

# ADDRESSING THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF BEHAVIORAL CHANGE AMONG PARENTS PARTICIPATING IN FAMILY DRUG COURT

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**ABSTRACT:** SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF BEHAVIORAL CHANGE among parents experiencing substance abuse have a profound impact on process and outcome indicators of compliance for family drug court participants. However, family drug courts often lack resources and supportive services to increase parents' chances of alleviating social and structural issues that impede their readiness for change, and ability to take action in pursuing family reunification. This study describes how an urban-based family drug court program partners with community-based service providers through an initiative known as "Project Ready, Set, Go!" to address the social and structural barriers that impact families struggling with substance abuse. Between 2008 and 2010, approximately 97 families received assistance in addressing the social determinants of behavior change, including housing support, employment, and parental skills-building. Supportive services and other life skills building groups among this population has resulted in a 45% drug court graduation rate (compared to a 39% national average), with a third of those individuals continuing to receive aftercare support. Given the low-level of readiness among this sub-population of substance abusing parents, court-ordered compliances coupled with the supportive services has increased these parents' opportunities and willingness to pursue family reunification as an ultimate goal. This project has implications for how to motivate and engage the hardest to reach and retain parents who use drugs and place their children at risk for abuse and neglect. Further analysis is needed to better understand the gaps in service capacity and approaches that limit some parents' ability to comply with family drug court orders.

## CLIENT-LEVEL BASELINE CHARACTERISTICS AT A GLANCE (N = 97)

**GENDER:** The majority (94 or 97%) of the clients served by RSG are women. Only three (3) or 3% of the clients were male. Gender is viewed as a social determinant because of the gender roles women are expected to play in our society. Standards of motherhood greatly impact the recovery and relapse phenomenon.

**AGE:** A total of nine (9 or 9%) program participants were between the ages 18-24 years old. Majority (50 or 52%) of the clients served by Project Ready Set Go fall between the ages of 25 and 35 years old. Another twenty-eight (28 or 29%), enrolled were between the ages of 36 and 44 years old and ten (10 or 10%) were between the ages of 44 and 55 years old. The age at which mothers in particular first enter treatment is a key factor in the recovery process.

**RACE AND ETHNICITY:** Project Ready Set Go is located in the South, in which it serves the residents of a major, urban-metropolitan city. At the end of year three (3), majority (91 or 94 %) of the clients were African American and six (6 or 6%) identified themselves as White.

**EMPLOYMENT STATUS:** At the time of enrollment sixteen (16 or 16%) reported being full-time employees and eight (8 or 8%) were employed part-time, working less than 20 hours per week. Fifty-two (52 or 54%) reported being unemployed and another twenty (20 or 21%) were not in the labor force due to involvement in a substance abuse treatment program, classification as being disabled or other qualifying factor. The employment status of one (1 or 1%) client was not recorded.

**SOURCE OF INCOME:** Upon enrollment into the RSG program, majority (25 or 26%) of the enrollees reported public assistance as their main source of income. Fifteen (15 or 15%) reported income from other support systems such as family, friends, or significant other(s). Twenty-three (23 or 24%) of the clients reported earning some wages; and another twenty-two (22 or 23%) reported no income. There were nine (9 or 9%) participants receiving disability income. The income of three (3 or 3%) participants was not reported.

**EDUCATION:** Education is an important factor in relation to one's ability to secure employment and often, determines one's rate of pay and ability to become self-sufficient. RSG assures to track the educational history of all clients to identify clients that may have literacy issues, in addition to referring those who are in need of educational programs such as GED assistance and/or vocational or college programs. At the end of year three (3), (58 or 60 %), had less than a high school diploma. Nineteen (19 or 20%) of the participants reported having completed their high school diploma; and fourteen (14 or 14%) reported some college education. There were three (3 or 3%) college graduates enrolled into the program. The educational background of three (3 or 3%) participants was not recorded.

**HOUSING:** Six (6 or 6%) clients reported being homeless upon entrance into RSG. Another thirty (30 or 31%) reported being in residences of dependent living, in which they were under the supervision of others or dependent upon others for their living arrangements (including homeless or residential treatment facilities). Fifty-five (55 or 57%) clients identified their living arrangements, as independent living in which they were living alone or with others, without supervision. The living arrangements of six (6 or 6%) of participants were not recorded.

**DRUG OF CHOICE:** RSG provides support services to parents engaging in substance abuse. During intake, the following data was recorded in relation to the drug of choice for all program participants: Five (5 or 5%) identified alcohol and another, sixty-six (66 or 68%) identified cocaine as their drug of choice. There were twenty-two (22 or 23%) participants who identified marijuana as the primary drug of choice. Only one (1 or 1%) participant identified pain killers as the primary drug of choice. The primary drug of choice for three (3 or 3%) was not reported.

