A Few Miles East

An glimpse at rural American handling of criminal justice addiction cases

Shaun Anchak, MDOC
Pamela Lynch, NLCMH, GVSU, HRMI

NW Lower Michigan
Drug Divide

Mercy varies toward drug offenders in GT region

BY MATT TROUTMAN mtroutman@record-eagle.com May 21, 2017

Grand Traverse (GT) County

• Sobriety Court – alcohol only
• Drug Court – Vivitrol only, no substitution therapy
• County Substance Free Task Force – meets monthly
• No prescribed psychiatric medications allowed in county jail, unless initiated by contracted jail psychiatrist
Grand Traverse County

- In the 5 year period analyzed, Grand Traverse County had 60 percent of its drug cases ending in lasting criminal convictions.
- “In Grand Traverse County,” a defense attorney states, “drug cases end with more convictions and longer sentences overall.”
- “Grand Traverse County’s mentality of ‘tough on crime’ ultimately globally harms the community they’re set to protect.”

Emmet County

- Michael is a patient on Suboxone, prescribed by a licensed MD who is Suboxone certified. He has not used heroin for 9 months.
- Michael is convicted of drunk driving.
- Michael's probation officer orders Michael off Suboxone and Ativan.
- MD writes a letter to the judge advising against taking Michael off the Suboxone and Ativan.
- Michael does not discontinue Suboxone, and is then ordered to three consecutive weekend detainers for “obstruction of justice.”
- Michael states that he is so happy that he was allowed to do weekends, so he can keep his job, that he is “just going to leave it alone.”
- Michael states in counseling that he is fearful relapse is inevitable because of the courts pressure to quit Suboxone, which he is already anticipating will put him in a state of craving, or withdrawal. He is certainly already experiencing increased anxiety as a result.

Leelanau County

- Opiate Epidemic summit planning group
- Culture of support amongst corrections staff, and sheriff’s deputies
- 47 percent of its drug cases ended in conviction Many misdemeanor marijuana cases result in deferred sentences and clean public records.
- “As a prosecutor, probably our greatest tool is discretion,” the chief prosecutor said. “With a stroke of a pen, you can very much affect people’s lives and their futures.”
Benzie (BZE) County

- About 33 percent of the county’s drug cases concluded with narcotics convictions.
- Prescribed psychiatric medications allowed in county jail
- Monthly public provider partner meetings for integrated case and issue discussion
- BZE Drug Court Recovery Board
- First county in Michigan to implement naloxone kits in police cars, in a response to the community’s outcry about a spate of heroin deaths

BZE continued

- “Fast’s multiple chances were a function of where Fast lived, as well as who she is, as different counties approach addiction and drug charges with sometimes wildly divergent tactics.”
- An analysis found about 66 percent of Benzie County drug cases concluded with dismissed charges or, more often, no public record.
- One local attorney who defends clients in these counties stated that Benzie County authorities will “literally bend over backwards” to avoid convictions for young people – a good thing.

Benzie Recovery Court

- Foundation Board

  - Judge Nancy Kida
  - Licensed mental health clinician, and harm reduction expert (20+ years in harm reduction, and traditional substance abuse fields)
  - An exceptional Probation Officer
  - Social worker & parent of an opiate addict on probation
  - Local Community Mental Health Jail Diversion Provider