



Seattle Community Court News

"A nontraditional approach to address traditional problems"

Volume 5, Issue 2

Summer 2012

MEET THE NEW FACES OF SEATTLE COMMUNITY COURT

By Nancy Waldman, Defense Attorney, Associated Counsel for the Accused

In this Issue:

Meet the New Faces of Seattle Community Court 1

What it Takes to be a Great Probation Counselor 2

2nd International Conference of Community Courts 2

What Does Success in Community Court Look Like 3

The Hardest Journey 3

How to Become Involved with SCC 4



Judge Steve Rosen, Northwest native and graduate of the University of Washington and University of Minnesota Law School, joined the SCC team in January of this year. His prior legal experience includes

work in both the King County and Pierce County Prosecutor's Offices, the Attorney General's Office, seven years in his own private practice, and three years as a part-time judge in Black Diamond. He was elected to SMC in 2010, and has already won wide respect and admiration in his short time on the bench.

When the regular rotation of judges occurred late last year, he asked to be assigned to Courtroom 1002, the site for

our Master Trial Calendar, SCC and Veteran's Treatment Court. Since collaborative courts are not the norm in the criminal justice system, it is not surprising that he had no experience with this model. He has quickly embraced it, however, terming it "revolutionary" and noting that a collaborative approach could well be used effectively in any court for cases with undisputed facts and defendants needing help with social services.

CONT. Page 4—New Faces



Assistant City Attorney Dan Okada is a Seattleite who attended the University of Washington as both an undergraduate and law student. After beginning his legal career in Tacoma, he joined the Seattle City Attorney's Office, where he has been for 12 years. He was assigned to SCC earlier this year. Like Judge Rosen, he was unfamiliar with problem solving courts. He

really likes it, though, "especially when people succeed and share their stories about how the court has had a positive effect on their lives." He finds himself "often surprised — pleasantly surprised — by how people with so many problems can succeed."

When asked how his approach is different in SCC, he said, "I try to engage a bit more with defendants, using more problem solving and encouragement." Having a prosecutor speak directly to them in this way is even more unusual for participants than when the judge does it. And as with the judge, this support is a powerful motivator for people to succeed. Participants cannot

believe that a prosecutor is actually talking to them—and even pulling for them to "graduate" from SCC with a certificate, a handshake and a round of applause. Dan delights in celebrating victories, and is genuinely disappointed when people don't succeed and end up serving the short alternative jail sentence.

Although he would like to have the funds to enhance SCC, and would like to see housing included, he believes that the two-week jurisdiction provides an incentive for people to enter and at least be introduced to services. He has become a valuable team member and is helping SCC evolve and improve.



WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A GREAT PROBATION COUNSELOR

By Kent Hay, Probation Services

A great probation counselor is one that can empathize with people, is able to listen and be respectful, and has ability to set appropriate boundaries. They have the ability to help defendants hold themselves accountable without minimizing their circumstances or feelings. Some defendants are un-engaged and/or uninterested in their own ability to change. Great probation counselors understand this, and realize they can only be as helpful to those that are willing to help themselves.

A great probation counselor

knows that their job goes beyond that Court room as a reporter of compliance. They know they are the voice of the community and victims as well. They recognize that they are often looked upon as a teacher to defendants that are seeking to change and those on the cusp of change. They know how much they need to motivate a defendant to move in the right direction. They welcome change as a way to gauge a defendant's progress as a self evaluation around whether they have shared all available knowledge and resources.

As a SCC probation counselor I strive to reach these goals every time I interact with defendants in the court. I strive to help every individual who comes through SCC be successful both in the program and out. Regardless of the final disposition of their case, every SCC defendant is encouraged to come back and utilize the services in the Court Resource Center and to maintain contact with probation for possible assistance with service connections, etc. I am pro-active and welcome the opportunity to empower any defendant that desires the chance to change their lives.

I want to help every individual who comes through SCC be successful both in the program and out.

2ND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF COMMUNITY COURTS

By Tuere Sala, Assistant City Attorney

The Center for Court Innovations and the Bureau of Justice Assistance held their 2nd Community Justice Conference January 31–February 2, 2012, in Washington, DC. The conference was an enormous success with approximately 300 attendees from Community Courts all over the world.

The conference began with an open discussion on how community courts have been evolving over time. We looked at what we see as the core principles of the court and where there is diversity in the application of those core principles.