## TOWARDS A BEHAVIORAL CHANGE THEORY FOR DRUG COURT CLIENTS

PHASES OF BEHAVIORAL CHANGE THEORY	APPLICATION TO DRUG COURT TREATMENT MODEL
PRE-CONTEMPLATION	CHILD NEGLECT & CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY
CONTEMPLATION	CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES/COPS
ACTION PLANNING	COURT-ORDERED TO TREATMENT
TAKE ACTION	COMPLIANCE/COMMITMENT/COMPLETION/CELEBRATION
MAINTAIN	CONTINUATION & CONTRIBUTION
RELAPSE	CRISIS
RECOVERY	COME BACK (AGENCY) & CAPACITY (STRUCTURE)

# READY SET GO!

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- (1) To identify the social and structural determinants that impact drug treatment outcomes for women and families
- (2) Examine strategies for addressing social and structural determinants in ways that lead to better drug treatment outcomes for women and families



## AN EXAMINATION OF THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF RECOVERY AND RELAPSE

*The social determinants of recovery and relapse refer to the social and economic risk factors that either increase or decrease the risk for relapse.*

### SOCIAL DETERMINANT 1: HOUSING

HOUSING CONTINUES TO BE A MAJOR BARRIER TO PARENTS MAINTAINING SOBRIETY AND GREATLY IMPACTS ONE'S ABILITY TO PRACTICE BEHAVIORAL CHANGE SKILLS LEARNED WHILE PARTICIPATING IN THE READY SET GO PROGRAM.

During the initial two (2) years, many program participants completed all requirements; however lacked the income to secure affordable, safe housing. Many of which were forced, to assume residency in the same neighborhoods with their dealers, substance abusing friends and/or family members, or similar drug and poverty stricken neighborhoods, where substance abuse was rampant. In addition to parents relapsing, the lack of suitable housing and productive neighborhoods has a huge impact of the children who are forced to grow-up in these environments. These children are often exposed to substance abuse, crime, and poor school systems in communities that lack the recreational activities and resources to foster healthy growth and social skills, which are more readily available in mixed income or more prosperous communities.

### SOCIAL DETERMINANT 2: EMPLOYMENT ATTAINMENT

ONE'S EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND RATE OF PAY HAS A HUGE IMPACT ONE'S ABILITY TO REMAIN SOBER AND SELF-SUFFICIENT POST SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT.

To assist, program participants with employment attainment, RSG provides educational and vocational assistance by building relationships with collaborative partners in the community whom focus on employment assistance, GED, vocational rehab, or job skills training. Once participants enter the job search phase at their perspective treatment facilities, program participants are referred to community partners based on their individual needs and goals.

### SOCIAL DETERMINANT 3: PARENTAL SKILLS-BUILDING

ONE'S ABILITY TO PARENT IS A MAJOR FACTOR IN MAINTAINING THE FAMILY UNIT AND PROVIDING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR FOSTER THE HEALTHY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN.

Due to a lack of parenting skills and experience with being the actual "parent or authority figure" many participants report difficulties with managing children of all ages. Due to substance abuse histories, children of substance abusing parents are often affected by prenatal exposure to drugs and/or alcohol, in addition to trauma due to the experiences related to placements and/or unsafe environments while in the care of the parent, extended family, or foster care. These factors often result in developmental and behavioral challenges that may be difficult to address. Moreover, parents of adolescents often report defiance issues occurring both, at home and school.

### SOCIAL DETERMINANT 4: SUPPORTIVE SERVICES & LIFE SKILLS CAPACITY BUILDING

ACCESS TO SUPPORTIVE SERVICES AND LIFE SKILLS-BUILDING WORKSHOPS IS A MAJOR COMPONENT TO THE READY SET GO PROGRAM.

Families with substance abusing parents come to the attention of the Department of Family and Children services and/or the court system with a myriad of challenges which needed to be addressed. Through Project Ready, Set, Go!, program participants enter a one-stop shop which allows them to access resources and referrals.



## RESULTS AT A GLANCE

### DRUG COURT GRADUATION AND AFTERCARE RESULTS

CLIENT TRACKING AT A GLANCE					
		Enrolled	Graduated from Family Drug Court	In Aftercare and Connective Services Phase	Completed Ready, Set, Go! (12 months of aftercare services)
<b>Year 1</b>	October 1, 2007 – September 30, 2008	45	15	5	0
<b>Year 2</b>	October 1, 2008 – September 30, 2009	28	14	11	5
<b>Year 3</b>	October 1, 2009 – September 30, 2010	24	15	11	9
<b>Total</b>		<b>97</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>14</b>

### DRUG COURT GRADUATION RESULTS:

Participants of Project Ready Set Go, progress through Family Drug Court, in phases from freshman to senior status. Progression through each stage is determined by each participant's compliance with treatment, family drug court compliance, and completion of goals on an individualized case plan.

Although each family's needs and challenges are different, there are four major goals that must be met for a participant to be eligible for graduation. As identified by Project Ready Set Go, participants are required to meet the following goals to be eligible to graduate: complete substance abuse treatment; secure suitable housing, based on family size; obtain gainful employment, work a minimum of 30 hours per week; and complete or work towards completion of case plan to regain custody of child(ren). At the end of year three (3), forty-four (44 or 45%) participants graduated from the program. All graduates are given the option to continue to remain connected to the program and additional resources by enrolling into the aftercare program, which is a lower level of care for individuals who continue to work towards maintaining sobriety after successfully completing a substance abuse treatment program.

### AFTERCARE PROGRAM RESULTS

By the end of year three (3), a total of twenty-seven (27 or 28%) participants voluntarily enrolled into aftercare services. Aftercare allows participants to remain connected to RSG by attending group sessions twice a month. Those who continue to participate remained connected and supported by the RSG program and peers.