



Family Drug Court Evaluation

September 2021

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Romero**

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BACKGROUND (p. 7)

Drs. Stacy Speedlin Gonzalez and Devon Romero were contracted by the County of Bexar from February 1 to September 30, 2021, to conduct a process evaluation of the Bexar County Family Drug Court.

The **goals of this research are consistent** with those stated in the OJJDP-approved grant proposal. There were **four original enhancement goals**. The goals of this research were:

1. Enhancement to Eligibility, Engagement and Screening
2. Enhancement to Assessment, Service Delivery and Case Management
3. Enhancement to Staff Training
4. Enhancement to Management Information System, Performance Measures and Evaluation

SCOPE OF THE STUDY (p. 7)

Specifically, the scope of the work included:

- Provide a process evaluation to assess the implementation of the following Bexar County Family Drug Court's identified Outcomes of Interest (Goals 1-3).
- Provide a process evaluation of the Family Drug Court to assess fidelity to the Ten Key Components of model Drug Courts along with the five additional key components that are unique to family drug courts (Goal 4).
- Provide an outcome evaluation of the Family Drug Court to determine whether the Family Drug Court is achieving its intended objectives (Goal 4).

FINDINGS (p. 7)

The evaluation makes the following findings:

- 134 participants were consented to participate in FDC from October 1, 2018 to June 30, 2021.
- 77.6 % were Hispanic, 94.8 % were Caucasian, 3.73 % were African American or Black, and 1.5% were American Indian or Alaska Native.
- 47.8 % had a high school diploma or GED or higher at intake.
- 43.3 % were employed full-time or part-time at intake.

PROGRAM PROGRESSION (p. 40)

Table 6

Phase Progression During Grant Period

Phase 2			
Participants Consented	Average Time to Next Phase	Percent Terminated	Percent Continuing
134	171 days	32.09%	16.40%
Phase 3			
Participants Promoted	Average Time to Next Phase	Percent Terminated	Percent Continuing
80	38 days	1.25%	5.00%
Phase 4			
Participants Promoted	Average Time to Next Phase	Percent Terminated	Percent Continuing
75	34 days	6.67%	1.33%
Phase 5			
Participants Promoted	Average Time to Graduation	Percent Terminated	Percent Continuing
72	39 days	0%	1.39%
Graduation			
Participants Graduated			
73			

Note. Based on 3-year statistics 10/2018 to 6/2021. Includes participants consented prior to 10/1/2018 who continued in program during grant period.

PARENTAL SOBRIETY (p. 40)

To assess parental sobriety, the evaluation team measured the following questions: (a) How many parents remained sober as a result of FDC?; (b) How many babies, if any, were born during the grant period and were drug negative?; (c) How many participants tested positive during their drug test?; and (d) Which drugs, if any, did participants test positive for during their drug test?

The evaluation team provides responses to these questions below:

- a. Based on the 10-Panel Urine Drug Screen data, **67 parents** who consented on or after 10/1/2018 remained sober as a result of FDC during the funding period.

- b. **Nine babies** were born during the grant period. All babies were born drug negative.

- c. During the grant period, there were **943 positive drug tests with 1,194 identified drugs** using the 10-Panel Urine Drug Screen. Of these occurrences, 90 positive drug tests were from 9 participants who consented with FDC prior to 10/1/2018 and the remaining 853 positive drug tests were from 67 participants consented during the grant period.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION (p. 41)

To assess **family reunification**, the evaluation team measured the following questions: (a) What is the **average reunification rate** for FDC? and (b) How many **individual and family reunifications** occurred during the grant period (including number of children)?

a. Family reunification begins at Phase 3 for FDC participants. The evaluation team found the average reunification rate for FDC was **6.5 months** during the grant period. This factor includes the 17 participants consented prior to the grant period who were reunified during the grant period. For participants consented on or after 10/1/2018, the average reunification rate for FDC was **6.1 months**.

b. **Eighty reunifications, 61 families, and 178 children** were reunified during the grant period.