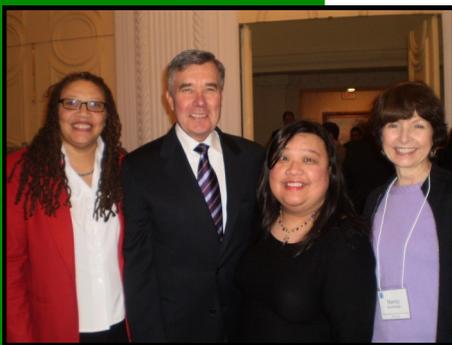
There was a separate panel discussion around the problems associated with shoplifting and the creative responses many jurisdictions are using to address the problem. SCC was on the panel to discuss the development and implementation of our Theft Awareness Class.

There was ample time given to discussions around the basic aspects of connecting with the community, social service links, community service hours and planning/creation of a community court. We also had time to consider new ideas such as the use of social networking technology; mediation services and the use of cognitive behavioral modification therapies.

It was clear that courts are still looking for workable solutions for defendants struggling with

addiction, homelessness and mental health issues given the short jurisdiction periods of most courts.

It was great to see former Seattle Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske, one of the keynote speakers, and many friends from others courts. The highlight for me, however, was being invited to give the introduction of Judge Fred Bonner at an evening awards ceremony. Judge Bonner was recognized for his achievements and tireless efforts in the service of community courts.



Tuere Sala, Gil Kerlikowske Tricia Lapitan and Nancy Waldman



WHAT DOES SUCCESS IN COMMUNITY COURT LOOK LIKE?

By Brett Ammend, AmeriCorp Volunteer

What does success look like? How do we qualify it? In a program like Community Court, as with many similar social service initiatives, the concept of “success” can be a bit slippery. We can measure it simply by recidivism, and look at how many times people come through the program. We could instead measure success by the amount of people who complete the program.

However, neither of these fully captures the grand scheme of what people can get out of Community Court. Say, for example, that somebody ends up finding the path to permanent housing via information they received from their social service housing contact. This would be something very real and concrete, yet not likely to be taken down as a statistic.

My main role as an AmeriCorps site monitor is to supervise defendants as they complete

their community service hours, making sure that they are actually working and finishing out the day. However,



Brett Ammend working with SCC Participant

another important function of what I do is to motivate and encourage the defendants to follow through on their contacts, and remind them of what they could get out of being in SCC.

I have found that many defendants can be very isolated, and have most of their social interactions be with people on the street, caught up in the cycle of addiction and homelessness.

I have seen how talking with new people about their experiences can be cathartic and cause a shift in perspective. Speaking for myself, I’ve learned so much in the nine months I’ve been working here. Simply being in the community, working at a food bank, for example, has really sparked a change in my mindset.

During one of the afternoon breaks in the Theft Awareness Class, I stepped outside to enjoy the nice day, and I happened to overhear two defendants discussing something the found interesting: they had continued the conversation we were having in the class.

Most of the time, we would probably expect them to be sick and tired of keeping up a topic that they had already talked about for hours, but these two were evidently still engaged in the topic. What does this tell us?

CONT. Page 4—Success

“I think the biggest impact SCC has on what success looks like for defendants is that it puts them in a certain frame of mind. A frame of mind to see that something else is possible in their lives.”



THE HARDEST JOURNEY

By Yonatan Aldolt, AmeriCorp Volunteer

I met Keith briefly back in 2011 when he made his first journey through the SCC program, and at the time he did not make much of an impression on me. When he reappeared in the program with a new theft charge in late April of this year, I must admit I did not have the highest expectations for him. He seemed to me at the outset like a very troubled youth with a penchant for glorifying a damaging lifestyle of drug abuse and crime, and the fact

that he was back in SCC less than a year after his previous charge indicated that he didn’t seem to have learned much from his first time through.

Initially I thought my perception of Keith was accurate when during our first day working together he and another man on my crew casually swapped graphic war stories about their life in the streets, both as drug users and pushers. Keith would admit the wrongfulness of his

actions, but there was also a kind of reckless pride he carried with him; an attitude of comic nonchalance towards everyone and everything around him, as though all his destructive behaviors were only trivialities. He was filled with crude jokes for every occasion, and appeared to take very little seriously.

CONT. Page 5—Hardest

NEW FACES...

The timing of Judge Rosen's entry into SCC allowed for him to attend the International Community Court Conference in January, which provided a crash course on the subject. He says he "learned a lot, and was particularly struck by the diversity of approaches" of the courts around the world. While based on shared principles and philosophy, all the courts do have their own unique identity, and Judge Rosen is already contributing to Seattle's.

