



SHAUN R. FLOERKE

JUDGE OF THE DISTRICT COURT
SIXTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT ST.
LOUIS COUNTY COURTHOUSE
DULUTH, MINNESOTA SSB02

The South St. Louis County DWI Court, which began operating January 2008, provides a comprehensive, multidisciplinary response to the repeat DWI offender that breaks the cycles of addiction and crime through strong accountability and improved access to services. This has proven to increase public safety, reduce recidivism, reduce cost, and strengthen families in our communities.

When we first started our DWI Court, we did a lot wrong. We focused on sanctions, which meant piling on jail in a way that broke our participants. We responded by implementing new research and best practices that was geared to our participants' success. The team changed its tone by asking, "what is our treatment response to this?" versus "what do we do to him/her as a sanction?"

After an evaluation in our early years, we realized we weren't adequately connecting our participants to mental health services. A psychologist was added to the team an effort to amplify the treatment voice on our team was done. We began to learn more about treatment, mental health, harm reduction, and what recovery truly means.

In 2012, Dr. Shannon Carey at NPC research evaluated our DWI Court. We benefited from the research on felons and offenders with multiple priors. We learned that those with the lengthiest criminal histories often have the greatest success. We became more comfortable with the "risk" and started allowing offenders who were facing presumptive commitments to prison into our DWI Court. These participants do incredibly well and contribute to our 86% graduation rate.

One of the more recent changes in our structure—after again reaching out to Dr. Carey and Robyn Robertson, President and CEO of the Traffic Injury Research Foundations, the separation of male and female participants at status check-ins. It only made sense to us, in a court where we have yet in nine years to meet a female participant who has *not* been the victim of some form of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. It was up to us to give women a safe and comfortable place to talk about their recovery without 40 male participants in the room. What have we seen since the split? Our female participants are more open, honest, and comfortable, whether discussing the weather, their day at work, or an incredibly sensitive topic with Judge Floerke and the Team.

We pride ourselves on our team training. We have completely revamped the way we train new members of our team. Instead of giving them a checklist, we now spend a day with them reviewing what is truly important for them to know in their respective roles. We focus on discipline-specific information and talk about best practices. We use a combination of documents and training videos, as well as the invaluable in-person discussion time with Jessica, our Coordinator, Judge Floerke, and Julie Seitz, our Treatment Provider, among others who have committed themselves to the research, best practices, and the value of adequate training in Treatment Courts.

Holding steady policy meetings and constantly aspiring to follow the research and best practice standards have brought us to our successes. To this day, the South St. Louis County DWI Court has graduated over 250 participants, and we continue to strive each day for increased public safety, reduced recidivism, lowered cost strengthened families in our communities, and healthy and happy lifestyles for our participants.