

Stearns County Repeat Felony Domestic Violence Court

Program Start Date: 2008

Website: <http://www.co.stearns.mn.us/LawPublicSafety/AdultCriminalJustice/DomesticViolenceCourt>

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Criminal Justice Partners: Criminal Court, law enforcement, defense bar, corrections (probation and jail), county attorneys, legal aid, and community advocates.

Information: The Stearns County Domestic Violence Partnership was created in response to data that felony domestic violence offenders were getting rearrested and repeatedly cycling back through the system. Comprised of representatives from the criminal court, community-based victim services, defense bar, legal aid, probation, law enforcement, county attorneys and other invested stakeholders, the Partnership began to critically look at how the entire court system was handling domestic violence cases.

With the assistance of the Center for Court Innovation, the Stearns County Domestic Violence Partnership created a planning timeline, developed a data collection plan and created a system map. The numbers showed that repeat felony offenders caused the largest amount of work for criminal justice partners and are of greatest risk to their victims. Data showed that participation in the criminal justice system's traditional programming of unmonitored conditions of release and relatively low bail was not working. **With that research in hand, Stearns County partners opened the nation's first domestic violence court for repeat felony offenders in 2009.**

The program has been operational for 3 full years and is a permanent county-board-funded criminal justice solution for repeat offenders and victims. The court identifies repeat felony domestic violence offenders at the initial arrest stage. Once identified as a repeat domestic violence felony offender, defendants are mandated to immediate pretrial intensive supervision that includes drug and alcohol testing and quick access to treatment if necessary, as well as strict no contact and behavior conditions. At the same time, victims have access to community based victim services, victim assistance available through the county attorney, and a legal aid attorney. The Stearns County Domestic Violence Partnership includes legal aid services to provide civil legal services for victims and their children. Three new initiatives involve child-focused interventions, post-prison challenges, and identification of barriers to repeat victim service delivery.

Evaluation/Research: In 3 full years of operation, the population of repeat violence offenders (136 total) has committed only 5 new domestic assaults. Prior to the court there were on average three felony assault arrests a year per defendant.