

YAKIMA HERALD

## Kittitas drug court turns 10

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Kittitas County's drug court program is marking its 10th birthday, and has graduated 71 offenders since it was first organized in 2003.

Emily Brown, drug court coordinator, said 18 people are currently enrolled, and there are about 28 to 22 in drug court at a given time.

Brown, along with Kittitas County Deputy Prosecutor Candace Hooper, are the two remaining members of the group that organized the drug court program.

The court or defense attorneys refer chemically dependent offenders involved in some kinds of non-violent crimes for enrollment in the program.

"We want them to get sober, that's what it's about," Brown said. The combination of court staff and volunteers from the prosecutor's office, the state Department of Corrections, law enforcement and treatment specialists all work together to provide support and show offenders how their substance abuse problems affect their families and community.

"But ultimately, they're doing it for themselves," she said.

### How it works

Participants pay about \$1,500, not including court, restitution and treatment costs, to participate in the program, which lasts at least 16 months.

Enrolled offenders receive intensive dependency treatment, spend extensive time in court, undergo random drug tests and attend support group meetings.

They must also get a job and go to school, or get their GED.

Successful graduates have their charges dismissed.

Kittitas County Superior Court Judge Scott Sparks, who presides over the court, said it has made a difference.

"They have families, they have friends, they're members of the community, they are just as important as everyone else," he said. "Our community is a really richer place because we have the program."

And it seems to work. A check in January 2010 showed Kittitas County's program had a 22 percent recidivism rate, meaning 10 graduates had re-offended.

A U.S. Justice Department study of drug courts in Multnomah County found of 6,500 participants over 10 years, re-arrests were lower for five years later and more, compared to similar offenders.

"It's a good thing to have in a community our size," Sparks said. "We have the right mix of people in our community to pull this off."

Having options to help offenders stay clean has been a boon for the community, he said.

"You need lots of different arrows in your quiver," he said, quoting William Holmes, the county probation services director. "The more programs you have, the more likely you will have the right program for the right person."