



NEWS RELEASE

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Mental Health Court Report Released: Findings Indicate Success

REGINA – For the past two years, a unique court has been operating in Regina. The Mental Health Disposition Court sits every two weeks to hear cases involving individuals with complex mental health issues and/or cognitive impairments. The goal? To keep these individuals out of jail when possible.

A research team from the University of Regina led by Dr. Michelle Stewart, Associate Professor in the Justice Studies Department, recently completed a study of the court to better understand its function in the justice system. The team released its findings at the Provincial Court House this afternoon.

The research demonstrates the court is achieving its goal of diverting individuals out of correctional facilities. To date, only five participants in the Mental Health Disposition Court have been sentenced to jail time. This is noteworthy since all individuals in this court are facing jail time as criteria for entry. Since November 2013, the court has dealt with 79 individuals of which 36 cases have concluded, with the majority resulting in community-based dispositions.

The mental health therapeutic court is one of two in the province, with the other being in Saskatoon. It relies on a collaborative case management model and requires multiple stakeholders to be involved.

"The strength of this court is its partners – the many agencies and government departments who come to the table to help," says Judge Clifford Toth, who founded the court in 2013 and was the presiding judge for the first two years.

The research report confirms that the collaborative approach is having positive results for participants, including increased connection to community supports and the implementation of more successful treatment plans.

"The study showed that stakeholders believe the court is successful because of the collaborative approach with attention to anchoring participants in community supports," says Brittany Mario, a graduate student at the University of Regina and co-investigator on the project.

While there is room for improvement, including dedicated supports for the court and increased outreach and training, the report highlights the success in stabilizing individuals in the community. Stewart sees this stability as key to interrupting a disturbing trend in the justice system.

"There is a disproportionate number of people with serious mental illness and cognitive disabilities, like Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder, being housed in our justice system," says Dr. Stewart. "The two Mental Health Courts in Saskatchewan are necessary steps towards bringing about better justice outcomes for some of the most vulnerable people in our province."

The report also highlights the lack of available and affordable housing in Regina.

The research report is the result of a partnership between the University of Regina, the Ministry of Justice, and the Provincial Court. Funding was provided through the University of Regina's Partnership Grant.

The full report, entitled "Regina Mental Health Disposition Court: A Formative Investigation," and Executive Summary are available by visiting: fasdresearchproject.com.

For further information

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