ability to serve these defendants.

This program is set up for first-time SCC defendants. In lieu of traditional community service hours, defendants complete two 8 hour Life Skills classes. The Life Skills Program Curriculum addresses certain issues such as hygiene, anger management, employment, drug addiction (not a chemical dependency treatment), and the various cycles a person goes through in order to change habitual and

chronic behavior patterns.

The program is facilitated by SCC Probation Counselors with assistance from probation volunteers and college interns. SCC hopes that defendants who complete the alternative to community service program will leave with greater knowledge of themselves and the ability to make better choices in the future.

This spring SCC launched an alternative community service

Seattle Community Court Introduced First Theft Awareness Class

By Yonatan Aldort and Tricia Lapitan, SCC System Analyst



Facilitators of the First Theft Awareness Class (Left to right): Jeremy Garabellini, Yonatan Aldort, and Kathryn Bledsoe

The Seattle Community Court is pleased to announce the launch of our first Theft Awareness Class on Monday, 7/11/11. This project is the culmination of months of hard work and collaborative efforts throughout the court and the community. The curriculum was crafted by SCC Americorps worker Jeremy Ciarabellini and Kathryn Bledsoe from the City Attorney's Office. SCC is fortunate to have Mrs. Bledsoe, a retired Seattle Public Schools principal, who is skilled in developing and facilitating behavioral change curriculum.

The final product is the result of exhaustive research in other municipalities and online, as well as invaluable guidance offered by our charter partner, the Metropolitan Improvement District. The course features, among other things, a panel of community speakers including representatives from the Seattle Police Dept, the City Attorney's Office, and the Seattle business community. Lunches are being generously provided for every defendant by another longtime partner, Operation: Sack Lunch. The development and implementation of this project has truly been a community effort.

Defendants opting into SCC and charged with Theft will be required to participate in this all-day class, either in lieu of one day of community service or in addition to court-ordered community service depending on the dollar amount of the violation. The goal of the class is to reduce recidivism and create an environment where defendants are encouraged to consider the consequences of their actions at length. By involving a broad spectrum of community members impacted by theft, we hope to give defendants a bigger picture with which to consider their behavior in the future. The class takes place twice a month in the court resource center.

"If an offender chooses to take responsibility for his or her actions and wants to participate in SCC, there is the exciting possibility for a win-win situation."

Community Courts: A Rational Approach to Social Problems

By Nancy Waldman, SMC Defense Attorney



I believe Albert Einstein would've liked problem-solving courts. After all, his definition of insanity was doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Community Courts arose in an attempt to address the problem of arresting, trying, convicting and jailing non-violent quality-of-life offenders, only to see them be released and have the whole cycle repeat itself, over and over again. Communities, the judicial system, and individual offenders were all suffering.

educated, and/or struggling with chemical dependency or mental health issues. They often feel so helpless that they can see no alternative to stealing, seeking shelter wherever they can, or selling themselves, willingly or not.

defender colleagues within the traditional court system. Others are thrilled at the prospect of having a case dismissed in exchange for community service and social service contacts.

It seems obvious today that when someone is repeatedly committing offenses because of their underlying social circumstances, addressing those circumstances should have a positive impact on that criminal behavior. Not too long ago, it was a leap of faith. But that conclusion is certainly borne out by our experience in SCC.

SCC offers them a chance to help themselves. Not only will they be introduced to social services that can dramatically change their situations, they will also have the chance to pay back the community for their wrongdoing, thus wiping the slate clean and starting over. If an offender chooses to take responsibility for his or her actions and wants to participate in SCC, there is the exciting possibility for a win-win situation.

As a defense attorney in SCC, I have the opportunity—along with the rest of the SCC team—to celebrate the sense of accomplishment of clients who receive a certificate for succeeding in what they agreed to do. Those who have proven to themselves they can contribute to the community and access much-needed help are in a position to be less likely to re-offend.

Our participants, almost always indigent, may also be homeless, unemployed, under-

As a defense attorney, my job is to make sure my clients understand all their options within the legal system and work to secure the outcomes they desire. Those who wish to fight their cases certainly have that right, and will be well represented by one of my public

This preserves scarce resources for the judicial system to expend on more serious cases, affords increased self-respect and self-reliance to participants, and allows communities to see restorative justice in action. It truly is a far cry from doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. We are using a new approach and seeing different — and far better — results.

Advisory Board Meeting



(Left to Right) Lanie Ross, West Precinct Advisory Council President and Peggy Dreisinger, Metropolitan Improvement District

Recently SCC reorganized its Community Advisory Board (C.A.B.) to align with the original structure identified in the SCC Charter from 2005. The C.A.B. consists of selected representatives from community groups, city/county agencies, and law enforcement. The new board met for the first time this year on July 15, 2011. We were happy to welcome several new members to this invaluable group of community advisors.