EMPLOYMENT IMPROVEMENTS (p. 42)

To assess improvements to employment status, the evaluation team measured the following question: (a) Did participant employment status change during the grant period? If so, what is the reflected change?

Table 8

Percent Change in Employment Status During Grant Period (N = 102)

	Time Point 1	Time Point 2	Percent Change
None	49	32	-35%
Part-time (under 32 hours)	25	23	-8%
Full-time (32+ hours/wk)	18	37	106%
Homeless	6	4	-33%
Disability	4	4	0%
Unemployed seeking	0	2	200%

EDUCATION IMPROVEMENTS (p. 42)

To assess improvements to education status, the evaluation team measured the following question: (a) Did participant education status change during the grant period? If so, what is the reflected change?

Table 9

Percent Change in Education Status During Grant Period (N = 102)

	Time Point 1	Time Point 2	Percent Change
No schooling	1	0	-100%
Elementary or Middle School	12	12	0%
9th grade	10	9	-10%
10th grade	16	16	0%
11th grade	9	10	11%
12th grade/HS diploma/GED	38	38	0%
Some college	11	12	9%
Associate's	4	4	0%
Bachelor's	1	1	0%

HOUSING IMPROVEMENTS (p. 43)

To assess improvements to housing and living arrangements, the evaluation team measured the following question: (a) Did participant housing and living arrangements change during the grant period? If so, what is the reflected change?

Table 10

Percent Change in Housing and Living Arrangements During Grant Period (N = 102)

	Time Point 1	Time Point 2	Percent Change
No Housing/Homeless	14	7	-50%
Emergency/Shelter Housing	1	0	-100%
Transitional/Halfway Housing	7	5	-29%
Others Residence-Family/Paramour	26	15	-42%
Others Residence-Friend	3	0	-100%
Permanent Housing (own or rent)	51	72	41%
Unknown	0	3	300%

THEME 1: REASON FOR REMOVAL (p. 29)

Participant Quote 1: I was addicted to methamphetamines, and I still was working, but somebody reported me. So, CPS came into my life and I was in Safety Plan, and not listen, not following the regulations and just doing things my own way. So, I ended up getting a court order. My kids got removed and they went to shelters and foster, but in the process of the shelter and at the court, I guess, when I went to court base, that's when I got introduced to drug court.

Participant Quote 2: But Coronavirus hit. I wasn't working. I felt overwhelmed. The bills weren't getting paid. I was cooped in the home... When I drink, I black out and I guess I just didn't really care. You know what I mean? Whatever I did that day, and I went to a hotel, whatever I did that night, I can't really recall because I can't remember. That's the worst feeling ever. Then I ended up in hospital because my kidneys were hurting the next day and still foggy memory. And then of course my son was there and they ended up finding that in my system. And they took my son at the hospital. **The most devastating thing I ever went through in my life. I literally had a breakdown.**

THEME 2: POSITIVE EXPERIENCE WITH FDC (p. 30)

Participant Quote 2: So, working with drug court, inpatient and outpatient, I learned to forgive and let go. And I still cry, yes. And I still cry. Because you know what, I'm thankful. I can never say before I hated my life. You know what? Now I can say, thank you God, because you know what? It made me a stronger person. It made me fight harder for my kids. I know if that wouldn't have happened to me, my past, I probably wouldn't have fought as hard.

Participant Quote 3: So, I feel like through all this journey that I've been going through, I love Drug Court tremendously. It's taught me so much. So, I can't really say anything bad about them.

THEME 3: GAINFUL INSIGHTS (p. 31)

Participant Quote 1: And that's what I feel like drug court did for me. They made me become a better me. That me that was hidden. And I remember them wanting to find... For me, like I said, I was not a bad person. But for me, what led me to addiction was abuse. My mom at nine months used to sell me, my dad is touching my uncle. That's all I knew, so when I was 12, I started using. When I was 15, I left my house, and I got pregnant at 16. And I stayed with my husband for 20 years. He gave me a beautiful wedding. I got married by the church, but I could never love this man. Because like I say, he gave me everything, and I thanked him for being the father of my kids, but I could not love him as a man or as a person until I work on my issues because I always saw men as disgusting, just here to destroy. Not until they took my kids away.

