

**Akron Mental Health Court: Use of Services by Successful Participants  
During the First Two Years  
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Since the inception of the Akron Municipal Mental Health Court (MHC) program in January 2001 through the end of January 2004, there have been 472 people who came to the attention of the court to determine eligibility for the program. One person was referred twice. Of those identified as potential MHC clients, 228 people were determined to be eligible and accepted the program.<sup>2</sup> As of the end of January 2004, there were eighty-eight active MHC cases, ninety-seven terminated from MHC, forty who successfully completed the program (graduates), and four who died while a participant in the MHC program.

A first step in evaluating the program was to assess use of services. We collected four types of services data on each individual: 1) Summit County jail, 2) State prison, 3) State psychiatric hospital, and 4) general hospital. Each included both the number of incarcerations or hospitalizations and the number of days per year. We also collected Ohio Outcomes data on employment, current living situation, and social support. For the purposes of the following discussion, the actual day of entry into the program is not accounted for, only the year of entry. Therefore, use of services prior to entry and those used during the program is not differentiated.

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<sup>2</sup>The remainder of the people were either eligible and declined (50) or ineligible (196). Ineligibility was determined either by the charge or by the person's diagnosis.

Since the first people graduated in January 2003, there has not been enough time to determine with any certainty the long-term effects of MHC. However, the following discussion of the behaviors of the graduates before entry into MHC and during MHC offers some initial evidence of the effects of the program.

### **Description of Sample**

For the first year of the program, 165 people were referred to MHC. Fifty-seven (thirty-five percent) were determined to be ineligible and 107 people (sixty-five percent) were eligible. Nineteen of the people who were eligible for MHC declined (eighteen percent) and eighty-eight accepted (eighty-two percent). As of January 31, 2004, forty of the eighty-eight participants (forty-five percent) who entered the program during 2001 graduated.<sup>3</sup>

The graduates entered the program between 1/2/2001 and 12/18/2001. Table 1 displays the demographic data. Eighty percent of the graduates are male. Fifty-eight percent are black and the others are white. Seventy-one percent are single, twenty-one percent are married, and the rest are divorced. Twenty-four have at least a high school education (two have completed the GED). Four have an eighth grade education and ten have some high school education. The average age at MHC graduation is about thirty-seven years old, with a range of twenty to fifty-nine years of age at graduation. The average number of days the graduates spent in the program was 734 days (almost two years), with a range of 602 to 1079 days.

### **Data**

Table 2 lists the service utilization by type of service. In 2000, one year prior to the inception of the MHC program, three-quarters of the sample did not have any incarcerations in the Summit County jail. Three people had one incarceration, five had two incarcerations, and one person had three. Two people were not in the jail system records. The nine people who were incarcerated had sixteen incarcerations for a total of 464 days, ranging from one to 180. There was one person who was incarcerated in a state prison for a total of 168 days. Five were hospitalized in one of the state psychiatric facilities for a total of 106 days. Six people were hospitalized in other hospitals for eleven hospitalizations for a total of 66 days.

During the first year of the program in 2001, nine people of the current forty graduates did not have any incarcerations. Two people were not in the Summit County Jail system, which might indicate that they had not been arrested. The remainder were in the system as this was the method most were identified as in need of the program. Fifteen people were incarcerated one time, nine twice, four three times, and one person four times for a total of 683 days, ranging from three to seventy-four days, for a total of forty-nine separate incarcerations. One person was incarcerated in the state prison for a total of seventy-two days. Four people were hospitalized in one of the state psychiatric facilities for a total of forty-four days. Eight people were hospitalized in a general facility for sixteen hospitalizations totaling 101 days.

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<sup>3</sup> One has since graduated (March 2004) while forty-seven were terminated from the program and one is deceased.

In 2002, there were ten people with a total of fourteen incarcerations and 165 days. Seven were incarcerated once, two were incarcerated twice, and one person was incarcerated three times. The range of days was from three to thirty-six. One person was incarcerated by the state for a total of forty-nine days. One person was hospitalized in a state psychiatric facility for nineteen days. General hospitalizations involved four people, eleven hospitalizations, and eighty-one days.

