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Dependency Drug Court (DDC) Section Manager Tran Ly credits the program's success to its personalized approach.

Dependency Drug Court transforms lives for parents battling addiction

In Los Angeles, the Dependency Drug Court (DDC) shines as a beacon of hope for parents yearning to reunify with their children amidst the struggle against addiction. Rooted in compassion, this innovative program offers a lifeline to those committed to overcoming substance abuse and rebuilding their families.

Operating from six DCFS offices — Belvedere, Lancaster, Metro North, Palmdale, Torrance and Vermont — DDC is a voluntary drug rehabilitation initiative focused on family reunification.

“Parents talk about how helpful it’s been in their rehabilitation journey,” said Tran Ly, who has been with DCFS for 15 years. She highlighted the critical role that DDC social workers have in engaging and supporting parents.

“They realize that it’s a long journey,” Tran added, emphasizing that she’d heard of only one relapse among program graduates during her year as section manager for DDC.

Founded more than 15 years ago by Commissioner Stephen Marpet at the Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court in Monterey Park, DDC arose from a need identified by the LA County Juvenile Dependency Court. Since then, it has helped hundreds of parents reclaim their lives, weaving together recovery and hope while helping rebuild families.

The program’s unique focus on personalized attention from dedicated social workers is complemented by a structured five-phase treatment plan. The first three-month phase includes drug testing three to five times weekly and rigorous cognitive behavioral group therapy. To advance to the next phase, participants must remain substance-free for at least 30 days.

Currently, around two dozen parents are enrolled, with numbers generally fluctuating between the 20s and 30s.

The journey is challenging. Nationally, just over 50% of individuals in treatment maintain sobriety for a year or longer, with the juvenile division estimating that 80% to 90% of cases entering the child protection system involve parents grappling with substance abuse.



Belvedere Office Supervisor Jose Omar Agredano highlights the importance of bimonthly meetings with the judge for keeping DDC clients' needs at the forefront.

Supervisor Jose Omar Agredano, who has spent six years with DDC at the Belvedere Office, emphasizes the value of biweekly meetings with the commissioner. Unlike typical family court hearings, where a parent might meet the judge only once every few months and in a rushed manner — often mediated through attorneys — DDC fosters a more personal connection. In this supportive environment, the commissioner develops a rapport with parents, allowing for open dialogue and a deeper understanding of their challenges. If a relapse occurs, he works directly with the parent to identify needs and map out a plan for accessing necessary services, such as following up with their drug counselor or therapist.

“Clients feel accountable knowing they’ll have the opportunity to discuss their progress at least twice a month,” Agredano said, noting that meetings with the commissioner have been conducted virtually since the pandemic. “We want them to learn new coping skills they can use in their lives so they won’t fall back.”

One mother’s journey embodies the program’s profound impact. Despite setbacks, including a relapse and the difficult decision to prioritize her recovery over her toxic relationship with the child’s father, she re-enrolled in a substance abuse program and returned to court with significant progress. Ultimately, she earned the chance to reunite with her daughter.

“This mother again got to parent her daughter,” Agredano said.

Agredano also highlights the significance of the DDC graduation ceremony, often marking the first time they receive formal recognition, with many having never graduated high school.

“Sometimes parents will say this is the first certificate they've ever received,” he shared.

The ceremonies, held at least once a year, bring together parents and their families, court staff, social workers, the commissioner and new enrollees to celebrate the graduates’ achievements.

“It serves as an inspiration of what they can achieve if they continue on this path,” Ly said. “It can be a very emotional event.”

“The hope is that they learn they’re not alone in this journey and that recovery is a lifelong commitment,” Agredano concluded.