

The Daily Courier

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Yavapai County Inmate restoration program saves money, time

[Scott Orr](#)

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PRESCOTT - Started just over a year ago, Yavapai County's Restoration to Competency program (RTC) is saving the county money and has returned about half of the inmates enrolled in the program to competency enough to go to trial.

Before 2010, Yavapai, like the rest of Arizona's counties, sent inmates deemed incompetent to assist in their own defense to the Arizona State Hospital in Phoenix. It was a major expense, and transporting the inmates to the Valley and back was time-consuming.

"It was a really expensive program, but it was 100 percent funded by the state," County Administrator Julie Ayers said.

Then the economy crashed in 2009, and the state Legislature began requiring counties to shoulder half the cost of the program. The next year, the price tag went up again and counties were required to pay the entire cost.

That was \$2.5 million per year Yavapai County did not have.

So county officials "put together a Restoration to Competency program that operated out of our own jail," Ayers said. "We can do it with much less expense."

As much as 66 percent less, in fact, according to statistics provided by the [Yavapai County Sheriff's Office](#).

The county partnered with Wexford Health Sources to create its own RTC program at the Camp Verde jail facility. The first inmate started treatment on April 5, 2010.

Some of the costs to the county are offset by the fact that Mohave, Navajo, Coconino, and Yuma counties pay to send their inmates to Yavapai's RTC program, and there are three more counties signed up that haven't yet sent anyone to treatment.

Inmates are referred to the RTC program by the Superior Court. By law, they have 15 months to successfully complete RTC. In the county's version of the RTC, inmates have been found to spend as much as 65 percent less time enrolled - an average of 63 days - before they finish treatment than they did when they were sent to the Arizona State Hospital.

How a defendant is restored to competency depends on the cause of his or her problem, said Dr. Joseph Stewart, psychologist and director of the Yavapai County RTC Program.

Sometimes, he said, medications will do the job.

Other times, a course of very basic legal instruction is needed.

Substance abusers may benefit simply by being kept away from their drug of choice. Even traumatic brain injury can be overcome, although Stewart said that is the most difficult situation.

A total of 37 defendants have entered the program since it began; 16 are currently in the program.

Becky Payne, RN, Health Care Unit Administrator for Wexford Health Sources, said, "We have restored 19 defendants and found two unrestorable.

"Of the restored defendants, six have been sentenced to DOC (prison), three were placed on probation only, one case was completely dismissed, one defendant was sent to a group home, and eight are still going through adjudication."

"The treatment works," Sheriff Scott Mascher said. "With the (poor) economic climate, people really do have to think out of the box, and think of ways to do things for less ... and think of new concepts. That's what happened here."

As successful as it is, RTC has a narrow focus and those treated must be moved through the legal system relatively quickly.

"The biggest challenge prior to our program's inception and continuing today for the defendants we work with is getting them adjudicated quickly before they deteriorate in the jail environment," Payne said.

"We have one defendant that we restored in August 2010 who still has not been to trial so there have been repeat psychological evaluations to assure the court she is still competent," Payne added.

"The treatment works and it really is a big cost savings," Mascher said. "It really is a win-win situation.

"I haven't seen any downside."

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