

Grand Forks County
Domestic Violence Court

PROJECT NEWS

Domestic Violence Court records 3 years



Since launching as a pilot project in Aug 2018, the Grand Forks County Domestic Violence Court has held 1,293 hearings by case.

Northeast Central Judicial District Judges Jason McCarthy and Jay Knudson preside over this post-sentencing court, which aims to increase offender accountability with court orders, enhance victim safety, reduce recidivism, and improve the administration of justice in domestic violence cases.

Former NECJD Presiding Judge Jon Jensen, who is now a chief justice, started discussions about the creation of a domestic violence court. He joined with Unit 1 Administrator Scott Johnson, Grand Forks County Clerk of Court Becky Absey and Jennifer Albert of the Community Violence Intervention Center to work out the concept. State Court Administrator Sally Holewa then oversaw development of the 2017 legislation that authorized creation of domestic violence courts.

Grand Forks County States Attorney Haley Wamstad said, “Due to the number of agencies and professionals involved and the built-in time on the court’s calendar, the court is able to quickly address any problems and get the offenders back on track with their programming and other conditions of their judgment.”

DV Court has taken a lot of work off of our program and has allowed us to focus more on providing our services, rather than tracking individuals through the court system.

“The maturation of the DV Court has ensured that we are impacting recidivism and compliance with court orders, said Johnson. “The additional judge and staff time applied to the initiative is having an impact on not only court activity and case flow but an impact in the community. The success of the program should lead to an initiative to replicate it in other areas of North Dakota.”

Under North Dakota Century Code 12.1-17-13, any sentence of a domestic violence offender must include an order to complete an evaluation and follow through with any recommendations made, including programming. Domestic Violence Court monitors individuals after conviction, checking sentencing compliance, to include programming, throughout their probationary period.

“DV Court has taken a lot of work off of our program and has allowed us to focus more on providing our services, rather than tracking individuals through the court system,” said New Choices Director Taylor Sorensen. “Not to mention defendants are completing their intakes and starting group as soon as they are able, rather than putting it off as they know the judge wants compliant across the top of their update to the court rather than non-compliant.”

The Court, she added, has not only increased the demand and follow through with services, but it also changed processes in order to provide the best services possible to enhance victim safety and continue our efforts to end interpersonal violence in greater Grand Forks.

Peggy Love, CVIC’s director of crime victim advocacy says the court is impacting victims of violence as well. “Crime victims are reassured that their offender won’t slip through the cracks. It provides comfort in knowing the criminal justice system also focuses on treatment and rehabilitation versus just punishment.”

“We know through empirical data that completion of the New Choices program significantly decreases offender recidivism. I’ve been fortunate to see firsthand how the Domestic Violence Court increases offender participation and completion of the programming and also provides for more timely accountability,” said McCarthy.



Gereszek receives 2021 CVIC Peacemaker Award

Sarah Gereszek, assistant state’s attorney with Grand Forks County, has been named the Community Violence Intervention Center (CVIC) 2021 Peacemaker Award recipient.

Gereszek is part of the personal crimes team where she works to uphold the safety of people harmed in some of the most dangerous cases of domestic violence.

“Time and time again, our clients express that they feel Sarah hears and cares for them at perhaps the most vulnerable time in their lives,” said Coiya Tompkins, CVIC president/CEO. “We are grateful to Sarah for her compassion work to make our community a safer place to live.”

Gereszek continues to show a commitment to offender accountability as well as victim safety, often representing the state at Domestic Violence Court hearings and provides balanced and objective support to all individuals involved.

“I am honored and humbled,” Gereszek said. “I couldn’t accomplish what I have if it wasn’t for the amazing law enforcement officers who I get to work these types of cases with and the awesome CVIC team of advocates and those from New Choices (domestic violence intervention). Knowing that CVIC has so many resources and ways to help individuals affected by domestic violence provides me with tools to help others.”

The designation is awarded annually to a local citizen who demonstrates outstanding commitment and leadership to ending violence in greater Grand Forks.