When asked how he felt about our court he called it "a very positive court," observing that "it feels good when somebody succeeds." He's particularly gratified when participants connect with the services they need, which hopefully will change their circumstances and enhance public safety and quality-of-life for all.

SCC offers these connections through our Court Resource Center, which Judge Rosen highly praises. He also appreciates how defendants are able to be accountable in a meaningful way through doing community service with our various partners.

As for the other team members, Judge Rosen feels "we're lucky to have the probation staff we do." In court he always tells our participants that their best chance of success is to be sure to stay in touch with our probation counselors, Kent Hay and Jason Pina, who work with them during their time in our court and often even long afterward. He also noted the support and dedication of the prosecutor and the public defenders. In fact, he said his biggest surprise in SCC has been the prosecutor's positive attitude toward the defendants, and his "willingness to work with defense attorneys who are traditionally seen as adversaries in court."

Judge Rosen has shown himself to be open-minded and creative in his approach to this previously unfamiliar court. When asked what he does differently in SCC, he talked about how he is more encouraging to defendants. He engages each participant in dialogue, which never fails to surprise them. They often remark how having a judge who believes in them and encourages them to succeed makes them believe more in themselves and their ability to succeed. After defendants have been screened by probation and found to be appropriate candidates, he asks if they want to enter our program. If they do, Judge Rosen always says, "I will allow you to do so. Welcome to Community Court."

And we say, "Welcome to SCC, Judge Rosen."

HOW CAN I BECOME INVOLVED WITH SCC

Become A Community Service Partners: If you have an idea for a neighborhood community service project, you are a business or community agency that could use the help of one of our crews, you can contact Tricia Lapitan, Seattle Municipal Court Probation Services, (206) 684-8569, tricia.lapitan@seattle.gov.

Become A Social Service Partners: If you are a social service provider and are interested in partnering with the court to provide easier accessibility for defendants, clients and the general population you can contact the Court Resource Center at (206) 733-9748.

Become A Community Supportor: Public Support is essential to the success of SCC. Feel free to visit a court session any Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, Courtroom 1002, Seattle Municipal Court 600 5th Ave, Seattle. We begin at 1:30 and continue until all cases have been heard.



SUCCESS

For one thing, it shows that they were *thinking* about the discussion.

I think the biggest impact SCC has on what success looks like for defendants is that it puts them in a certain frame of mind. A frame of mind to see that something else is possible in their lives.

Just because we may have a defendant complete a chemical dependency evaluation doesn't mean that they have to enter into a treatment facility. But the contacts do ensure that they

know what's out there and available to them. A large majority follow thru, not because they have to, but rather because they want to.

One thing many defendants sometimes seem to struggle with is avoidance. As simple as it may seem to ask questions about what's out there, many people simply do not do that, whether out of fear, embarrassment or otherwise. A big function of SCC is breaking through that, getting to the root causes of criminal behavior—causes such as addiction,

homelessness, depression, mental illness, and posing solutions tailored around each defendant.

If you ask me, one of the most important aspects of success in SCC isn't easily defined by figures and statistics (well, it could be to an extent, but not simply in terms of recidivism or completion). Instead, I see a big part of the success in SCC comes from making connections with people, and realizing that there are other ways to live, feasible ways of making that happen, and people willing to help you with the process.

THE HARDEST JOURNEY....

But despite my skeptical and even irritable attitude towards Keith, he slowly grew on me as we continued to work together on days of community service. It soon became clear to me that he was a far more complex individual than I had given him credit. He confided to me his concern that his longtime girlfriend would leave him due to his lifestyle, which she did not share. He talked about the difficulty regarding his actions and admitted that his cavalier attitude was really a mask.

Keith's mentality was understandable given his background. He was only 27

years old and already his body was ravaged by drugs ranging from crack to prescription pills and heroin. He had recently nearly lost his life due to drugs.

Still, Keith was determined to really make a change this time. He was off the streets, had entered a treatment program, and was working hard to maintain his relationship with his girlfriend. In personal conversations, he would be very candid about his fear of failure when it came to putting his old lifestyle completely behind him.

It takes great strength to tell another person that you need their help, and I was very moved by Keith's honesty with me in that respect. I knew he would need that kind of strength and more to accomplish his goals. When he finally graduated from his second time in SCC I was proud in a way I never anticipated.

I saw him then not as a youngster without respect for the world, but as a man taking his first steps on the long road to redemption.

SCC WORKS FOR SEATTLE

FROM THIS



TO THIS



www.seattle.gov/communitycourt/

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

Questions:

dan.okada@seattle.gov

Phone: (206) 386-1590

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 inquiries from other courts about how a community court could work for you.