

## UPCOMING TRAININGS & CONFERENCES

- **NDAA is making its National Courses available virtually in light of health and safety concerns over COVID-19.** Check out a full list of NDAA's virtual learning sessions at <http://ndaa.org/wp-content/uploads/NDAA-Offerings-Covid19.pdf>.
- **NEW! NDAA's Human Trafficking and the Impact on Commercial Driver's Licenses On Demand Training** <https://ndaa.org/training/human-trafficking-and-the-impact-on-commercial-drivers-licenses/>
- **NDAA's Prosecuting DUI Cases Online Course On Demand Training** <https://ndaa.org/training/prosecuting-dui-cases/>
- **NDAA's Digital Trial 101**  
August 12, 2020 @ 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm EDT
- **NDAA's Diversion—A Rehabilitative Approach to Reduce Gun Crime** / August 13, 2020 @ 2:00 pm–3:00 pm EDT
- **NDAA's Advanced DNA—Beyond the Basics Learning Series** / August 31, 2020 @ 11:30 am–3:30 pm EDT and September 1, 2020 @ 11:30 am–4:00 pm EDT
- **NDAA's Substance Use Issues in Juvenile Court: An Overview for Prosecutors** / September 16, 2020 @ 3:00 pm–4:30 pm EDT
- **NDAA's 6 Things Every Prosecutor Needs to Know About Cell Phone Records in Court**  
September 23, 2020 @ 2:00 pm–3:00 pm EDT



## What Can We Learn From Rural US?

By Erin Inman, NTLC Staff Attorney

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Imagine living fifty miles from the nearest town and another fifty miles from the nearest doctor. Now imagine needing services to treat and heal a health condition, but not being able to drive anywhere for those services and not having access to any public transportation. This is the reality much of rural United States faces when considering how to rehabilitate DUI offenders. When a person enters the

criminal justice system as a DUI offender, he typically loses his ability to drive since his driver's license is suspended. For many of those same offenders, the interaction with the criminal justice system is both jarring and motivational; they realize they need help to heal, and they want help immediately.

The criminal justice system now recognizes it is best for the safety of our communities to assist in rehabilitation of DUI offenders, rather than simply punishing them. Thus, DUI courts have emerged as one of the most successful programs in the DUI/criminal justice world. Offenders are simultaneously held accountable while also assisted in finding lasting healing.

Implementing DUI courts in rural jurisdictions, however, is not always feasible. The program requires a dedicated judge, prosecutor, and defense attorney, but it also requires a

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litany of other professionals: Coordinator, mental health professional, chemical dependency professional, probation officer, and maybe even a yoga instructor. It is the cooperation and dedication of the team and the clients (labels are important, so offenders become clients) that ultimately yields successful results. Rural communities often do not have easy access to one or more of these professionals. Does that mean people who live in rural communities are not afforded the same opportunities for a better life and safer communities? They cannot have a DUI court? Historically, the answers to those questions were, "yes." Montana, however, did not accept that as the final answer. More specifically, the people working in the Yellowstone County Sobriety, Treatment, Education, Excellence, Rehabilitation (STEER) Court, in Billings, Montana, knew they could help people and communities who did not have access to services, and they did so by incorporating technology and teleservices into their program. Little did the STEER Court team know that by serving the most rural residents, they also prepared their STEER Court for the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We've been doing it for so long, we're just used to it," says STEER Court prosecutor and Deputy Yellowstone County Attorney, Victoria Callendar. STEER Court accepted

its first remote client in June 2015. This means the clients come to Billings for interviewing and processing, but they appear remotely almost every week. Remote clients live up to 260 highway miles away from Billings; the drive to court is over four hours, and even longer during winter months. Thanks to STEER Court's willingness to accept people who live hours away, though, the commute is only as long as it takes to log into a computer. Every Wednesday morning, Judge Mary Jane Knisely's courtroom is packed with clients and STEER team members, and a large television screen displays the remote clients. Decorum is maintained

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by requiring everyone, even remote clients, to dress and speak appropriately for court. Clients take turns reporting on their progress and accepting praise and/or correction as needed. Should the need arise for a client to speak privately with the STEER Court defense attorney, Fred Snodgrass, he finds a quiet location and speaks with the client on the telephone.

As far as the providers, the clients are responsible for finding their own nearby chemical dependency, mental health, and any other relevant professionals. The clients work with the STEER Court coordinator to make sure all necessary releases are signed to allow for the free flow of information between the providers and the team. The STEER Court team meets before court every Wednesday morning to discuss the clients' progress. They coordinate with the client's local providers, so everyone knows if the client is doing well or needs some additional assistance. This is the heart of the program. Keeping everyone on the same page, so clients' needs are met, is essential to the ultimate goal of the STEER Court program—the rehabilitation of the clients. Because the team is proficient at coordinating with remote clients and their providers, they remain ready even during the pandemic.

Clients who previously appeared in-person immediately began appearing remotely. The clients are familiar with what remote appearances look like, so becoming a remote client is a natural transition. The team already coordinates with providers, so acquiring essential in-

formation from them continues. The in-person portion of the program immediately converted to remote meetings and appearances. Random chemical testing still requires in-person contact. Health concerns are accommodated, and the testing personnel come to the clients at their homes, rather than the clients reporting to a central testing location. Even the STEER Court-sponsored yoga classes are virtual now.

As with much of the country, adapting to the new normal is necessary to get the job done. In the case of STEER Court, ensuring clients' needs are met during a time of turmoil and strain is especially important. Coordinating remotely to ensure the clients are getting

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what they need is second nature, and Ms. Callendar never loses sight of why the team is willing to make the extra effort. “We can’t jail or prison people out of their addiction. We can put DUI offenders behind bars for designated periods, but they will return to our cities, our suburbs, our neighborhoods.”

DUI Courts recognize and accommodate the gap between historically traditional criminal sanctions and the reality, and the dangers, of untreated chemical dependency. In the case of Yellowstone County’s STEER Court, accepting rural clients is important to helping those who otherwise do not have access to DUI court. Thanks to that aspect of its program, the STEER Court succeeds in continuing service for all its clients, even as the pandemic changes everyone’s world.

For more information on DUI Courts, visit [www.dwicourts.org](http://www.dwicourts.org).