

Superior Court of California County of Santa Clara

191 North First Street
San Jose, California 95113
(408) 882-2700

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KIRI TORRE
Chief Executive Officer

BARBARA J. FOX
Assistant Executive Officer

ADMINISTRATION

Contact: Jean Pennypacker
408-882-2718

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ADULT AND JUVENILE MENTAL HEALTH COURTS HONORED BY STATE OF CALIFORNIA

The Superior Court of California, County of Santa Clara is pleased to announce that two of its pioneering collaborative courts have been recognized by the State of California. The Juvenile Mental Health Court, and the Adult Mental Health Court, have both been selected to receive “Best Practices Awards” by the California Council on Mentally Ill Offenders (COMIO). Only one other juvenile project and two other adult projects in the State were chosen to receive these honors. Both awards were presented at the 33rd Annual Forensic Mental Health Association of California Conference on Wednesday, March 19th, at 7:00 PM at the Embassy Suites in Seaside, CA.

The Juvenile Mental Health Court was implemented in 2001 and was the first coordinated program in the nation to address the problems facing the juvenile justice system in handling minors who are both charged with crimes and suffering from severe mental illness. Since then, approximately twenty other courts nationwide have adopted similar protocols. Judge Raymond Davilla presided over the Juvenile Mental Health Court from its inception on February 14, 2001 through 2005. Judge Richard Loftus presided over this court from 2006 until 2008, when Judge Davilla reassumed that role. The Court and representatives from Probation, the Public Defender, the District Attorney, the Mental Health Department and the Department of Family and Children’s Services use a collaborative therapeutic approach that focuses on both the crime and the underlying causes of the criminal behavior. After acceptance into the program, the Supervising Judge works with other law and justice agencies and mental health professionals to tailor an individualized treatment plan for each offender. To date over 80% of the participating youth have graduated from the program. The success of this dynamic program comes from the commitment of county-wide agencies to work collaboratively with the Superior Court to ensure positive outcomes for these youthful offenders.

The Adult Mental Health Court was initiated in 1998 under a grant and became permanent in 1999. Defendants in Drug Treatment Court who are identified as having significant mental health problems in addition to substance abuse issues may be re-directed to Mental

Health Court for assessment and referral to appropriate community resources. Judge Stephen Manley and representatives from the Department of Drug and Alcohol Services (DADS), Mental Health Dept., Probation and the Department of Corrections collaborate to create an individualized community treatment plan for each defendant. According to Family Resource Division Director Jean Pennypacker, "Since 2001, nine hundred and seventy-five (975) defendants have successfully completed the program. In 2006 alone the program diverted enough defendants from County jail to save the County \$7.87 million."

The Council on Mentally Ill Offenders was formed in 2001 under the auspices of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. COMIO is comprised of eleven members representing various segments of the law and justice community, and its website states that the primary purpose of the Council is to "investigate and promote cost-effective approaches to meeting the long-term needs of adults and juveniles with mental disorders who are likely to become offenders or who have a history of offending."

The Court would like to congratulate and thank the judges, court staff, and our partners in the legal and health professions, whose combined efforts have contributed to the continued success of these innovative programs.