Those members in attendance heard short presentations

about recent happenings and new initiatives in SCC, then brainstormed about ways they could contribute to our ongoing improvement. Representing a wide variety of stakeholders across Seattle, they brought an exciting energy and commitment which will undoubtedly have a positive impact on SCC's future. We are grateful that so many people have agreed to volunteer their time in this way, and look forward to mutually beneficial collaboration as we work together to improve the quality of life both for Seattle and for SCC participants.

C.A.B. meetings are held quarterly, and are always open to the public.

In The News:

For the second year in a row, the National Drug Control Strategy has endorsed community courts (along with drug courts) as an effective court-based strategy for linking addicted offenders to treatment. This year's report referenced the three mentor courts, SCC, Dallas and Hartford, Connecticut (Page 46):

<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/policy/ndcs11/ndcs2011.pdf>

West Seattle Herald newspaper announces Theft Awareness Class.

<http://www.westseattleherald.com/2011/07/21/news/seattle-community-court-theft-awareness-class-aim>

Sarah Schweig of the Center for Court Innovation interviewed Judge Bonner in March 2011. You can read the entire interview

<http://www.courtinnovation.org/research/fred-bonner-presiding-judge-seattle-community-court>

"[Seattle City Council] has said 'We don't want to reduce or cut community court.' It has been recognized that not only does [SCC] save the city money, it also saves lives."

Judge Bonner

Third Time's The Charm By Tuere Sala, Assistant City Attorney



There is a compliance phenomenon I have been watching over the past few years with SCC participants. A pattern is beginning to emerge that may challenge our notions around what is successful compliance in a community court structure the way relapse principles challenged the notion of compliance within Drug Courts. In my early years as a prosecutor, I worked in the Jackson County Drug Court in Kansas City Missouri. Initially our review hearings were structured around a

traditional probation model where relapses were treated as non-compliance, although the sanctions were minor.

Over time we began questioning the appropriateness of such a model within a drug court setting. Increasingly, we began reviewing cases within a more traditional recovery model, paying less attention to the drug use and more attention to the time between relapses. Similarly, I have been particularly interested in what happens to defendants between their three SCC opportunities.

Several years ago we had a female participant come through SCC three times. When she entered on her first SCC opportunity she had limited criminal history but was actively abusing drugs. Her assessment indicated that she had two years of college, was a chemical dependency counselor with 11 years clean time. She was homeless and needed a safe environment. She struggled with compliance on her first opportunity and was completely unsuccessful on her second SCC opportunity.

Continued on back page...



www.seattle.gov/communitycourt/

**Seattle Justice Center
600 Fifth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98124-4667**

**Questions:
tuere.sala@seattle.gov
Phone: (206) 684-7766
Fax: (206) 684-4648**

**"A Nontraditional Approach to
Address Traditional Problems"**

Seattle Community Court is a nationally recognized problem solving court. This innovative and proactive program enables people charged with non-violent misdemeanors to access social services while paying back the community with much needed community service hours.

Seattle Community Court is a community driven collaborative court that is supported by the Seattle Police Department, downtown businesses, neighborhood groups, and many social service agencies.

The court is in session Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday; 1:30PM; Seattle Municipal Courtroom 1002. All are welcome to come and visit us. We especially welcome inquires from other courts about how a community court could work for you.

Third Time's the Charm... (cont)

About 6 months after failing her second SCC trip, she voluntarily entered and successfully completed inpatient treatment. She was in outpatient treatment during her third SCC opportunity. She was successful and remains conviction free nearly 3 years later. While her decision to enter treatment was of her own volition, she has repeatedly stated that going through SCC was the motivation behind her decision to get clean.

Last month we had a male participant come through SCC on his third and final opportunity. He entered SCC with old history but was actively using heroin. He had failed to comply on both of his previous trips.

His initial assessment had indicated that he wanted to consider a methadone program – something he had never tried before. Like the participant mentioned above, he was in a crime and drug spiral during his first and second SCC opportunities. Many did not believe he would be able to

comply this third time. A third trip in SCC is not easy. It requires focus and diligence to complete six 8-hour days of community service and a list of social service contacts within a two week period.

This individual, however, had entered a methadone program on his own volition between his second and third SCC opportunities. When he returned for his two week review hearing, he brought a letter from the service site. It was very complimentary indicating that he was reliable, punctual, kind and a pleasure to have in their office. It further noted that he had demonstrated that he was committed to making positive changes in his life. He continues to volunteer with the site to this day

What I find significant about these two situations is the fact that each participant entered treatment outside of SCC jurisdiction. I cannot help but believe that SCC played a significant role in their decision to enter

treatment – how much of a role would require further study.

It could be because SCC probation counselors closely support participant with their compliance. It could be because SCC develops partnerships with community service sites that are effective at working with a population in need of many services. It could also be because of the short probation periods, the voluntariness of the program, the court's engagement, or simply that the participants are ready to make positive changes in their lives.

Whatever the reason, here is some food for thought: in 2010/2011 there have been 14 third time participants in SCC (2-2011; 12-2010). Regardless of their compliance in the previous trips, all 14 were successful on their third opportunity and 11 (80%) have no new criminal convictions within Washington State.