



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

W A S H I N G T O N , D C

JUSTICE PROGRAMS OFFICE

MEMORANDUM

TO: Judge Thomas Merrigan, First Justice, Orange District Court, Franklin County, Massachusetts

FROM: OJP Drug Court Clearinghouse and Technical Assistance Project, American University

SUBJECT: **DCCTAP Assignment No.020 : Recommendations to the Franklin County, Massachusetts Substance Abuse Intervention Project Regarding the Development of an Evaluation Design: Report of Dr. John Goldkamp, Consultant.**

DATE: January 17, 1997

I. Background

The Franklin County, Massachusetts Substance Abuse Intervention Project, implemented on January 1, 1997, entails the establishment of a single substance abuse drug court which serves as a "referral" docket to which referrals will be made from six separate courts: the criminal, juvenile and civil divisions of the District Courts in Greenfield and Orange. The specific referral points will be: The Orange District Court; the Orange Juvenile Court; the Greenfield District Court; the Greenfield Juvenile Court; the Franklin County Superior Court and the Franklin Probate and Family Court (which will make referrals in custody and visitation matters in which substance abuse is an issue.)

It is envisioned that, for criminal cases, a range of progressive sanctions will be applied. For cases involving custody or visitation, "relapse" responses may involve many sanctions applicable in criminal cases (e.g., increased treatments, obtaining sponsors, community service, etc.) as well as include requiring that visits be restricted or supervised or that custody or visitation be temporarily suspended.

Judge Thomas Merrigan, First Justice for the Orange District Court in Franklin County, is directing the Project and requested OJP's Drug Court Clearinghouse and Technical Assistance Project at The American University to provide assistance in two areas: (1) general guidance in planning the project and (2) specific assistance in developing an evaluation design for Franklin County's drug court program. Although Judge Merrigan had reviewed available materials relating to drug court evaluations and was utilizing them in the development of the project's data collection process, specialized, on-site assistance was needed in light of the multi-jurisdictional, multi-court, and civil, criminal and juvenile matters that will be addressed by the Franklin County program and special evaluative issues, not confronted by "conventional" drug courts, that were being raised. These included: the multiple sources of information required by the project; special confidentiality issues and requirements relating to juvenile matters; the nature of information available for civil cases compared with criminal; and the degree to which a baseline on information may be available for evaluation purposes.

The technical assistance services requested by Judge Merrigan have been provided by the DCCTAP in two phases. General technical assistance for project planning has been provided by Judge Bruce Beaudin, one of the founding drug court judges in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, and recently retired and residing close to Franklin County, in Marlboro, Vermont. Judge Beaudin's services were provided during the October - December 1996 period. Specific technical assistance to address relevant evaluation issues has been provided by Dr. John Goldkamp, Professor of Criminal Justice at Temple University and Director of the Crime and Justice Research Institute in Philadelphia. Dr. Goldkamp is a national expert in judicial system evaluations generally and drug court programs in particular and conducted the first multi-faceted drug court evaluation in the country (for the Miami-Dade County Drug Court).

Dr. Goldkamp's observations and suggestions regarding an evaluation design for the Franklin County program are provided below.

II. Summary of Technical Assistance Provided

On November 15, 1996 Dr. Goldkamp and Judge Beaudin met with Judge Merrigan and

representatives from a number of agencies involved in the Franklin County Substance Abuse Intervention Project and discussed many of the features of the program as well as implementation and evaluation issues. In preparation for these meetings, Dr. Goldkamp spoke previously with Judge Merrigan by telephone regarding the objectives of the Franklin County Substance Abuse Intervention Project and the types of evaluation questions Judge Merrigan wanted to have addressed. In addition, Dr. Goldkamp reviewed available background materials including the Franklin County Substance Abuse Intervention Project Description and a copy of a draft proposal for the project which included information regarding the program objectives, the target population addressed, the components of the project's approach, and implementation and operation details.

The November 15th meeting discussions were far-ranging. Dr. Goldkamp was asked to provide feedback on issues related to evaluation of the program, once it was under way. To do this, discussion focussed first on the aims of the program and considerable time was devoted to providing explanations of these various aims because an evaluation design cannot be developed without knowing what is being attempted.

The Franklin County project is a very ambitious and innovative approach, setting up a court-based substance-abuse program that can serve as a core service to different types of individuals from different types of courts, criminal, family, juvenile, etc., some in different locations in a fairly rural Massachusetts county. Dr. Goldkamp also urged Judge Merrigan to formulate for himself the most important evaluation questions for the project, and not to rely too greatly on what he believed outsiders might want to know.

Because of the mix of different "feeding", or referral courts, the focus on substance abuse (with an emphasis on alcohol) raises different issues for implementation and for evaluation for the different types of cases being handled in the project. The meeting discussion included addressing the aims related to each of the types of cases that would be entering the program and, therefore, the types of measures that would be of interest in an evaluation. Also discussed was the difference between early stage evaluation, focusing on implementation of various of the program elements, and longer term evaluation of outcomes and recommendations for getting a local university involved in the evaluation effort. Design issues (experimental, etc.) were also addressed and the practicalities

of conducting an experimental design that might, initially at least, prove disruptive to implementation.

The challenge involved in implementing the Franklin County program is remarkable; Judge Merrigan's approach is highly creative and adaptive. Part of the challenge in implementing the project has to do with the diverse caseload contemplated. Part of the challenge has to do with the rural setting of Franklin County and the effects of geography on the proposed program, considering the location of the courts and resources in the county. In addition, as is the case in many American jurisdictions in or near rural areas, alcohol is the most popular substance of abuse in Franklin County. Given the different kinds of data that will be needed, planning for manual data collection of different sorts will present formidable tasks -- which, eventually, computerization will help address. In addition, the state health/substance abuse agency will play a very important part in the success of this project. The requirements of data collection for analysis of implementation and outcomes were discussed in some detail.

It is hoped that the discussion of the questions raised by Judge Merrigan and the members of the planning committee at the November 15th technical assistance meeting were helpful and provided ideas about how best to proceed.