THEME 4: HELPFUL EXPERIENCES (p. 33)

Participant Quote 2: And with this notebook, I have so much history in this notebook right here and everything that I've done and accomplished. I even accomplished, they even offered me a five-year grant from SACADA. They gave me the five-year grant. So, I went to peer specializing school. I did the core classes. So, I just got to do my hours, which they're going to offer me another grant and an application so I could work through that to be a peer specialist. This program and what I've learned and what they have offered me is amazing.

Participant Quote 6: You know what, for them, for me being in drug court, I never had structure. I never had a schedule. That's what they give you, a lot of structure, set times. You have to be here at this time. You don't know why, but there are all these times but they're preparing us for the future, something we should have done a long time ago, but now we're doing it now. We're not used to structure, so they're giving us that structure.

THEME 5: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT (p. 34)

Participant Quote 3: Just pretty much with the staffing. I mean, yeah. Make sure... If CPS is not always on the same page with drug court, don't use them if you want to succeed. CPS is not always that case worker as CPS don't want to succeed. If that was the case, when I had earlier CPS cases, do you not think they might have offered some programming or some help to you? Never. I just really feel like before you make that final decision on somebody's life and the child's life, please get the facts for sure in black and white on your desk. Do a little research. Just don't take somebody's word because it's somebody's word. It's not always right.

Participant Quote 4: When I signed up for drug court, I didn't get no rules. I didn't get what was supposed to be. All I was told is check in three times. I think more in black and white, you're exactly right. Knowing what I'm supposed to be doing would have helped me tremendously. Knowing what expulsion means, knowing how you can get expulsion, what that means, you know what I mean?

THEME 6: VIRTUAL V. IN PERSON EXPERIENCE

(p. 35)

Participant Quote 3: Honestly, I can say Zoom was probably a blessing because of COVID, because there's probably no way I could have been everywhere that I needed to be, which really scared me if COVID was to let up, that I was going to have to be here and then be here and then I wouldn't be able to work at all.

Participant Quote 5: So, it was pretty hard [before zoom]. That was one thing that the girls say, like, "I pay for parking." That's funny, too. That was my attitude. I would park. I told them; I'll park at the bank. I would run. I would just show up. I had to do other classes. I would get out at 12:00. I had to be there by 1:00. It was just hectic. That's why I told them, "You didn't have to run." You have it through Zoom. You're lucky." But the parking, that was one.

THEME 7: STORIES OF RESILIENCE (p. 36)

Participant Quote 2: No, it's work. It took everything I had inside me too. You have to start here first with yourself. Otherwise, you're not going to want to do it. You know, if you can't do it for yourself. How are you going to do it for anybody else? You know, you've got to want this. And I wanted it. My son was taken from my arms. I know I want what's best for him because he is my blessing from God, you know?

Participant Quote 3: But I'm a highly motivated and dedicated person that when I say I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it. And the landlord held this place for almost a month. And she had renters lined up so that was an act of God. She could have let it go at any time. And then they ended up approving it because I got that job at [nursing home] for \$25 an hour. And they wrote me a letter and I handed that into [case worker] and [homeless services agency]. And they were like, "Okay, approved." So really got me on my feet. And then of course my recovery support group, I didn't pay for anything in this house that it has been furnished with really. I've been extremely blessed in the situation. Through the tears and the sadness and the hopelessness, there's a light at the end of the tunnel. They just really make you work for it.

THEME 8: HEALING IN PROCESS (p. 37)

Participant Quote 4: I told my daughter I'm finally growing up. With my daughter with me, we get to grow up together.

Participant Quote 5: Domestic violence, he was very abusive. Didn't want to leave me alone. He made a lot of threats. He mentally and physically scarred me. Especially when you feel like they're still getting what they wanted, the best of you. When is it ever going to end? But I'm more than halfway there, I've got the protective order.

Participant Quote 6: How can I say, I'm at peace at that, but it's just what hurts me, and what I still get teary about, is how did I let it happen to me? How? How did I allow it to happen to me? That's where I've got to stop beating myself up. Eventually I won't, but right now it's really fresh still.