In 2003, thirty-five people were not incarcerated and two were not in the system. The other three were incarcerated once, twice, or five times for a total of eight incarcerations and thirty-four days. No one was incarcerated by the state. One person was hospitalized in a state facility for nineteen days. General hospitalizations involved four people, five hospitalizations, and fifty-four days.

### **Discussion**

In the year prior to MHC's inception (2000), relatively few of the current MHC graduates were incarcerated in the Summit County Jail. Specifically, only nine of the forty graduates were incarcerated, with most (five) of these being incarcerated twice, fewer (three) being incarcerated once and one person being incarcerated three times. The sixteen incarcerations in 2000 resulted in 464 total days in the jail. With the onset of MHC, the number of jail incarcerations increased from 9 to 29. This increase is to be expected since being arrested and incarcerated was the primary method used to identify those in need of the MHC program. Of the twenty-nine who were incarcerated in 2001, the vast majority (fifteen) were incarcerated only once, with fewer (nine) incarcerated twice, three times (four) or four times (one). These forty-nine incarcerations resulted in 683 total days in the jail. By the second year of MHC (2002), the graduates' rate of incarceration decreased with only ten of them incarcerated in jail. Of these ten, most (seven) were incarcerated once, with fewer being incarcerated twice (two), and one being incarcerated three times. These fourteen incarcerations resulted in 165 total days in the jail. During their final year in MHC, only three of the current graduates were incarcerated totaling eight incarcerations and thirty-four total days in Summit County Jail.

Being in the MHC program does not protect participants from incurring new charges. Additionally, one of the methods to sanction during MHC is to sanction with jail time. During their tenure in MHC, seven people incurred new charges (one person incurred two), nine were sanctioned with jail, and three were placed under house incarceration.

The State prison rates for MHC graduates tend to be more stable throughout the study period of 2000 to 2003. In each of the first three years, only one current MHC graduate was incarcerated in a State prison, and in the final year (2003) no MHC graduates were incarcerated in a State prison. Although the number of State prison incarcerations remained fairly stable, the number of days incarcerated decreased over the four year period (168 in 2000, 72 in 2001, 49 in 2002, 0 in 2003).

The number of state psychiatric hospitalizations slightly decreases over the study period, but are consistently few. Specifically, prior to the MHC program (2000) five of the current MHC graduates were hospitalized once for a total of 106 bed days. In 2001, four of the current MHC

graduates were hospitalized for a total of forty-four bed days. During each of the last two years of the study, only one individual was hospitalized, each for nineteen bed days.

The number of days of general hospitalizations, some of which were to the psychiatric areas of local hospitals, peaks during the first year of MHC. During 2001, there are slightly more people who are hospitalized for a larger number of incidents. After that time, the number of people, incidents, and days decrease.

The year prior to the inception of MHC, the graduates had the most number of state incarcerations and the most number and days of hospitalizations. During the first year in MHC, the graduates had more Summit County days of incarcerations and general hospitalization days than they did during the second year of MHC.

Figure 1 graphically depicts the data. The sum of the total service days is shown in Figure 2. Note that there is a moderate increase in 2001, with sharp declines in 2002 and in 2003. This indicates that the number of days where the MHC graduates were either in jail, prison, or the hospital declined.

For the successful participants during the four year period of the study, no services use was found for three people. Twenty-three people used one type of service, primarily the county jail. Eight used two types of services and six used three service types. None of the participants used all four types of services.

Mental Health Courts, loosely patterned after Drug Courts, have become a method for communities to address the criminalization of the mentally ill, to stop the revolving door of the criminal justice system, and to provide services to those with mental illness. However, there have been few systematic studies of the effects of these types of diversion programs and questions remain concerning the effectiveness of mental health courts. Some questions are: Does the system of sanctions and rewards affect and alter behaviors so that participants are removed from the criminal justice system? Is the intensive post-arrest diversion program an effective use of limited resources? Are individuals helped and the community served? These results, though preliminary, indicate that mental health courts may be an effective use of limited resources. Comparison of those who successfully completed the program and those who were terminated from the program because of non-compliance with the program requirements is the next step of our analyses as well as differentiating between time of entry and use of services.

