

MEDIA ADVISORY

For immediate release: **January 20, 2012**

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What: Post Conviction Drug Court Graduation.

When: 3:00 to 4:15 pm, January 27, 2012.

Where: Fresno Superior Court Jury Assembly Room, 1100 Van Ness Avenue, Fresno.

Background: The Fresno County Drug Court partners will hold one of two semi-annual graduations for the Post Conviction Drug Court in 2012. This event will recognize 13 participants who successfully completed the Post Conviction Drug Court since the last graduation in July 2011 or who are on track to finish by this March. The three female and ten male graduates represent a combined total of 268 months in the drug court program.

Drug court is an intensive program that links strong case management, substance abuse treatment, and mental health therapy with frequent court appearances, drug testing, and probation supervision. Defendants who want to voluntarily enter the drug court must first undergo a pre-entry assessment by the multi-disciplinary drug court team. If they are eligible for the program, they agree to plead guilty to their charges and are sentenced to two years of felony probation in lieu of incarceration while they remain compliant with the drug court. Participants must agree to demonstrate sobriety through random drug testing, participate actively in recovery, and pay fees for treatment and drug testing.

To graduate, they advance through five phases in which they must increase self-management by setting and achieving goals for employment, education, housing, and life-functioning skills. The rigorous program takes a minimum of 18 months to complete and requires attending daily substance abuse treatment in the first three months of recovery. Treatment attendance is gradually reduced to once a week by the final phases of recovery and aftercare. Because it is so intensive, Post Conviction Drug Court capacity is limited to 115 participants at one time.

Fresno County's Post Conviction Drug Court was started in 1998 to provide a cost-effective rehabilitation alternative to incarcerating non-violent defendants without gang affiliation facing drug or property crime charges due to their habitual drug use. A comprehensive study of California drug courts found that the average net savings from the positive outcomes, including savings due to less victimization, was \$11,000 per participant. The local program is a cooperative partnership between the Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health – Substance Abuse Services, Fresno County District Attorney's Office, Fresno County Office of the Public Defender, Fresno County Probation Department, and the Superior Court of California, County of Fresno. Mental Health Systems, Inc. - Fresno Center for Change provides substance abuse treatment and mental health therapy for the drug court participants.

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