PHOTO: Coiya Thompkins with assistant states attorney, Sarah Gereszek, receipt of the 2021 Peacemaker Award.

New Choices participants impacted by program

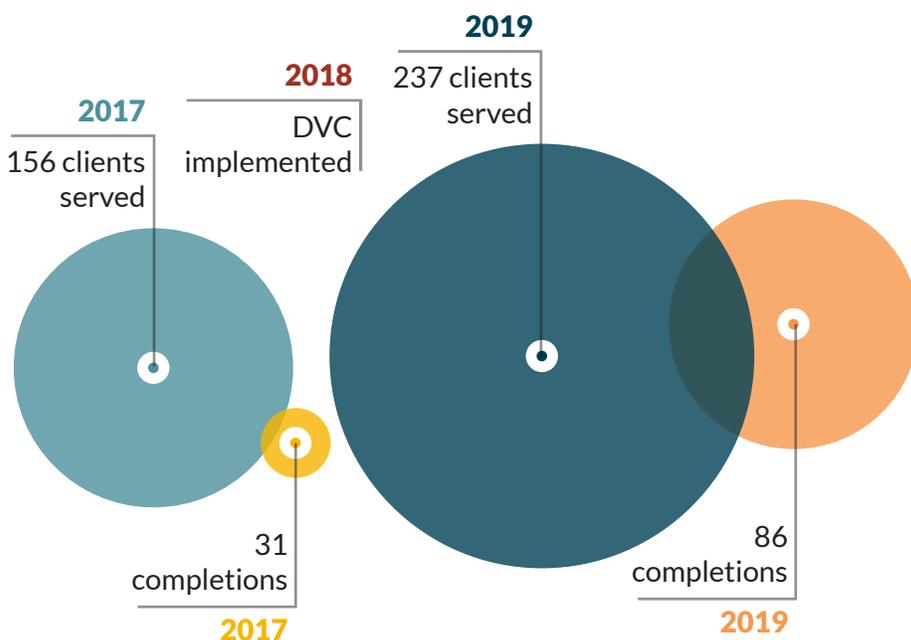


NEW CHOICES BY THE NUMBERS

August 2018 - August 2021 Data

- Out of 446 cases that were ordered to complete a NC intake during this period, 363 (81%) were DVC cases
- Out of 331 NC intakes provided during this period, the average number of days before/after intake due date and actual intake date:
 - › Average of 2 days prior to intake due date for DVC
 - › Average of 33 days after intake due date for Non-DVC
- Average number of days between start and completion of NC program
 - › 225 days for DVC (down from 288 in 2017)
 - › 233 days for Non-DVC

After the first year of DVC, New Choices clients served was up 52%; completions +177%



Includes all referral sources: court-ordered in Grand Forks County, voluntary, other jurisdictions.

“When I first took these groups I looked at them as a secondary punishment, however, after I began to get settled in, **I realized the lessons taught here were to help me, not punish me.**

It all boils down to choices. Once we - the aggressors - take responsibility for the choices we made, and not point out what our significant others' role was in helping us getting ourselves in this predicament, we can begin to figure out how to make better choices. First we must realize that someone got abused, whether emotionally or physically, by us. **I never want to make a bad choice again** that will result in me abusing someone I say I love. I'm starting with the man in the mirror. Thank you, New Choices facilitators, for all your hours of dedication to help me become a better person.”

- Participant exit interview

“Since I have started this group, **my relationship with my partner has improved** where I realized that (in) most of our fights, I wasn't taking responsibility for my actions or taking into consideration the fact it was not only affecting my partner and I, it was having a major effect on my children as well. I've been taking it upon myself to think before I react impulsively to certain situations that I've encountered in past events. Heated arguments that would escalate to full blown physical fights...now I pay attention to how I could think of a different way to diffuse the situation rather than use violence or verbal abuse to get my point across, that I falsely believed it was my way or the highway.

