



NINETEENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
State of Oregon
COLUMBIA COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT

Columbia County Courthouse
230 Strand St.
St. Helens, OR 97051-2041
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February 4, 2020

Erin Pettigrew
Access to the Justice Counsel for Legislative Affairs and Strategic Planning
Oregon Judicial Department

Dear Ms. Pettigrew,

I am delighted to share with you and your colleagues about our Dependency Drug Court Program. The Columbia County Dependency Drug Court program was established just over ten years ago. It was established in response to the growing issue in our county regarding families and children cycling repeatedly through the child welfare system. DHS Child Welfare, our local treatment providers, and the court system recognized that we needed to do something different in order to have better outcomes for the families in our community. Our county had already established an Adult Drug Court program and it was decided we would do something similar for families involved with the child welfare system.

Since its inception, we have worked very hard with our community partners to establish a wrap-around service network for our participants. This network provides them with a strong foundation of support and services that along with involvement in the 12-step community, has resulted in high levels of success for our participants.

Our Dependency Drug Court program determines its recidivism rates on if families we have served re-enter into the child welfare system. Last year our recidivism rate was 15% due to two of our families re-entering into the child welfare system; however, one of those families is back in our program and expected to graduate this summer.

While our recidivism rate is something we are proud of, it is the ability of our program to reunite families on a much quicker timeline that is our major success. Families in our program generally have children returned to their care within 60-90 days of entering our program. This significantly impacts our community because it reduces the number of children in foster care and helps lighten the load of an already overburdened system. Being able to reunite families more quickly also helps alleviate the trauma that long stays in the foster care system cause. The result is stronger, safer and a more stable families in our community.

Over the past several years that I have worked with the Columbia County Dependency Drug Court both in my capacity as a DHS Child Welfare case worker and as the current Program Coordinator, I have witnessed our program shift from the last resort to a problem to the first suggested solution by our community partners. This has resulted in stronger relationships with our community partners. This only strengthens the overall stability and health of our community.

Thank you,

Julie Heuer
Treatment Court Coordinator
Columbia County State Courts
230 Strand St.
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