Table 1: Mental Health Court Graduates, Demographic Information (n=40)

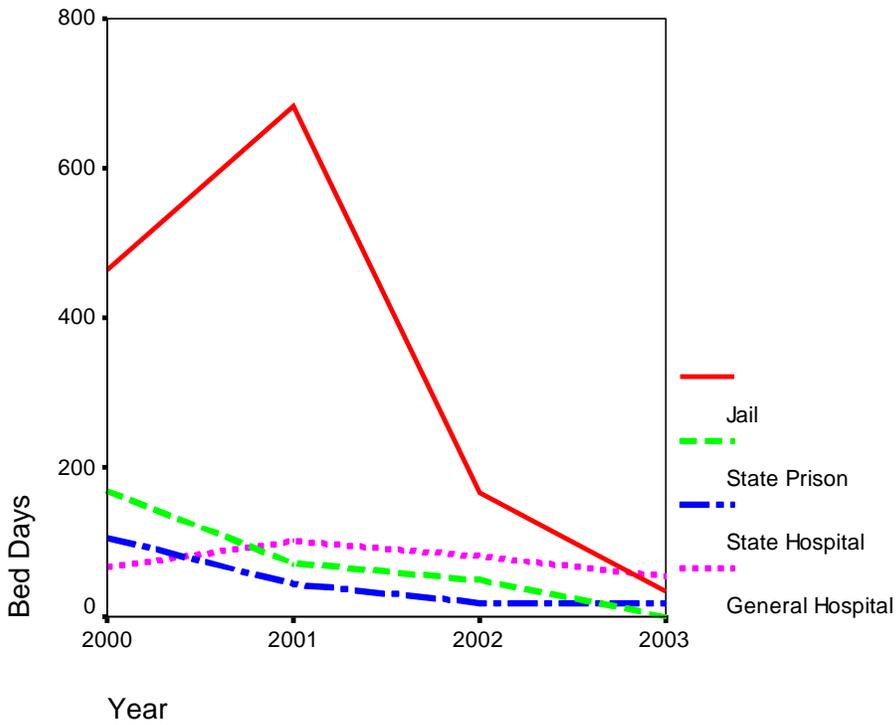
|                                |       |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Average Age at Graduation      | 36.6  |
| Percentage Black               | 57.5  |
| Percentage Female              | 20.0  |
| Percentage Single              | 68.4  |
| Average Level of Education     | 11.6  |
| Average Number of Program Days | 734.1 |

Table 2: MHC Grads, Service Utilization

| <i>Graduates (n = 40)</i>                     | Number of People Affected | Number of Incidents | Number of Days |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| <b>Summit County Jail (33)<sup>a</sup></b>    |                           |                     |                |
| 2000  | 9                         | 16                  | 464            |
| 2001  | 29                        | 49                  | 683            |
| 2002  | 10                        | 14                  | 165            |
| 2003  | 3                         | 8                   | 34             |
| <b>State Prison (total 2)</b>                 |                           |                     |                |
| 2000  | 1                         | 1                   | 168            |
| 2001  | 1                         | 1                   | 72             |
| 2002  | 1                         | 1                   | 49             |
| 2003  | 0                         | 0                   | 0              |
| <b>State Psychiatric Hospitalizations (9)</b> |                           |                     |                |
| 2000  | 5                         | 5                   | 106            |
| 2001  | 4                         | 4                   | 44             |
| 2002  | 1                         | 1                   | 19             |
| 2003  | 1                         | 1                   | 19             |
| <b>General Hospitalizations (13)</b>          |                           |                     |                |
| 2000  | 6                         | 11                  | 66             |
| 2001  | 8                         | 16                  | 101            |
| 2002  | 4                         | 11                  | 81             |
| 2003  | 4                         | 5                   | 54             |

<sup>a</sup> Numbers in parentheses indicate the total number of MHC graduates who received the service over the 2000-2003 study period.

**Figure 1:** Service Utilization per Year  
MHC Graduates (n = 40)



**Figure 2:** Total Service Days per Year  
MHC Graduates (n = 40)