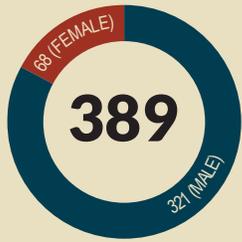
My partner's feelings matter, my children's feelings matter.

I didn't think my reactions were having such an impact on my children the most, and I don't want them thinking it is okay to treat people this way because they have seen me set the example. They deserve better than that.”

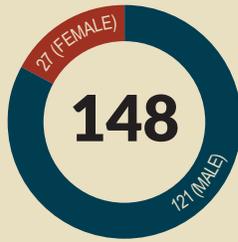
- Participant exit interview

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT DATA

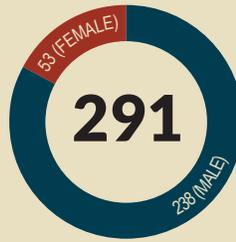
August 2018 through August 2021



Defendants ordered into DV Court*



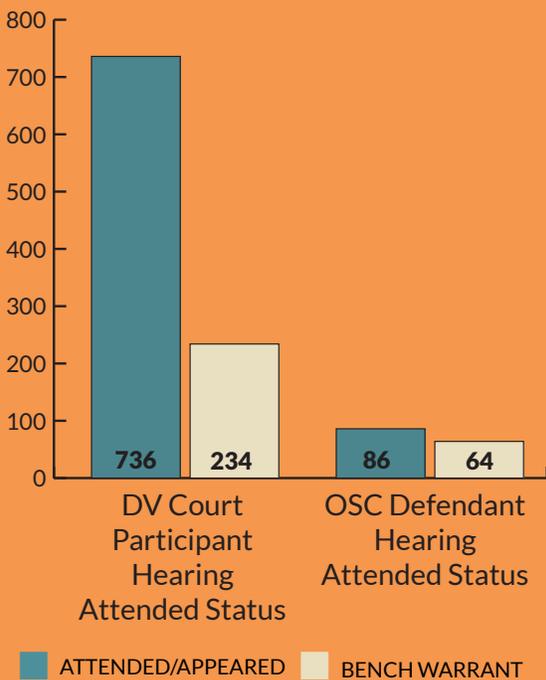
DV Court Participants Completed



Unduplicated Participants with a scheduled PSR Hearing

MALE FEMALE

*Some defendants were ordered to DV Court in multiple cases.



59

DV Court Sessions Held

40

Cases with probation revocation

34

Cases closed (probation expired, DOCR sentence, not appropriate for programming, etc.)

1,293

Total Cases Heard in DV Court

1,139

DV Court Post-Sentence Review Hearings by Case

154

OSC Hearings by Case

DV COURT STEERING COMMITTEE

Northeast Central Judicial District

701-787-2700

Jason McCarthy
DISTRICT JUDGE

Jay Knudson
DISTRICT JUDGE

Scott Johnson
COURT ADMINISTRATION

Rebecca Absey
CLERK OF DISTRICT COURT

Alison Fiala
DEPUTY CLERK OF COURT

Grand Forks County States Attorney's Office

701-780-8281

Haley Wamstad
STATE'S ATTORNEY

ND DOCR Parole and Probation

701-795-3885

John Knutson, NORTHEAST PROGRAM
MANAGER

Grand Forks Public Defender's Office

701-795-3910

David Ogren
SUPERVISING ATTORNEY

Job Service North Dakota

701-795-3700

Dustin Hillebrand
WORKFORCE CENTER MANAGER

Vogel Law Firm

701-203-8760

Matthew Dearth
ATTORNEY

Community Violence Intervention Center

701-746-0405

Max Kollman
DV COURT PROJECT COORDINATOR

Jennifer Albert
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Teresa Eisenman
CCR DATA ASSISTANT

Peggy Love
DIRECTOR OF VICTIM WITNESS SERVICES

Taylor Sorensen
DIRECTOR OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

Amber Paulson
DIRECTOR OF VISITATION & EXCHANGE