THEME 9: STORIES OF CHANGE (p. 38)

Participant Quote 4: I came here, homeless. I got an apartment that I'm about to move out of, move into a better one because my lease is up. We've got a 2017 Kia outside. We didn't have a car. I've got credit cards now. I've had my job for almost two years. We're members at the Cornerstone Church. I've got my son playing football. That's just great.

Participant Quote 6: I finally got my business cards, and I cried. Who cries for business cards? Me, because I've never had a business card. I've never even had a good job, like a reliable... Or any kind of job really...I was 35 when I got my first business card, and it wasn't even like a real one. Like I had to pencil my name in, which I was like so happy. Yeah, I had business cards.

COST EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION (p. 44)

Cost-effectiveness evaluation is a form of economic analysis that compares the relative costs and outcomes (effects) of different courses of action. Cost-effectiveness evaluation is distinct from cost-benefit analysis, which assigns a monetary value to the measure of effect. In this evaluation, cost effectiveness is measured in terms of a ratio where the **denominator is the cumulative effect of child removal** (cost of actual removal, foster care, medical care for child[ren], clinical services, and the CPS investigation) and the **numerator is the cost associated with operating the Family Drug Court** (staff salary/ benefits, drug screening, and treatment services). The Incremental Cost-effectiveness Ratio (ICER) is estimated using this formula:

$$ICER = \frac{(C_1 - C_0)}{(E_1 - E_0)}$$

COST EVALUATION FINDINGS (p. 45)

- **Cost of FDC:** The estimated cost of the Family Drug Court from October 1, 2018-September 30th, 2021, was estimated at \$1,666,788.00. Additionally, the average time frame for reunification during the grand period is six months.
- **Cost of Child Removal:** the average cost per child in the traditional CPS system is \$70,827.62 per child. Based on the number of reunified children (178), the evaluation team estimates the cost for these children in traditional CPS removal would amount to \$12,607,316.40.
- **In summation, the Family Drug Court shows actual cost effectiveness.** This is supported in the findings listed above, which would result in possible savings of \$10,940,528.40. Given the limitations indicated below, this is not an actual figure; however, it supports the idea that considerable cost savings occur with the Family Drug Court as opposed to traditional CPS removal. Moreover, the timeframe to complete reunification is approximately four to seven months shorter in Family Drug Court compared to traditional CPS removal processes.

COST EVALUATION CONTINUED (p. 46)

- According to Health and Human Services (HHS; 2015), the average cost for hospital care for babies with neonatal abstinence syndrome in Texas is \$53,400 per birth (Note: This does not take into account the cost of foster care, investigation, or services).
- During the three-year granting period, nine babies were born drug and alcohol free. This would support an **additional savings of \$480,600** from FDC compared to traditional removal interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS (pp.48-49)

The following recommendations are suggestions for future analysis, evaluations, or ideas for consideration.

The recommendations align with the research questions explored in this evaluation:

- Continue to standardize the process for intake, enrollment, and data management.
- Continue to prioritize staff training and ensure non adversarial approach with all professionals who interact with FDC.
- The evaluation team suggests if possible, maintaining a virtual platform for participation.
- Follow through with incentives.
- Orient participants to the drug court process prior to the enrollment.
- Ensure that drug screening is consistent with the participant's drug of choice.
- Tailor treatment goal setting based on participant's individualized needs and worldview.
- Contact participants early for court date and session information.

SUMMARY

- FDC met all Ten Key components of Family Drug Courts, thereby demonstrating **fidelity and adherence to the empirically-based model.**
- FDC showed **improvements in participants** within the following variables: 1) sobriety, 2) family reunification, 3) employment, 4) education, and 5) housing access.
- FDC participants reported **positive experiences and outcomes** as the result of accessing the program. Supports such as therapy, parenting, GED classes, 12 step programs, case management, and wrap around service delivery were well received and appreciated.
- FDC is **cost effective** compared to traditional child removal processes.



For questions or comments, please contact:

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